Parenting in the Digital World

Parent session – guidance for schools

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Introduce the topic. How many parents feel like their child knows more than they do about the online world, new apps, and modern technology?

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In 2020, the use of apps and the internet in general became vital to being social and keeping on top of school. Every **minute**, there were:

- 4.1 million different searches on Google
- 1.3 million Facebook logins
- 698,000 Instagram scrolls
- 194,000 Twitter tweets
- 59 million messages sent on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger
- 1,400 downloads from TikTok
- 1.2 million views on Twitch
- 400,000 apps downloaded
- £1.1 million spent online

In 2015, Internet Matters released research which showed how children were leaving their parents behind when it comes to knowledge and use of the internet.

It revealed the challenges that parents face in keeping up with what their children are doing online. 48% believed their children knew more about the internet than they do and 73% of children agreed.

However, just a year later, the research was repeated and showed that gap in tech-knowledge between parents and their children is narrowing.

It showed that parents had a greater understanding of the common social media platform that their children were using; parents had overtaken children in uploading photos, videos and music online. The desktop computer was almost retired as 6 out of 10 parents turned to smartphones to go online instead.

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There are plenty of positives when it comes to the internet:

- Things like online games enhances creativity and teamwork
- Children have easy access to a wealth of knowledge
- Households with computers/online devices tend to perform better academically
- It can help improve visual intelligence and hand-eye coordination (not just with games)

A 2020 Ofcom report found that 89% of 8-11 year olds said that using social media made them feel happy. 82% said it helped them feel closer to their friends.

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The internet opens up a wealth of opportunities for children and has become a big part of how they develop, discover and see the wider world. With everything, including tech use in moderation is key as it can have an affect your child's brain.

Various studies have found that technology can affect:

- Sleep cycles
- The central nervous system (which can impact mood, attention, alertness, and decision-making)
- Memory
- Focus
- Empathy
- How children are impacted by marketing

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More children in all age groups are using devices than ever. Children as young as 3 years of age are using YouTube while 98% children aged 12-15 are spending over 11 hours streaming content.

Go through the statistics and the associated ages. Some facts may be surprising!

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This table summarises the online safety for vulnerable children.

Content
This relates to what they see online or could potentially be exposed to i.e. sexualised material, pro self-harm websites, etc.

Contact
This includes accepting 'friends' they've never met, which may open them to being groomed or pressured or bullied to send images of themselves. Also, disclosing personal information about themselves (passwords/addresses, school details, etc).

Conduct
This relates to a child's behaviour online - such as cyberbullying, online hate, posting inappropriate content of others or themselves.

Children with vulnerabilities such as mental health and communication difficulties are more susceptible to these risks. Read through/highlight key findings in the table.

With the growth of awareness campaigns and coverage in the media, parents' concerns around specific online risks are increasing. Parent concerns typically peak when a child is 11-12 years old which coincides with the transition to secondary school. These concerns from the 2021 Ofcom report are:

- Websites and content that encourages self-harm
- How their child's privacy is affected and data collected
- Cyberbullying
- Being radicalised by extremist groups
- Spending too much time looking at a screen

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Although there are a number of online risks that children may be exposed to, it's important to note that these do not directly lead to harm. Being informed about the risk and implementing safeguards to limit the likelihood of your child being exposed is the first line of defence. Here is a five-step plan that you can action to start that process.

1. Understand the risks: talk to other adults or use online resources for information on the risks involved with any online platform
2. Communicate regularly: ask your children about their online usage and stress the importance of being private online
3. Keep the risks in proportion: consider what the benefits are compared to the risks
4. Agree on helpful mediation strategies: speak with your child about what can be done if they find themselves in harm's way; build trust
5. Develop coping strategies: what is going to help your child move past the risks and what can you do to ensure they don't feel fear?

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Dealing with inappropriate content

It's possible that children may come across things online which are inappropriate for their age and stage of development. Tools like parental controls can help to protect your children from accessing inappropriate content, but you can't check everything they see on the internet. The first step is to have regular conversation about what they do online and encourage them to talk to you if they see anything that upsets them.

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What to talk about
- They can come to you if they see anything that upsets them
- If they have seen pornography…that it presents an unrealistic image of sex and relationships
- The importance of respect for each other and the meaning of consent

Top tips / tools to use (resources/how-tos available on internetmatters.org)
- Parental controls on home broadband
- Content lock on mobile networks

● Safe search on Google (& other browsers) & YouTube; child–friendly search engines

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Dealing with inappropriate contact

There's a chance that your child may meet people online who aren't who they say they are. Grooming is a word used to describe people befriending children in order to take advantage of them for sexual purposes. Many parents worry about online grooming so it's important to talk to your children about how to stay safe.

