



Parents Factsheet

Parental information for under 9s – Helping to keep your child safe online

Being online and using technology at any age can be an extremely positive and rewarding experience. As adults, we use technology almost daily to connect, to work, to learn and to be entertained. Children are no different – technology can open up a range of exciting opportunities for any child, as long as it is done carefully, safely and with adult supervision. Children can be vulnerable online because ... because they are children. Children are not as well placed as adults to recognise online risk or harm or to understand the consequences of their online actions. Children face pressure from peers, from influencers, from the media – if their mates are doing it, of course they want to be doing it too. As parents/carers or family members, we are in the best position to be able to support our children's online lives, to make sure they are happy, healthy and harm free. After all, that's what we do – we protect our children as best we can.

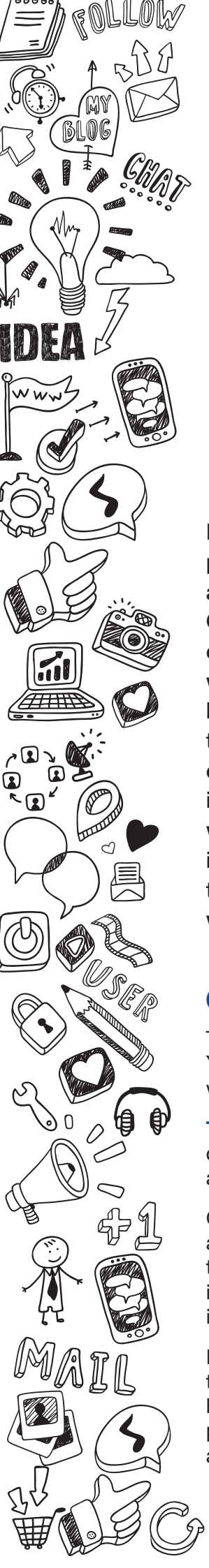
Celebrate the positives – send the right messages

Too often the online world is portrayed as scary, dangerous and full of risk. Yes, there are risks, but it is important to celebrate the positives that the online world can bring.

The Digital 5 a Day by the Children's Commissioner is a great place to start conversations about appropriate and positive use, ensuring young people get a rich and healthy digital diet.

Get involved with your child's digital interests – whether that be creating digital art, playing Minecraft or creating videos. Learn with your child. This will send the right message that technology can be great and that you have an interest in what they do. This will have an added benefit in that it may mean your child is more likely to come to you should they feel worried or concerned.

It's important that adults model good practice and show the benefits of technology but also time away from technology. If you take devices into your bedroom, this will be seen as normal acceptable behaviour. If you use your phones in bed before you sleep, your child is less likely to understand that time away from technology before bed is a healthy thing to do.





Understand that it's probably different to when we grew up!

Many of our children will experience a technological world very different to the one we grew up in - it's important to understand the pressures that this may bring. Growing up is never any easy experience – even when many of us were younger, we probably tested our parents, wanting to follow the crowd, do what our friends did, to be popular and liked and to push boundaries. Many of these normal and natural behaviours can be amplified online. Understanding and discussing behaviour and pressures young people may face online can really help. This might include:

- wanting to be popular
- wanting to be liked or loved.
- wanting to fit in and not be excluded – being part of a group.
- Fear of missing out (FOMO)
- Comparing their lives to the lives of others online,
- Being influenced by others – both people they know and people they don't, including celebrities (or influencers)

Make sure these pressures are understood, discussed and addressed as you would address them offline. Everyone wants to fit in and be liked, everyone compares themselves to others. However, just as children should not be pressured into doing anything offline that they think 'doesn't feel right' just to be liked or to fit in, the same applies online – it's no different.

Encourage open and honest dialogue – aware not scared

Online safety, healthy habits and possible risks should form part of regular conversations. Children need to feel that they can come to you with any worries or concerns and that they will be supported, listened to and not judged. Having honest conversations is key – and having them early in an age and ability appropriate way. The key is 'aware not scared' – children need to know that there are risks online, but as long as the right precautions are taken and as long as they feel they can approach family members for support, the risks are less likely to become harmful.

There are lots of resources available to help have those conversations (it's often difficult to know where to start). The [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) and the [NSPCC](#) offer really useful conversation starters – have those chats and have them regularly.

Send the right messages

It is important that the messages that you communicate to your children are positive and proportionate. Beware unhelpful general messages and make sure that you explain the difference between the behaviour of adults online and that of children. For example, be careful with phrases like 'never speak to strangers online'. For younger children, they probably shouldn't be communicating with anyone online that they do not know. However, for older children, many appropriate online multiplayer games allow in-game chat. Not all online strangers are bad – as long as online conversations are positive, respectful, appropriate and are monitored by adults, children can have positive interactions with online.



