

# Engaging Families in Online Safety: Guidance for Educational Settings

## Why do some parents not engage with online safety?

Concerns about insufficient computer skills or a limited understanding about the online environment can be off-putting and sometimes frightening for parents and carers. 50% of parents agree that their children know more about the internet and technology that they do, and this can sometimes be a difficult issue to overcome. It is important to remind parents that online safety is more about parenting and communication skills than technology; when advertising online safety events, try to avoid using terms such as 'ICT', 'e-safety' or 'technology'.

Alternatively, some families may think they already do enough to protect their children by banning certain games or sites and installing filters or antivirus software onto home devices. Unfortunately, this approach does not take into account that children could access the internet elsewhere or may intentionally bypass systems without parent's knowledge.

Banning and blocking is not the answer; when working with parents, try to highlight the importance of maintaining open discussions and empowering children to make safer and more sensible choices online.

## What are the key messages we should be sharing with parents?

- **How and what are children accessing online**  
Highlight the range of different devices that have access to the internet and what children are using them for; e.g. mobile phones, games consoles and tablets (not just computers). Ensure your information is up-to-date and relevant to your audience- you may find it helpful to survey the children for accurate information about the latest apps and games they like to use then look at: [www.net-aware.co.uk](http://www.net-aware.co.uk) to investigate what they do.
- **The internet has its good points**  
Ensure that you balance your approach and don't just terrify parents; it's important to acknowledge that for most children, their experiences and interactions online are wholly positive!
- **Don't over rely on blocks and filters**  
Remind parents that blocks and filters are never 100% reliable and children may actively work to bypass these if they feel restricted or don't understand why they are in place. Highlight the importance of **empowering** children to be risk aware and telling a trusted adult when they are worried.
- **Practical advice and resources**  
Provide practical tips for online safety in the home, such as, how to use filters, parental controls, etc. Make sure you also signpost to useful websites for parents to access online safety information in their own time (*see useful links and resources*).

- **School policies and procedures**

Whether you're referring to cyber-bullying or youth produced sexual imagery, inform parents of the internal procedures that are in place to support them and their child. Ensure they know how to access the right policies and who they can contact in school for assistance (i.e. named designated safeguarding lead).

## **How do we run an effective online safety presentation for parents?**

Parental awareness sessions are a valuable opportunity to provide families with advice and support; however attendance at these types of events can vary, so they should not be used in isolation.

**To ensure the best turn out at your event, consider the following suggestions:**

- ✓ **Make it convenient**

Ensure as many parents as possible can attend by asking them when they would prefer the session to be offered, Coffee mornings allow parents to attend just after the school run and can save them an extra journey, whilst evening sessions may better accommodate families who work during the day. Some settings also "recorded" the session so it is available to parents who could not attend in person.

- ✓ **Invitations and reminders**

Send out an invitation in advance to all parents/carers via printed letter, text/SMS and/or email; sent out a few reminders leading up to the event, ideally with different content, to encourage parents to attend. Often a directly addressed letter can help engage parents; why not get the children to write letters to their own parents?

- ✓ **Publicity and posters**

Highlight the event in a variety of ways, e.g. school/setting website, official social media, and/or newsletters. Display posters in public areas, such as: reception, playgrounds and notice boards. You may also wish to open your event to the local community and advertise in local Children Centres, shops or local press.

- ✓ **Surveys and quizzes**

Survey the children about their online experiences; collate the statistics and use these to advertise the importance of your event. National statistics and research are also available at: [www.saferinternet.org.uk/research/research-highlight-series](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/research/research-highlight-series)

Alternately, you may wish to quiz your parents to find out how much they know (or don't know) about keeping their children safe online, to encourage them to attend.

- ✓ **Bribery and emotional blackmail**

Try enticing parents with a raffle, 'freebies' or a reward for attending; parents could be offered discounts to school events or entered into a prize draw. Providing refreshments is also a good idea (e.g. tea/coffee/cake or wine/cheese- depending on the time of day!).

Alternatively, you could consider offering a simultaneous event (e.g. free cinema club or disco) exclusively for children whose parents attend the online safety event.

- ✓ **External speakers** Use with caution- it is important that schools demonstrate internal capacity for delivering online safety inputs, so external speakers (such as Police) should be used to compliment your event, rather than relied upon to deliver inputs.
- ✓ **Don't be put off**  
If your first event has lower than expected attendance, don't let it put you off trying again. You may wish to adjust the time or location, but rest assured that if you delivered it right, word will spread and the numbers should increase in the future.

