

Keeping your child safe online

Children and young people go online to connect with existing friends, to make new ones, to browse the internet for information, chat with others and play games. They may:

- search for information or content on search engines like **Google** and **Bing**
- share images and watch videos through websites or mobile apps like **Instagram, Pinterest, Vine, YouTube** and **Snap Chat**
- use social networking websites like **Facebook, Twitter** and **Omegle**
- write or reply to messages on forums and message boards
- play games alone or with others through websites, apps or game consoles
- chat with other people through online games, **BBM** (Blackberry Messenger), game consoles, webcams, social networks and tools like **WhatsApp**

When online, children and young people can learn new things, get help with homework, express themselves creatively and connect with friends and family.

But there are also risks when children and young people go on line. By understanding and talking about the dangers you can help keep your child safe online.

Some of the risks and dangers of being online include:

1. Exposure to inappropriate content, including pornography

Children and young people may see illegal or unsuitable content online, such as:

- pornography
- child abuse images
- dangerous advice encouraging eating disorders, self-harm or suicide
- excessive violence or race hate materials.

Children may come across this content by mistake, or they may look for it because they're curious. Promises of special offers or prizes can also draw young people in.

How much illegal or inappropriate content is online?

Figures suggest that there is an incredible amount of information on the internet which includes content which is unsuitable for children on the internet. Just as an example:

- 9500 web pages were removed by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) worldwide in 2013
- 70,000 indecent images of children were reported to CEOP in 2012
- 100s of pro-eating disorder websites are estimated to exist.

2. Friending or communicating with people they don't know

Children and young people may chat or become 'friends' with people on social networks or online games, even if they don't know them or have never met them in person.

The percentage of online friends that children didn't know outside of being online was:

- 12% for 8-11 years olds in 2012

- 29% for 12-15 year olds in 2013

This makes children vulnerable to bullying, grooming and sharing personal information.

Children in the UK have the 2nd highest number of social networking contacts in Europe:

- 26% of children had between 100 and 300 'friends'
- 16% had more than 300 'friends'

3. Online abuse

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the web, whether through social networks, playing online games or using mobile phones. Children and young people may experience cyberbullying, grooming, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or emotional abuse.

Children can be at risk of online abuse from people they know, as well as from strangers. Online abuse may be part of abuse that is taking place in the real world (for example bullying or grooming). Or it may be that the abuse only happens online (for example persuading children to take part in sexual activity online).

Children can feel like there is no escape from online abuse – abusers can contact them at any time of the day or night, the abuse can come into safe places like their bedrooms, and images and videos can be stored and shared with other people.

Grooming and sexual abuse

Grooming is when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation, and often happens online.

Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional conversations.

Groomers may be male or female. They could be any age.

Many children and young people don't understand that they have been groomed, or that what has happened is abuse.

Groomers can use social media sites, instant messaging apps including teen dating apps, or online gaming platforms to connect with a young person or child.

They can spend time learning about a young person's interests from their online profiles and then use this knowledge to help them build up a relationship.

It's easy for groomers to hide their identity online - they may pretend to be a child and then chat and become 'friends' with children they are targeting.

Groomers don't always target a particular child. Sometimes they will send messages to hundreds of young people and wait to see who responds.

Groomers no longer need to meet children in real life to abuse them. Increasingly, groomers are sexually exploiting their victims by persuading them to take part in online sexual activity.

When sexual exploitation happens online, young people may be persuaded, or forced, to:

- send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- take part in sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone
- have sexual conversations by text or online.

Abusers may threaten to send images, video or copies of conversations to the young person's friends and family unless they take part in other sexual activity.

Images or videos may continue to be shared long after the sexual abuse has stopped.



Report online abuse to CEOP

CEOP helps keep children safe from online grooming and sexual exploitation. If someone's acted inappropriately to a child or young person you know, report it to CEOP.

Cyberbullying is an increasingly common form of bullying behaviour which happens on social networks, games and mobile phones. Cyberbullying can include spreading rumours about someone, or posting nasty or embarrassing messages, images or videos.

Children may know who's bullying them online – it may be an extension of offline peer bullying - or they may be targeted by someone using a fake or anonymous account. It's easy to be anonymous online and this may increase the likelihood of engaging in bullying behaviour.

Cyberbullying includes:

- sending threatening or abusive text messages
 - creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos
 - 'trolling' - the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
 - excluding children from online games, activities or friendship groups
 - setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
 - encouraging young people to self-harm
 - voting for or against someone in an abusive poll
 - creating fake accounts, hijacking or stealing online identities to embarrass a young person or cause trouble using their name
 - sending explicit messages, also known as sexting
 - pressuring children into sending sexual images or engaging in sexual
- Groomers may look for:

- usernames or comments that are flirtatious or have a sexual meaning
- public comments that suggest a child has low self-esteem or is vulnerable.

Sharing Personal information

Privacy controls can limit who can see your child's details, like their name, age and where they live. But when your child connects to someone as a 'friend', that person will have access to your child's personal information.

Some 'free' games might ask your child to fill out lots of details before they can play and then illegally rent or sell this data on to others.

Switch off or adjust settings using GPS or location tracking

Lots of apps and social networking sites use software to locate where the user is. Children and young people can also reveal their location by tagging photos, such as on Instagram, or checking in on Facebook or Foursquare.

This means that people can find out where your child lives, socialises, works or studies.

Remember - Talk to your child about staying safe online