'Never share your personal information online' – again for young children, there is no real need to share personal information online. However, it may be ok to post or discuss interests, favourite foods or hobbies. This is a very different set of information to name, school and address. It is important that children know the difference between what may be ok to share and what definitely is not. In this example, it's important to discuss the fact that some adults do share their name and address online – if not, we would never have parcels delivered!

Discuss healthy online behaviours

It's important to discuss healthy online behaviours. Children need to know, in an age and ability appropriate way, what is normal and healthy and what is not normal and harmful. Just as we teach our children to cross the road, we need to teach them how to navigate the online world. Children need to know that being asked to tell someone online where they live or what school they go to isn't healthy. They need to know that being asked to send a 'nude' isn't healthy and that some people online are not who they say they are. They need to know that playing 18+ games as a child isn't healthy. They need to know that spending hours on a screen isn't healthy. They also need to know what to do if they feel something doesn't feel right.

If children understand positive behaviour such as how to show **respect, self-respect, kindness, what consent means, how to disagree respectfully**, these can be applied easily to online situations. Use scenarios or role play to give the opportunity to apply these to online situations – e.g., someone pops up in an in-game chat and says you are rubbish. How might it make you feel? How might you react?

It is important to establish rules and expectations – where technology can be used, how long for, what apps, games and website are appropriate, what we can and can't share as well as what we should do if we are concerned. Creating these rules together means they are more likely to be followed.

Childnet offers a really useful Family Agreement template and suggestions to help make this process easier.

Don't assume it can't happen your child

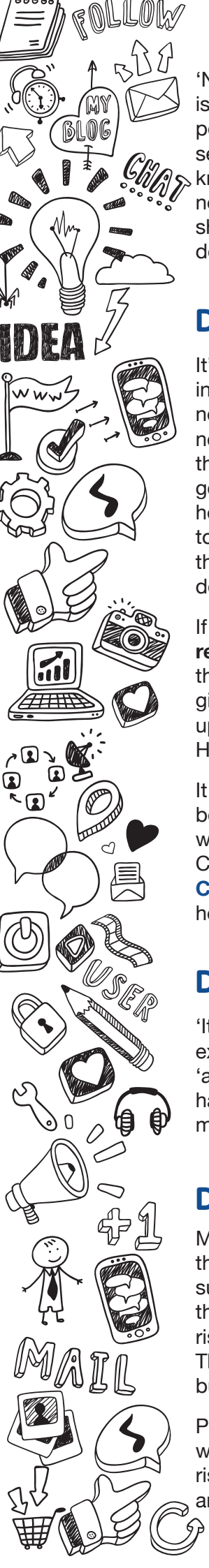
'It won't happen to my child' - unfortunately, online risks and harms can be experienced by any child, regardless of background, age or ability. Remember, 'aware not scared' – being aware of potential risk, keeping up to date and having regular conversations with young people regarding their online lives means that the likelihood of harm is reduced.

Do your research

Many parents and carers are concerned that their children know more about the online world than they do, and therefore they cannot offer children much support. Of course, children can be extremely technology savvy. However, they are still children and are not particularly good at understanding or spotting risk or understanding the consequences of online behaviour.

The term 'naive experts' describes some children – expert users of technology but naive in terms of its impact.

Parents and carers do have a vital role. We should try to stay as up to date as we can. The **UK Safer Internet Centre** provides a useful breakdown of online risk. NSPCC also gives some really good advice for specific online safety risks and harms. Remember, you also need to be aware! (not scared!)





And then there's understanding the multitude of apps, games and websites that children might use. The [NetAware](#) website is great for researching the latest apps, games and social media sites, providing a description, age ratings risk levels and advice and guidance. [Common Sense Media](#) allows you to search for apps, games and films so you have a thorough understanding of them before your child uses them. It is also really important to thoroughly understand the safety features of any game or platform before use – do not assume just because an online platform is designed for young people that it comes without risk of harm. Any platform which allows users to connect, with a chat function for example, has the potential to put your child in contact with other users. Any platform which has content created by other users has the potential to contain content which may not be suitable for your child.

Remember that most social media apps, designed for 13+, will try to connect people with similar interests. If a child under the age of 13 has joined social media, they could be connected with an adult who shares similar interests. For young people, most social media is 'Risky by design', rather than safe by design. The [Risky-by-Design](#) website from the 5 Rights foundation provides some really useful examples of how children may be put at risk by the design and features of some platforms.

