

Online Safety

Simple tips and advice for parents and carers



At Enquire Learning Trust schools the safeguarding of your child is of the utmost importance.

The online world can seem like a scary place to some, particularly as children seem to be able to navigate technology with relative ease. Children receive lots of education about how to keep

themselves online from early years onwards, but as parents and carers it is vitally important we keep ourselves up to date; children see things differently to adults and some can be more risk averse so knowing where they're going online, what they're doing, who they're talking to and knowing where to turn to if something is goes wrong is key. We have put this short guide together to give you some helpful advice and point you in the direction of other resources that you may find useful.

What is online safety?

The issues we see can appear overwhelming; many of us weren't brought up in an age where we had the world at our fingertips and the ability to see the very best and worst of society.

Online safety has evolved over the years; it used to cover areas such as child sexual exploitation and online bullying. Whilst these are still very important areas, time has moved on and we now have so much more knowledge, research and equally, concerns. The best way to think about it is this: almost any real-world behaviour can be enacted online. When you see it in those words you can understand why it is such a huge area and yet we're still learning, finding out new things, better academic research. The learning never stops, we have to keep up to safeguard our children.

So what is online safety? It's about educating ourselves and our children so that they can navigate technology and the online world safely and securely. It isn't about preventing (although that can depend on age), it's about knowing what to do if something goes wrong and recognizing when something isn't right.

Behaviour not technology!

We can't emphasise the importance of this.

Many people get wrapped up in the technology, perhaps concerned that their children know more than parents do, but in many cases the technology is a smokescreen. For the most part the technology is just the mode of transport for a behaviour, e.g. browsing inappropriate content, adults contacting children. Technology has a part to play, for example children may view inappropriate content when they didn't want to (e.g. a YouTube video) or the default privacy settings on an app may be set to public, but behaviour is the most important element of online safety.

Equally, different families will have different parenting styles which is why there is no single piece of advice that fits into every family environment; there can only ever be advice and guidance.

What do children do online?

They do lots of things,

but let's keep this simple. Most online activities for children fit into 3 areas: gaming, YouTube and, for some, social media.

But even the term 'social media' is becoming outdated. Traditionally social media may have been discussed in terms of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok etc. but many games and apps now have a social element built into them. This makes things even more difficult for us which is one of the reasons why we must simplify this even more.

Children simply want to have fun, to play with their friends, to explore and learn new things. That's all a part of growing up and we need to be mindful of this online as we would in the real world.



When your children are online, content, contact and conduct is the easiest way to think of the risks and issues that children may face. It is exactly the same whether your child is gaming, making their own videos to upload to YouTube, using TikTok to have fun with their friends from school or anything else they're doing.

CONTENT

What can my child see, and am I happy with this? For example all games and apps have an age rating; this gives you an indication that there may be content which is inappropriate for the age of your child. What about that YouTube channel they're always watching?

CONTACT

Can my child contact others? Can other people contact my child?

Can I set privacy settings and is there a way we can report inappropriate comments or contact through a block/report button?

CONDUCT

What is the behaviour of my child? Some children are more risk averse than others.

The online world can exacerbate this making someone feel safe because they're behind a screen.

To explain this further, imagine your child asks you if they can have a TikTok account. They may tell you that 'everyone else is using it', but as a parent you need to satisfy yourself regardless of the pressure your child puts on you. So how would you come to this decision?

- Content - what sort of content is on the app and is it appropriate for the age of my child? First of all you would check on the Apple or Android download store and see what the age and content rating is. You could also carry out a series of Google searches, e.g. 'is there adult content on TikTok?'
- Contact - can my child contact others and can others contact my child? Are there privacy settings so that people I don't know can't contact my child? Are there reporting methods on the app?
- Conduct - if I allow my child to use this app will they behave appropriately? Much like adults, some children are introverts and some are extroverts. Some introverts become extroverts when they are behind a screen or if they become over-excited. This is usually one you have to keep an eye on over a period of time if you allow the child to use the app. Even with this very simple explanation you can see that the risks and issues can quickly become overwhelming if you don't keep up. So what can you do?

Top Tips

Be curious - Keep up to speed with your child's online activities. This isn't about spying on them, it's about openly engaging them in conversation in exactly the same way that you would do with their real world activities. What are they doing? Where are they going? Who are they talking to? What are they playing? What apps are they using? It's good practice to check their devices every now and again just to make sure they're not playing any games or using apps that you're not aware of. Do this together so that your child knows that you are just trying to protect them.

Be practical - Use the technology they are using. This is the only way to understand clearly what the risks and issues may be. You don't have to become an expert, a simple understanding is all that is necessary. For example if your child asks you if they can have TikTok, either use it yourself first or use it together for a period of time until you are happy. Have a play of their new game with them; together you can go through the game and find out how to apply any privacy settings, how you report an account for inappropriate behaviour etc.

Be proactive - On point 2, understand that all games, apps and many online services (e.g. YouTube) have age restrictions. For example most social apps are age-restricted to 13 and above primarily due to data protection laws but also inappropriate content, content and conduct, but there are other age restrictions too. If your child is asking for a new game or an app find out what the age restrictions are.

Be inquisitive - Ask your child what they have been doing in school regarding online safety. What lessons do they have, what have they learnt?

Be supportive - if your child has seen something they didn't want to see and they come and tell you, a natural reaction is to remove the device or app. To a child this is a punishment for something that was out of their control. Instead praise them for telling you, find out how this has happened and then take the appropriate action. Don't show panic, fear or anger as children pick up on this.

Be involved - some schools are now pro-actively discussing the issues at meetings such as PTA's. Many other schools have online safety committees where they meet every so often to discuss issues. Find out if your school has such a thing and get involved with it.

If you're ever unsure, seek advice from school. Your school has a huge amount of knowledge and expertise. Staff in ELT schools get a lot of online safety training and there is at least one designated person that has more in-depth knowledge. The school may not know everything, but they know the best person or organization to turn to for help.

CEOP

Are you worried about online sexual abuse or the way someone has been communicating with your child online?

CEOP is the Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre, a key part of the National Crime Agency in the United Kingdom. As well as investigating crime there is a plethora of information on the website for parents and for children.

<https://ceop.police.uk/safety-centre>



INTERNET MATTERS

Tons of age-related information created specifically for parents. Includes information to set up devices, specific risks, ongoing advice in the shape of articles and videos.

There is also a YouTube channel with lots of advice and guidance for parents.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/>



NSPCC

The National Society for the Protection and Care of Children, including Childline, is the main charity which deals with the protection and care of children. There is a huge amount of advice on the website, including for online issues.

Childline is the free helpline for children when they have no one else to talk to, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is the only service of its kind in the UK.



<https://nspcc.org.uk>

COMMON SENSE MEDIA

To learn more about the games or apps your children are using, Common Sense Media is a one-stop-shop.

The site is filled with advice and guidance for parents, including opinions from other parents too which can be great to help you make up your mind.

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

