A Parent Guide to Online Safety

for Children Aged 7 - 11
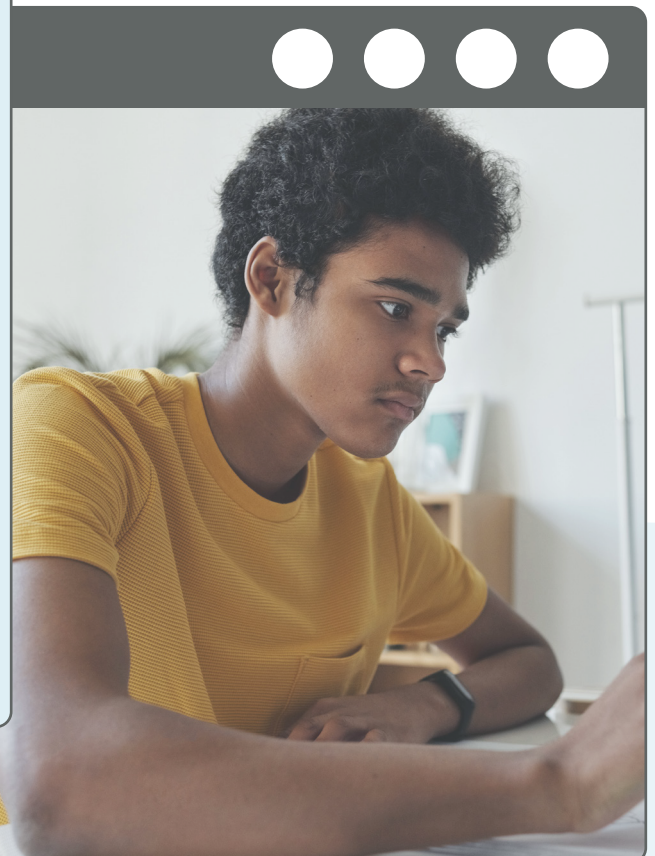
What is online safety?

Online safety - sometimes called cyber safety - is the safe and responsible use of information and communication technologies. This includes mobile phones, computers, tablets, games consoles and any other electronic device that connects to the Internet. It's important that individuals (such as you as a parent and your child) take the necessary precautions to protect themselves online.

It can be mind-boggling to try to understand every new technology that comes your way, especially if your child seems like an expert! Technology is incredible. It can open up new worlds and support your children's learning and development, as well as being a fun way to relax and keep in touch with friends and family. However, technology can come with some risks too. It's important to learn as much as you can about how to keep yourself and your child safe online.

This parent guide presents some ideas which can support your child's safety and wellbeing online as they move through key stage two (years 3 to 6, when they're aged seven to eleven).

Online Safety

for Ages Seven to Eleven

If your child is in key stage two, you might be facing new challenges as a parent. It's likely that they'll be increasingly immersed in the online world.

It's best to supervise when possible, but also begin to allow your child some independence while they explore online. There are so many benefits to help them continue to learn and grow. Early use of digital technology has been shown to improve language skills, promote social development and encourage creativity. However, there can be some risks too.

Research shows that the age at which children are accessing smart devices and the Internet is getting younger and younger. It's never too soon to start good online safety habits with your child.

Why is online safety important?

There are many issues that you or your child could encounter online. For example:

Requests for personal information:
These could come from real people in the form of emails or messages. It might also be phishing: this is where an 'attacker' tries to steal information by getting the 'victim' to open an email, a suspicious link or a message.

Computer viruses:
These are pieces of code that can copy themselves. This can result in your computer or other system becoming unusable. Viruses can destroy data too.

Requests for money:
Sometimes, applications or games require payment information before you can play. If this is stored in the game, it can be all too easy to accidentally authorise a payment in the middle of a game. Requests for money can appear on websites or in messages and emails too.

Dangerous individuals: Unfortunately, there are people who use the Internet to prey upon vulnerable people, including children.

There are many other threats online, which is why it's so important for you and your child to have a good understanding of how to navigate the online world. Without guidance, they are likely to see inappropriate content or come across something unsuitable for their age.

Online Safety Top Tips

What can you, as a parent, do to help your seven to eleven-year-old to develop socially and stay in touch whilst also protecting them from online dangers? **Here are some top tips to help you and your child when using technology.**

Talk to Each Other

This is a really simple tip, but it's so important that you make sure you know what your child is doing online and that your child knows they can come to you for a chat. If you keep this dialogue open and non-judgmental, they're more likely to tell you if they encounter anything suspicious or strange.