There are many guides for safety settings within apps and games - these settings can limit who children can contact, whether they can be 'friend requested' and whether chat functions are allowed. [Roblox has a guide here](#), [Fortnite has a guide here](#). There are plenty of YouTube videos and guides online for other platforms. The key is to do your research and set the correct controls **before** allowing your child to use them.

Know when and how to report

Know your reporting routes. If there is a concern, there are a number of options available. Evidence suggests that children can be reluctant to discuss or report online worries, so it is important to foster an environment where children feel they can talk to you without feeling they will get into trouble.

If you are in any doubt, contact school in the first instance. Most social media and games platforms have reporting functions – find out where these are. If you feel that your child has been subject to sexual exploitation, abuse or grooming, the police should be informed in the first instance. CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection command) can also be contacted and will be able to investigate on your behalf. If you are in any doubt how and where to report worrying online content, [Report Harmful Content](#) is a fantastic website offering easy to follow advice and practical support.

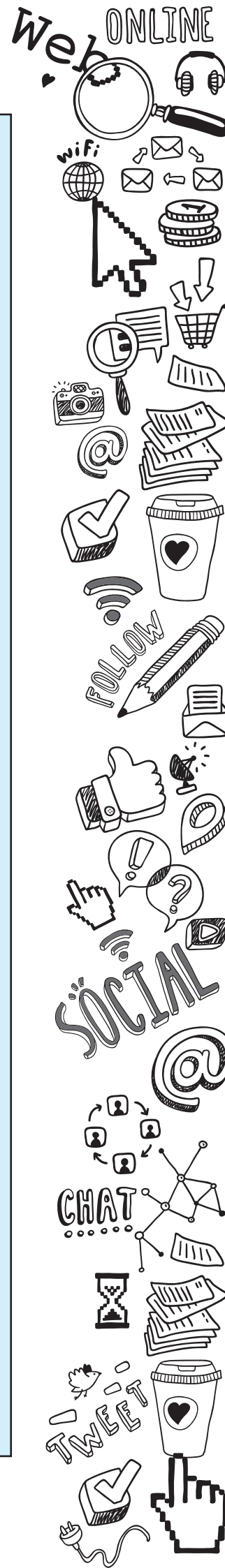
Remember – harmful online behaviour happens when it is not reported.





To summarise

- Assume, although it may not, it could happen to your child.
- Have conversations – what do they like to do online, what games do they play, what do they watch?
- Be aware of who your child communicates with. How do they communicate, what do they talk about, what information do they share?
- Be involved – learn and play with them. Show that you are interested, and that positive online behaviour is to be encouraged.
- Have rules and expectations – set up a family agreement. Jointly decide where technology will be used, for how long, what age apps and platforms are appropriate and what to do if things go wrong.
- Monitor what your child watches, downloads, plays and uses. If in doubt, check online!
- Do your research – try to stay up to date.
- Set up parental controls on broadband, devices and in apps or online platforms.
- Create an environment in which children feel comfortable reporting anything that worries them and know where to report if this happens.
- Model positive behaviour & discuss what 'healthy' online behaviour looks like.





Resources for parents

The Digital 5 a Day -

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/digital/5-a-day/>.

A great resource by the Children's Commissioner to celebrate positive use and encourage a healthy technology 'diet'.

Project Evolve - <https://projectevolve.co.uk/>.

A fabulous site for anyone supporting children. Resources, lesson plans and key questions to get conversations going.

NetAware - <https://www.net-aware.org.uk/>.

Keep up to date with the latest apps and platform, risks and reviews.

Internet Matters - <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>.

Learn how to apply the latest device settings and parental controls on a number of platforms, apps and devices.

Childnet - <https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/parent-and-carer-toolkit>.

A useful set of resources and guidance from Childnet

Internet matters - <https://www.internetmatters.org/>.

Tips, advice and resources from Internet Matters.

ThinkuKnow - <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/>.

Activities to complete with your child from ThinkuKnow.

LGFL resources centre for parents - <https://www.lgfl.net/online-safety/resource-centre>.

A whole range of useful resources from London Grid for Learning

CEOP YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/user/ceop/videos>.

CEOP's own YouTube channel offering lots of video content for young people of all ages.

Report Harmful content - <https://reportharmfulcontent.com/>.

A site devoted to supporting users in getting harmful online content removed.

CEOP - <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/>

CEOP's reporting site should you have concerns about sexual activity directed towards children.