## How else do we engage parents and carers with online safety?

Parents and carers can often be a very hard-to-reach audience, but one-off events are not the only way to raise the profile of online safety.

**Embed online safety across the school community with some of these suggestions:**

- **Involve the children**  
One of the best methods of engaging parents is to use something their child is performing in, has written or made. Why not get the children to put on their own online safety event or play, which parents can be invited to? Sessions led by pupils are a great way to facilitate "pupil voice" but can often have a greater impact and higher attendance than those run by external speakers.
- **Regular communication**  
Try not to overwhelm parents with too much information in one go! Use regular communication channels, such as, newsletters, emails, texts or letters home to share up-to-date online safety advice; this could include, weekly "tips" current trends or useful resources. Consider asking the children to write reviews on their favourite games or share their top tips for online safety.
- **Linking in with other events**  
If you find that attendance for specific online safety events is low, or you don't seem to be reaching the right parents, consider integrating it into another event that parents are likely to attend; for example, summer/Christmas fetes, plays, transition evenings or open days. Now you have a captive audience, you do not have to lecture them; instead you may wish to have an online safety display stand or drop in session for parents, with free leaflets etc.
- **Co-operative learning**  
What better way to encourage parents to engage with their child's online world, than learning and experiencing new things together? Some settings invite parents to join the children's lessons or workshops. Others have offered open ICT Suite sessions after school, where parents can explore useful websites and resources with their children.

- Include links on the school/setting website**

School websites can be a great source of information for busy parents/carers; it is also one of the first places they will look for advice if they are concerned about their child. Include some online safety advice and links to other organisations for further information to the parent/carer section (*see useful links and resources*) or consider creating a stand-alone online safety page. Make sure you also include links to relevant school policies and the name and contact details of the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- Using social media**

When appropriately risk assessed and carefully managed, social media can offer school/settings a popular and easily accessible dynamic to their normal communication methods.
- Involving parents/carers in forums and groups**

Online safety groups or forums can be a good way of incorporating the views of the whole school/setting community with regards to policy decisions and action planning, etc. Consider how parents/ carers might be able to contribute and support this. If you already have an active parent or friends association, consider ways to involve them in online safety too; they may be able to support events and activities as well as contributing to risk assessments and policy development.
- Sharing the school's Online Safety Policy**

An online safety policy provides an essential framework to develop the online safety ethos within school; it is vital that these policies are shared with parents/ carers to ensure that they are adopted and upheld by the whole school community. Some settings share the whole document with parents and ask them to provide feedback, whilst others have developed condensed or 'child friendly' versions, which can be adapted and implemented at home.
- Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) and Home-School Agreements**

Acceptable Use Policies provide a clear outline of acceptable/unacceptable behaviours—they are usually signed by pupils, staff and volunteers who have access to the school computer systems; however it is helpful for parents to have an overview of these rules and ensure the messages they provide at home are consistent. You may also wish to adopt an AUP for parents; this is particularly relevant if you are considering introducing social media as a communication tool.

Alternatively, you may wish to add reference to the school's online safety policy/acceptable use policy in the Home-School Agreement, stating that they will support the school's online safety ethos and behaviour management.

- Think outside the box!**

When it comes to engaging parent/carers in online safety, you are only limited by your imagination. Below are a few more suggestions that came from schools/settings themselves:

  - Use the TV and computer screens that are already dotted around the school to display online safety messages; for example, online safety posters as

screensavers, a rolling presentation on the smart TV at the school office, or even just playing online safety videos in the background at parents evening.

- Parents vs. children quiz game at the school fete. Pitching the generations against each other works well for cooperative learning, but also makes them really competitive. When the parents realised that they didn't know as much as the children, they were keen to get more information.
- Social media coffee morning- run by the PTFA, with support from year 6. The pupils used the school iPads to show the parents how to set up privacy and security settings on social media. The children loved showing off and the adults received a valuable lesson.
- Online safety "tip of the week"- the classes take it in turns to come up with an online safety tip for parents, or to review a new app or game; these are then published in the newsletter and on our official Facebook page. It gives the children a great sense of achievement and encourages parents to actually read it.

## Useful Links and Resources

### Resources for delivering your own online safety presentation for parents:

[www.internetmatters.org/schools/primary/#tab-1431596137466-2-10](http://www.internetmatters.org/schools/primary/#tab-1431596137466-2-10)

This downloadable presentation is available for primary schools, from Internet Matters, along with posters and videos. For secondary schools, they have a debating guide, to enable schools to facilitate a parent/teacher/student debate about online safety.