Talk to your child about the sites they are accessing, the games they're playing and the people they're chatting to. Ask them to show you if they mention a new website or they get a new device. Encourage this by also chatting about your own technology and Internet use.

Also, talk regularly about the importance of online safety. Keeping those lines of communication open is a powerful way of letting your child know that you trust them but you expect them to be honest. A good starting point for discussion is this website www.thinkuknow.co.uk which is part of the government Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). This site also offers support and advice should problems arise.

If your child has an older sibling, talk to them as well. Chat about what they're doing online and what they show to their younger sibling. Encourage them to be responsible and help keep their younger sibling safe.

Online Safety Top Tips

Use Parental Controls to Tailor Your Child's Online Experience

Set up appropriate parental controls on your home broadband and all Internet-enabled devices your child has access to, including mobile phones, tablets and games consoles.

Choose the sites your child has access to on their account. On many websites, applications or programmes, you can choose what content your child will see, which should help protect them from seeing and interacting with inappropriate content. For example, you can set restrictions for some streaming services, so your child can only watch videos that are meant for their age range.

Make sure your child is using child-safe search engines, such as Swiggle or KidzSearch. Activate safe search settings on search engines (like Google) and entertainment sites or applications (like YouTube and iPlayer).

Talk to your child about what they should do if they access something online that is not appropriate. The best guideline is for them to close the screen down immediately and tell you or another responsible adult.

Online Safety Top Tips

Manage the Devices

Set up a user account for your child on your devices and set your homepage to a child-friendly one. Keep all devices your child will use in a high-traffic communal area in your home, such as the kitchen or living room. Be with your child when they are online and talk about what they are doing.

If you think your child isn't old enough to have a mobile phone or tablet, that's perfectly okay - it's your decision. Stay firm and explain your reasons. Keep the conversation about technology open and honest with your child.

Set Some Boundaries

Decide on some house rules for screen time and stick to them. You might decide that all devices will be put away at mealtimes and at bedtime. Put them in a central location (not in bedrooms) and make sure they're switched off. Set a good example in your own use of devices; if you follow these house rules, your child is likely to be more willing to comply.

Use Strong and Separate Passwords

Password-protect all accounts and chat to your child about the importance of security. Having secure passwords can help protect your personal information online. Pick something that is memorable and that contains a mixture of capital letters, numbers and special characters too. Some services recommend choosing three random words to create a password that is tricky for someone else to crack.

Online Safety Top Tips

Warn against Sharing Personal Information

Advise your children not to share personal information online, as this can easily get into the wrong hands. It's worth discussing with your child that, although it is safe to talk about general things with others online, they should still be careful not to give too much information away. Be a digital role model for them by never sharing your own personal information online. Personal information includes:

- your name
- your address
- your phone number
- your password
- the name of your school
- a photo of you or your family

Chat about Strangers

Sometimes, we interact with people we don't know online; this is similar to writing a letter to a penpal across the world. Not all strangers are dangerous, but it's important that your child knows what to do and what not to do. Rather than saying, 'Don't talk to strangers!', it's more valuable to create a climate where they can talk to a trusted person (such as you or their teacher) if they feel scared or at risk. In addition, we don't want children to feel like they can't seek help from a police officer or a shop assistant, simply because they don't know that person.

As discussed, there are risks of sharing information online. This is a place where your child is very likely to encounter people that they do not know, especially through online gaming or the use of social media.

Children can be vulnerable to online grooming by adults pretending to be someone they are not. Remind your child that, if they have not met a person, they have no idea if they are who they say they are. Your child can choose to block or ignore people they don't know or don't want to interact with. It's also possible to set strict privacy settings on many social networking platforms.

Online Safety Top Tips

Read Everything Carefully

If your child enjoys playing games, for example, encourage them to read messages and instructions carefully. If there is ever a request for payment online, they can alert you to this. Your child is likely to take this responsibility seriously if you help them understand.

Avoid Unknown or Suspicious Links

As some general advice, avoid opening up links or messages from unknown contacts. These could be trying to steal personal data. Show your child if you receive an unknown message and model to them what they should do. This might encourage them to talk to you about their own experiences.

Be Wary on the Move

If you're travelling or out in public, you might find your child can access public WiFi. Some safety features might not be active, which can mean your child might be able to access things online that you would usually restrict at home.

Some providers are part of family-friendly WiFi schemes: look out for the symbol for Friendly WiFi, which is a government-initiated safe certification standard for public WiFi. They have filters that block inappropriate content. You can find out more about Friendly WiFi by clicking here.

