



Internet Safety Tips for Parents/Guardians/Foster Carers



You've got friends in the hundreds on Facebook, follow Stephen Fry on Twitter and use the iPlayer to catch up on last weekend's telly.

But even if you think you're "down with the kids" you probably still don't know as much as they do about the Internet, and this glaring fact is leaving many thousands of children open to abuse.

A new survey reveals that, while around 80 per cent of British five to 15-year-olds are online every day, nearly two-thirds (61 per cent) of parents fail to set adequate online controls to keep them safe.

The MORI poll, commissioned by the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), suggests parents' confusion about the new technologies is a major obstacle to proper understanding of the sites their children are visiting. The boom in social networking, instant messaging and gaming means the digital world is changing at an ever faster pace. And with cyber-bullying on the rise, along with Internet grooming, Internet addiction, hacking and more, young users are exposed to all manner of online attacks.

The European Safer Internet Day (February 7), was dedicated to urging parents to get properly involved in their children's online life – with a special website '[Thinkuknow](#)' set up to steer adults through the maze of technology their children may be using.

Advice includes adapting Facebook privacy settings, checking sites and games are age-appropriate, blocking or reporting contacts in IM (Instant Messaging), addressing the issue of online pornography and teaching kids how to control the information they share with others.

There is also a series of films for children aged from five to 16, guiding them through their use of online technologies and teaching them how to respond if something goes wrong or they feel

concerned. As the website notes: “The internet has changed all of our lives, and your child has grown up during this change. Many of the things that confuse, baffle or even scare us, are part of the everyday for them. For many of us, this can all be a bit too much.

“Whether you’re a technophobe or a technophile, it’s still likely that you’ll be playing catch-up with the way your child is using the Internet.”

young people of today.

“Technology has transformed people’s lives both collectively and individually. It has changed how we communicate and socialise and children and young people are at the forefront – the real Internet pioneers. For them it provides immense opportunity and excitement.

“But too often we see examples of where the child is at risk because they make simple online mistakes. We all have a role to play and today I want to encourage parents to engage with their child to help avoid these risks.”

Among the top tips laid out are:

Be involved

For young people today there is no division between online and offline – they use the Internet to socialise and learn. Just as you are there for them offline, you should give support online too. Talk to your kids about what they are doing and show you understand – they will then be more likely to approach you if they need help or advice.

Stay up-to-date

Be curious and interested in the new gadgets and sites your child uses. *“It’s important that as your child learns more, so do you.”*

Set boundaries

There should be boundaries in the online world as much as in the real world: which sites they can visit, who they can communicate with, and when and how, for instance. These rules will change and adapt as they grow and use new technologies.

Know how they are connected to the Internet

These days it’s not just a computer that connects to the Internet: your child’s phone or games console can, too. Make sure you monitor their use of all their devices and check how they are going online: is it your connection, where you may have placed controls, or a neighbour’s Wifi, which lacks safety settings?

Set the controls

Use parental controls on the TV, computers, games consoles and mobile phones to lock and block dangerous sites and help you steer your child through the appropriate boundaries. Your service provider (eg Sky, Vodafone, Virgin etc) will be able to help you with this.

Remind them not to speak to strangers

Just as you caution small children not to go off with strangers, you should remind your kids that not everyone online is who they say they are. Make sure they never meet up with someone they only know online, or at least never without a trusted adult to accompany them.

“The risks that children face may have changed but basic parenting skills remain the same.”