Keeping Children Safe Online

A 2021 Office for National Statistics (ONS) report found that nearly a third of children had accepted a friend request from someone they did not know and around 1 in 10 children (11%) aged 13 to 15 years reported receiving a sexual message, while 1 in 100 reported sending a sexual message. Barnardo's offer the following advice.

What types of harms do I need to be aware of as a parent?

There are different types of inappropriate, concerning and illegal content online. From bullying, violent videos and 'sexting' to blackmail. We know that those that want to harm our children can use chat rooms, gaming and social media to befriend and groom children. Children report that they can be quickly exposed to content they didn't search out. Therefore, it's vital not to blame children and keep calm if you are faced with this as a parent. The responsibility always lies with those that want to harm. The risk of online harm differs by age and what they are doing online. So, finding age-appropriate ways to educate children is essential. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) have some great animations to show younger children. Plus, they're split into age brackets with key messages you can revisit as a parent.

What age should you start to talk to your child about online safety?

For younger children, it's best to use technology together and use that time to discuss what to do if something unusual or scary pops up. As they get older, they will need more independence but keep those conversations about online safety going. Remind them to tell someone if they need help, are worried or something makes them feel uncomfortable. Child0/ren feel that conversations about the internet and online safety should be frequent and not a one-off. Regular dialogue allows children to lead the conversation and leaves space for them to ask questions and share concerns. For older children, it allows us to explore what they are doing online. These conversations will change as they grow and mature but started early, they get easier. You can find more information about having a conversation with your children at Barnardo's online safety hub.

As a parent, how can I stay up to date with platforms, such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, and their safety and settings. What are the biggest dangers to children online right now?

The dangers that pose the most risk to your child will depend a lot on how they use the internet, what is already being done to keep them safe, and what they already know about using the internet safely and responsibly. A simple and effective way to hear about the latest online trends or what your child is getting up to is to talk with them about their life online. By maintaining an open dialogue and encouraging them to talk to you about their internet use, parents can help children access the amazing resources and opportunities the internet has to offer whilst keeping them safe. The risks to each child are different depending on what they are doing online and the ever-changing tactics of those who want to harm. Therefore, it is most effective to equip your child with the skills to identify harmful or uncomfortable situations, seek support and offer them regular opportunities through conversation to talk with you.

Do you have advice on keeping children safe when they're using an Xbox or PlayStation?

The best way to keep your child safe when they are playing games or using games consoles is through discussion. Talk with your child about the games they enjoy playing and where possible, sit down and play these together. Speak to your child about what else they do on their consoles, aside from play games. For example, what else do they access? Who do they communicate with? Next, establish and support realistic boundaries with your child, whilst encouraging safe choices. For example, make sure young people know not to share their personal information or anyone else's when playing online games. You may also want to think about the amount of time your child spends on these devices or take control of in-app purchases. Childnet's family agreement has some great ideas for areas to focus on with your family. The UK Safer Internet Centre also has further information specifically relating to the use of games consoles. Internet Matters and Thinkuknow are excellent tools to explore parental controls available through games consoles.

•equip yourself with some basic knowledge by using internet sites

•ask your child to show you what new apps are

speak with other parents or older teens to see what they are doing online