[www.saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/2017/education-packs/education-pack-parents-and-carers](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/2017/education-packs/education-pack-parents-and-carers)

The UK Safer Internet Centre produced this scripted presentation, along with posters, and factsheets for Safer Internet Day (Feb 2017).

[www.childnet.com/resources/know-it-all-for-parents/kiAFP-cd](http://www.childnet.com/resources/know-it-all-for-parents/kiAFP-cd)

Know IT All for Parents is an interactive video guide for parents and carers produced by Childnet International. This guide is better suited to small groups or a drop-in session, rather than a large audience.

[www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/)

CEOP has a downloadable presentation aimed at parents/carers of looked after and adopted children. Or incorporate their videos, including: "Where's Klaus", "Naked Selfies" and "Parents Guide to Technology" to make your presentation more engaging,

[www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/)

The NSPCC have produced three videos as part of their Share Aware campaign, which can provide an excellent discussion point for parents, particularly "Alex".

[www.swgfl.org.uk/products-services/online-safety/resources/SWGfL-E-Safety-Movies](http://www.swgfl.org.uk/products-services/online-safety/resources/SWGfL-E-Safety-Movies)

The SWGfL videos "Do you know?" and "Golden Rules" can also be downloaded or streamed online to show during your presentation.

## Links to share with parents and include on the school/setting website:

**CEOP:** [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) are a national policing organisation which specialises in investigating grooming and sexual abuse online. Their educational website: [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk) is suitable for children aged 4-16 and has a specific section with advice for parents/carers.

The 'Click CEOP' report button provides a means of reporting abuse online and can be downloaded onto the school website for easy access.



**Sussex Police:** [www.sussex.police.uk](http://www.sussex.police.uk)

If you believe a child or adult is in immediate danger, contact 999 for police assistance. To report non-emergency concerns, call 101 and ask to be put through to your local team. Sussex Police also have Online Safety advice on their website: <https://sussex.police.uk/ask-the-police/safety-on-the-internet/>

**The IWF:** [www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) is the UK hotline for reporting illegal online content, such as child abuse images, or material considered to be criminally obscene. The IWF actively works to identify and safeguard any children involved, as well as getting illegal images and videos removed from the internet.



**Parent Port:** [www.parentport.org.uk](http://www.parentport.org.uk)

Run by the UK's media regulators, Parent Port enables parents and professionals to report inappropriate online material, such as videos, adverts or news articles.

**Home Office:** [www.gov.uk/report-terrorism](http://www.gov.uk/report-terrorism) and [www.educateagainsthate.com](http://www.educateagainsthate.com)

The government have introduced a new red button for reporting online material which promotes terrorism or extremism and an educational website with advice and information for parents.

**NSPCC:** [www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety)

The NSPCC have teamed up with 02 to provide excellent information and advice for parents, as well as a free online safety helpline. They have also produced an app/site, on which they have reviewed the



most popular apps and websites young people are using; including age ratings and how easy it is to report a problem: [www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk). Parents can also choose to sign up to the Net-aware newsletter, for up-to-date information via e-mail.

**Internet Matters:** [www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org)



Internet Matters is a not-for-profit organisation working with online safety experts to provide advice and information for parents to keep their children safe online.

It has an excellent interactive tool which guides you step by step through setting up parental controls on all the different devices in your home, as well as video tutorials about specific topics of concern.

**Parent Zone:** [www.theparentzone.co.uk](http://www.theparentzone.co.uk)

Parent Zone provides up-to-date content on a variety of parenting concerns, including online safety. In collaboration with Vodafone, they have produced Digital Parenting magazine, which schools can order for free, to hand out to parents, or link to the online articles: <https://parentzone.org.uk/DP5>

Schools can also sign up to host expert articles from CEOP and Parent Zone on their school website, for free: <http://parentinfo.org/>



**UK Safer Internet Centre:** [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk)

UK Safer Internet Centre is a collaborative organisation which provides a wide variety of advice and guidance on online safety. Their website is predominantly aimed at professionals and schools, but their parent guides to technology and social media checklists are valuable resources to share with parents or link to on the school website: [www.swgfl.org.uk/products-services/esafety/resources](http://www.swgfl.org.uk/products-services/esafety/resources)

**Childnet:** [www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com)

A partner organisation of UK Safer Internet Centre, Childnet has a wealth of resources, including; leaflets, conversation starters and online storybooks; 'Digi-ducks Big Decision' (storybook) is available to buy from this website, or can be downloaded for free.



**Get Safe Online:** [ww.getsafeonline.org](http://ww.getsafeonline.org)

Get Safe Online covers a lot of practical, technical information on protecting families and computers against fraud, identity theft, viruses and many other problems encountered online.