Be Aware of Age Ratings

Games, apps, films and social networks all have age ratings; these can be a good guide to follow. For example, many social networking platforms have an age limit of 13, including TikTok, Facebook and Instagram. Pay close attention to these age ratings to make sure they are suitable for your child.

Talk about Social Networking

Social networking is the use of social media websites and applications, like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, to connect with family, friends and other people who share your interests. **Many people use social media daily.**

Your child might be aware of social media, either through older children's use of it or perhaps through their peers. Talk to your child about the benefits and risks of social networking. Chat about the age restrictions in place for some social networking platforms and discuss why these restrictions are in place. Do you, as a parent, use social media? What pros and cons do you experience? Be open in these conversations.

It's also important to remind your child that anything they upload, email or message can stay online forever. For instance, a post on Facebook or Instagram is 'published'. Think about the meaning of that word and the weight it has.

Investigate safe social media sites for children. There are some sites and apps aimed at under-10s that have social networking elements, like Spotlite or PlayKids Talk. Internet Matters has some great information about some of the top social networks made for children; find out more by clicking here.

Talk about Online Gaming

Online gaming can take place using a range of devices, including mobile phones, tablets, games consoles and computers. Players can play live with people across the world, which can be a fun, exciting experience. However, there are some risks associated with online gaming. Take a look at these top tips:

Get involved by finding out which games your child enjoys playing, then play them together so you can understand how they work. Check if you're happy with the content and the ideas in the game.

As with all online safety advice, talk to your child. Chat about what information they should and shouldn't share. Let them feel that they can come to you if they come across bad language or inappropriate content.

Switch devices to aeroplane mode when your child is playing online games. This will prevent them from accidentally making in-app purchases or contacting other players online.

Be guided by the age rating of the game. Sometimes, games can appear suitable at first glance, but there might be language, themes or images that are inappropriate.

If your child is keen to try online gaming, make it the norm that they play in a communal area, like the lounge or kitchen where you all spend time together. **This means you can check they're okay.**
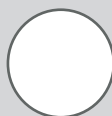
What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is when someone uses the Internet or a digital device to target, harass or threaten another person or group. It can occur on many platforms, including over text and direct messaging apps, on social media platforms, via email and within the online gaming community.

Cyberbullying can include:

- sending abusive or threatening messages, both privately and on public forums, such as chat rooms or social media
- sharing embarrassing or upsetting images or videos
- disclosing someone's personal information online
- posting rumours about someone
- creating fake accounts to impersonate someone online

In very serious cases, cyberbullying can be considered a crime and the police could become involved. Examples of this include making threats of violence or threatening someone's life and harassing someone based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity or religion.

How can this impact my child?

Sometimes, children find themselves bullying or being bullied online. Issues can also arise between friendship groups at school or elsewhere when hurtful comments are carelessly posted on social media. Talk to your child about being a good friend online. It's important to remember that our words can still hurt, even if we are not there to see a person's reaction to them.

Experiencing cyberbullying can make children feel very worried, upset and overwhelmed. They may become very uneasy about going to school, have trouble sleeping at night and have unexplained headaches or stomach aches.

Here are some potential signs that a child may be experiencing cyberbullying:

They appear nervous or upset after receiving a message, text or email.

They are unwilling to share information about their online activity.

They suddenly shut off their device or walk away from their computer without warning.

They experience episodes of unexplained depression or anxiety after using a digital device.

What should I do if I think my child is being cyberbullied?

The most important online safety tip is to create an open and ongoing dialogue with your child about their online activity. Let them know they can trust you and can talk to you about anything they experience online. Here are some steps to take if they are struggling:

- Approach your child calmly, at a time when they will not feel rushed or stressed.

- Listen to your child without judgement and reassure them that you are here to help.

- Ask your child how long the bullying has been happening and if they know who the bully or bullies are. This could be tricky if the perpetrator has used a fake account or is anonymous.

- Take screenshots of any abusive messages or comments as evidence.

- Once you have taken screenshots, encourage your child to delete messages from their cyberbully.

- Show your child how to block people online.

- If your child knows their bullies in real life, arrange a meeting with your child's teacher or club leader. Schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy and they will be able to help resolve issues with bullying, even if it is taking place outside of school hours.

- If bullying is particularly serious (e.g. threats of violence or abuse based on race, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity), the bully may be committing a crime. Contact the police for more advice.