SAFE and SMART

Keeping Children Safe Online

Nov 2023

Welcome to the very first edition of this half-termly newsletter.

In each edition we aim to share a range of useful information for parents and carers of older and younger children. There will be a section called 'What is', one called 'How to' and another which will cover some aspect of gaming, social media or YouTube, as well as other useful information.

Technology is fast-moving, our children are using more and more technology at school and at home. As parents and carers it's important we keep up to date as much as we can.

IMPORTANT: the information in this newsletter is intended for adults. By its very nature, online safety goes into aspects using terminology and explanations which may not be suitable for younger children. Please use your discretion, only you can decide what is or is not appropriate for your child.

1	2	3
WHAT IS	**HOW TO**	**SOCIAL MEDIA**
Online Disinhibition	Google Family Link	Discord app

What is
ONLINE DISINHIBITION

Imagine you're wearing a mask at a costume party. With that mask on, you might feel a bit more daring or bold.

You might even do or say things you usually wouldn't. This is similar to what happens online; we sometimes feel hidden behind our screens, like wearing a digital mask. This can make us act differently than we do in person. This change in behaviour is what we call the online disinhibition effect, for example, that falling out in a WhatsApp group.

Why does it happen?

1. **Anonymity**: Online, people often don't know who we really are. We can, to some extent, be anonymous, which sometimes makes us feel more confident or less worried about what others think.

2. **Invisibility**: We can't always see the people we're interacting with, and they can't see us. This can make us forget that there are real people with real feelings on the other side of the screen.

3. **Lack of Authority**: Often there aren't teachers or parents watching what we do online all the time. This lack of immediate authority can make us feel more free to express ourselves.

4. **Delayed Consequences**: Sometimes, the effects of what we say or do online don't seem immediate. This can make us less cautious.

Toxic Disinhibition

Toxic disinhibition is when people say or do mean or hurtful things online. It's like the dark side of feeling free behind the screen.

Example: Imagine someone starts spreading rumours about a classmate on social media. They might not do this in person, but online, they feel bold and less accountable. This can really hurt people's feelings and lead to serious problems like cyberbullying.

Benign Disinhibition

But there's also a positive side, known as benign disinhibition. This is when people feel free to share good things - like offering support,

DID YOU KNOW?

There are approximately one billion videos currently on YouTube. Each day around 3.7 million videos are uploaded which equates to roughly 271,330 hours of video content. If you wanted to watch all the content on YouTube two things would have to happen:

○ All video uploads would have to stop.

○ You would have to be alive for around 18 thousand years to watch the current content!

expressing kindness, or showing a part of themselves they usually keep hidden.

Example: Someone might be too shy to sing in front of the class, but they feel comfortable sharing a video of them singing online. They receive positive feedback and encouragement, which makes them feel good and more confident.

Why Is This Important?

Understanding online disinhibition is important for a few reasons:

1. **Empathy**: Remembering that there are real people with real feelings on the other side of the screen can help us be more empathetic and kind.
2. **Responsibility**: We need to be responsible for our actions, whether online or offline. Understanding the impact of our words and actions is a big part of growing up.
3. **Safety**: Knowing about the risks of toxic disinhibition can help us stay safe online and make the internet a better place for everyone.
4. **Self-Expression**: Understanding benign disinhibition can encourage us to express ourselves in positive and creative ways.

Tips for Children:

1. **Think Before You Post**: Always take a moment to think about how your words or actions might affect others.
2. **Be Kind**: Treat others online as you would like to be treated in person.
3. **Speak Up**: If you see someone being unkind or unsafe online, it's important to speak up. Tell a trusted adult.
4. **Be Yourself**: If your parents allow it, use the internet to express your true self in a positive and creative way.
5. **Privacy Matters**: Remember to protect your privacy, be mindful of personal information and what you are sharing with others.

DID YOU KNOW?

Every so often Google releases a 'transparency report' which gives us lots of information. For example, between April 2023 and June 2023 Google removed (from YouTube):

1.5 million harmful comments.