Facts about contact:
● 48% of secondary school children have talked to people they don't know on social media
● 48% of 11-year-olds have a social media profile, despite minimum age usually being 13

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What to talk about
● Sometimes people hide behind fake profiles for dishonest reasons
● Agree how they will respond to requests from people they don't know in real life
● Never ever to meet up with anyone they don't know in real life

Top tips / tools to use (resources/how-tos available on internetmatters.org)
● Set up safe social media profiles that don't share personal information
● Turn off geolocation settings on devices
● Use the strongest privacy settings on social media
● Learn how to report/block/mute

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Dealing with inappropriate conduct

The nature of devices is children can contact each other all the time. This also means that bullying isn't something that can just happen at school.

Cyberbullying stats
● 25% of children will experience cyberbullying
● 50% of children say someone has been nasty to them online

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The internet and social media has changed the way children interact and share their lives. It is really important to have regular conversations with them about what they sharing online. As a parent, it can be difficult to stay on top of all the different apps and sites that children are using, but there are simple things that you can do to make sure they become 'good digital citizen' and avoid sharing or saying something that they would later regret.

What to talk about

- Talk to a trusted adult if they experience anything upsetting online
- Think carefully about sharing images of others
- Be responsible online; they are creating their own digital footprint

Top tips / tools to use
- Report inappropriate posts/content to the social media providers; show them how
- Think carefully about using monitoring apps that identify inappropriate behaviour

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Dealing with 'sexting'

The term 'sexting' is used to describe the sending and receiving of sexually explicit photos, messages and video clips by text, email or posting them on social networking sites. It's increasingly done by young people who send images and messages to their friends, partners, or even strangers they meet online. 15-40% of young people are involved.

There are many reasons why a young person might get involved in sexting. Exploring sex and relationships is a natural part of adolescence. Young people often feel that they love and trust their partner and want to express their sexual feelings.

Most young people don't see sexting as a problem and are reluctant to talk to adults about it because they're afraid of being judged or having their phones taken away. If your child has shared an explicit photo or video of themselves, they may be very upset, especially if it's been widely circulated. If you become aware of this, try to stay calm and reassure them that they have your support.

What to talk about
- It's hard to control where an image might be shared
- It's illegal to create or share sexual images of a child under 18

Top tips / tools to use
- The t-shirt test: if you wouldn't wear the picture on your t-shirt, don't share it online
- If your child is involved in sexting, contact CEOP and Childline who can help to remove the images

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Schools are encouraged to adopt a whole community approach to teaching online safety, so it is embedded across Computing/ICT and PSHE.

Read through/explain how it is taught in your school.

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A lot has been written about the impact of screen time; it is either quite negative and focuses on the risks children face online or is more positive and focuses on the educational, school related benefits for children online. But parents often feel that they are being a 'bad' parent if they have let their children have too much 'screen time'.

Here is how you can help:

- Turn off notifications on apps to avoid constant pings
- Buy alarm clocks rather than using devices in the bedroom
- Keep your phone on silent and away when picking kids up from school
- Create rules such as 'no phones at the table' or 'no devices between 6 and 7
- Have family tech-free days

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Internet Matters gives five tip to help parents manage their children's screen time:

1. Set a good example with your own device use. Children will tend to model their behaviours on you, so if you start reading a book, they may follow your lead.

2. Talk together about the time they spend online to better understand what they're doing; explain your concerns.

3. Once you've agreed on an appropriate length of time that they can use their device, put in place a family agreement to set some boundaries and don't break them. A good resource for this can be found on Childnet.

4. Then get the whole family to unplug and play by creating 'screen free' zones at home.

5. Technology can actually help you limit screen time. For example, the Forest app is a great tool that enables them to grow a beautiful forest of different trees each day when they don't use their phone for a set amount of time. And the iPad's 'Guided Access' limits the time you can access any given app, which can be great for younger children.

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It is important to give children the tools they need to take control of their own behaviour online and make smart choices. These are the three things you can do to teach your child how to be 'digitally resilient' – encourage their confidence as a communicator, think critically about what they see and do and how to use the devices and apps in a responsible and effective way.

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Internet Matters is a great source of information, created uniquely for parents to learn about the online risks that children face. It is packed full of practical tips from industry experts and offers a one-stop shop for the best resources available to deal with the most pressing issues your child may face.

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In addition to Internet Matters, there are some other useful support services that can help inform you and your child on online safety issues such as CEOP, NSPCC and Childline.