10.5 million hateful comments.

55 million comments related to harassment and cyber bullying.

650 million comments related to spam and scams.

Google Family Link

Designed for parents of children under the age of 13, this an app which can help manage devices.

Why is it Useful for Parents?

Note: some features are device dependent. Family Link is most useful on Android devices

- **Supervision**: Provides a level of digital supervision, helping parents guide their children as they explore online.
- **Screen Time**: It helps parents manage how much time their children spend on their devices, promoting a healthier digital lifestyle.
- **Content Control**: Allows parents to approve or block apps their children want to download from the Google Play Store, helping to keep them away from inappropriate content.
- **Location Tracking**: For added peace of mind, it offers the ability to track the location of your child's device.

Key Features of Google Family Link

- **App Management**: Approve or block the apps your child wants to download. You can also manage in-app purchases and hide specific apps on their device.
- **Screen Time Management**: Set daily screen time limits and a device bedtime to help your child balance their day.
- **Activity Reports**: View activity reports showing how much time your child spends on their favourite apps, giving you insights into their digital habits.
- **Remote Locking**: Remotely lock your child's device when it's time to play outside, study, or go to bed.
- **Safe Search Settings**: Ensure safe browsing by managing the Google Search settings on your child's device.

- **Location Tracking**: Keep track of where your child's device is, providing an extra layer of safety. You can also get notifications when your child arrives/leaves a location.

Google Family Link and YouTube

When you use Family Link to manage a Google account for your child, you can set up parental controls on YouTube Kids and YouTube (called Supervised Experience).

Setting Up Google Family Link

Setting up Family Link is straightforward. You'll need to download the app on your own device and create a Google Account for your child through the app. Once the account is set up, you can link it to your child's device and start managing their digital activities.

Google Family Link isn't perfect, key features that parents might look for such as web filtering and text monitoring are missing, but as a free app it's worth considering to see if it is suitable for your circumstances.

Useful Links

There are lots of useful questions and answers about Family Link **HERE** or search 'Google Family Link FAQ's'.

Social Media - DISCORD

Discord is a popular communication platform, originally designed for gamers but now used by a wide range of online communities.

It allows users to chat via text, voice, and video, and is particularly popular among children, teenagers and young adults. You have to be 13 or older to have a Discord account.

Key Features

- **Servers**: Much like 'Groups' in WhatsApp Discord is organised into 'servers'. These are virtual spaces where communities gather. Each server can have multiple "channels" for different topics.
- **Channels**: Channels within servers can be text-based or for voice chat. They allow users to communicate in groups or privately.
- **Direct Messaging**: Users can also send private messages to friends on Discord.
- **Customisation**: Users can customise their profiles and settings, including privacy controls.

Benefits

- **Community and Socialising**: Discord allows young people to connect with friends and communities with shared interests, which can be great for socialising and support.
- **Diverse Interests**: There are servers for almost every interest, from gaming and technology to art and education.
- **Learning and Collaboration**: Many use Discord for study groups, project collaboration, and sharing knowledge.

Potential Risks

- **Exposure to Inappropriate Content**: Not all servers are moderated, and some may contain inappropriate content for younger users.
- **Unwanted Contact**: Like any platform that allows communication, there's a risk of contact from people who can pose a risk to children for purposes such as grooming, exploitation and scams.

DID YOU KNOW?

Each quarter Discord release their transparency report which goes into details about accounts and servers removed for a variety of reasons such as child safety, violence, hate and more. Between April 2023 and June 2023 Discord removed:

155,873 accounts for child safety (which includes child sexual abuse).

21,256 accounts for violent and graphic content.

10,671 accounts for harassment and bullying.

10,385 accounts for violent extremism.

- **Cyberbullying**: The platform can be used for cyberbullying, especially in less moderated spaces.
- **Privacy Concerns**: Sharing personal information on Discord can pose privacy risks.

Tips for Parents

- **Open Communication**: Talk with your child about their use of Discord. Show interest and ask about the communities they're part of.
- **Privacy Settings**: Ensure your child understands the importance of privacy settings and not sharing personal information.
- **Monitor Use**: Keep an eye on the amount of time spent on Discord and encourage a healthy balance with offline activities.
- **Educate About Online Safety**: Discuss the importance of online safety and being cautious about who they interact with.
- **Use Parental Controls**: Familiarise yourself with Discord's parental controls and use them to help manage your child's experience.

Conclusion

Discord can be a valuable tool for communication and community building, but like any online platform, it comes with risks. By staying informed and maintaining open dialogue with your children, you can help them navigate Discord safely and responsibly.

Useful Links

Discord has a number of features which can help parents including 'Family Center' which helps parents understand how their children use Discord, get insights into the communities they are involved with and more.

Just search 'Discord family center' or click HERE to be taken straight to it.

DID YOU KNOW?

Each quarter Discord release their transparency report which goes into details about accounts and servers removed for a variety of reasons such as child safety, violence, hate and more. Between April 2023 and June 2023 Discord removed:

155,873 accounts for child safety (which includes child sexual abuse).

21,256 accounts for violent and graphic content.

10,671 accounts for harassment and bullying.

10,385 accounts for violent extremism.

New devices for Christmas?

It's a common time of year when some children receive new devices such as gaming stations, tablets, phones, Kindles etc.

All devices come with some form of parental control features and it's important that these devices are prepared in a way you feel is appropriate for the age and ability of your child.

For example, some devices can limit content downloads (based on age), some will either allow or disallow chat, such as in-game chat, some will allow you to manage spending money and much more.

But all devices are different and it can be a bit of a struggle for those who don't think they're tech-savvy so here's some tips:

• **The Home** - think about how the Internet is accessed to/from your home, commonly broadband. Most broadband providers give you free parental controls to allow you what is being accessed by any device from the home. Some providers allow you to set up restrictions based on a particular device.

• **The Device** - what devices are in your home that your children have access to? Do you know what parental controls are available? It might be useful to make a list and set them up one-by-one. It can be a bit daunting but don't worry, there are some really useful, non-techie walkthroughs available (see Useful Links).

• **The App/Game** - most apps and games have parental features to one extent or another, e.g. social media apps and kids games. Like devices, they're all different and some are of limited use, but it's important to be aware of what is available to see if it's useful for you.

Knowing what is available to you is useful, only you can determine what is best for your household and your children. Also, when setting parental controls it's vital that you talk with your child and explain what you are doing and why you are doing it.
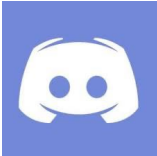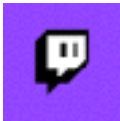
Useful Links:

Internet Matters is a fantastic website which can help with all of this and more. There is a page which will help and guide you set up all your devices HERE or just search 'Internet Matters parental controls'.

Common Apps

This is not an exhaustive list, but tends to be the more popular apps used by children and young people.

Age requirements are set within the terms and conditions of the app provider, don't be confused by ratings in the app store which can sometimes be different.

App	Age	Comments
	13 and over	**Discord** - is a voice, video and text chat app that's used by tens of millions of people aged 13+ to tap and hang out with communities or their friends. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**Instagram** - is a photo and video sharing app where people can upload photos, videos and messages to share with others. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**Snapchat** - is a very popular app that lets users swop pictures and videos (Snaps) with others which are meant to disappear after they are viewed. There is also a messaging feature. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**TikTok** - is a social media app that allows users to create, watch and share short videos shot on mobile devices or webcams. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13 and over	**Twitch -** is where people come together to chat and interact live. Think YouTube, but it is live rather then pre-recorded. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	16 and over	**WhatsApp -** is a messaging app which uses text, images, video and voice record features to connect with others. Parental settings can be found **HERE**
	18 and over	**Reddit** - is a network of communities (called subreddits) where people can share information, their interests and hobbies. Reddit is an 18+ app, there are no parental controls.