

Online risks and e-safety

Online risks - Facts and statistics

Evidence of increased risks to children online has been a serious concern for many years. The extent of and prevalence of online abuse, the harmful experiences and dangers presented for children continues to rise.

In January 2020 the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) estimated 90 cybercrimes were being recorded each day against children. This included sharing of child abuse images and sexual grooming offences recorded by the Police. Crime data suggested that an 'average of 1 online abuse offence against a child was recorded every 16 minutes in England and Wales'. By the end of May 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and during a time of national and international lockdown, figures of online abuse soared. Increased screen time for children and the absence of adult supervision created the perfect storm for perpetrators to target their abuse towards vulnerable children and young people who were becoming increasingly lonely and isolated due to the pandemic lockdown. It was reported that obscene online material more than doubled globally to more than four million between March and April 2020.

What are the on-line risks to children?

1: Grooming a child

Online grooming often involves perpetrators building relationships with children or young people – forming trust and emotional connections in order to manipulate, exploit and abuse them.

2: Bullying sometimes known as 'cyberbullying'

There are a number of types of cyberbullying, these can include;

- 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
- shaming someone online
- 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 conversations.

Source: NSPCC

3: Radicalisation and extremist activity

Often radicalisation is introduced as propaganda accessed through the internet. The UK Government's Online Harm White Paper (2018) cited that 'all five terrorist attacks in the UK during 2017 had an online element, and online terrorist content remains a feature of contemporary radicalisation'. Not only does radicalisation in any form, impact directly upon individuals as a driver for terrorist activity it has consequences for family members and wider communities.

On-line abuse manifests in the form of emotional abuse, sexual abuse and can lead to physical abuse if the abuse causes a child or young person to self-harm.

Continued online risks for children

The growth and increase of online activities for children will not decline, if anything it will continue to become a significant way in which children engage in learning and interact with their world. It is therefore extremely important that those responsible for the wellbeing of children put the correct and effective measures in place to ensure that they are safe and protected. This means that a number of things should be in place to manage safe online access and model safe use of the internet.

What does this mean for early years?

Early years children could be at risk of a number of things regarding online risks. The UK Government in its document Safeguarding children and protecting professionals in early years settings: online safety guidance for practitioners (2019) categorises three main areas.

1. Content – what children see:

- Exposure to inappropriate videos, pictures or messages which might upset, worry or frighten them
- Intimidating harmful or inappropriate behaviour they see online
- Searching for inappropriate content on purpose or stumbling upon it by accident
- Inadvertently giving apps or websites permission to share their location or other personal information
- Spending real money via in-app or in-games purchases

2. Contact – who might communicate with them:

- Being abused online (including sexually) by people they don't know, such as when gaming or using video chat
- Being abused online (including sexually) by people they know, such as friends and family members
- Sending images or information to people on the device's contacts

3. Conduct – how they might behave:

- Exhibiting unhealthy behaviours and boundaries around use of screens
- Being unkind to each other online as well as offline, using mean words or excluding others from their games
- Using words or terminology which are not appropriate for their age
- Engaging in unhealthy relationships
- Taking inappropriate or indecent images and videos of themselves

Safe online practice in your setting

- Always use safety modes and filters on digital devices – ensuring that a high level of privacy or security is applied
- Ensure that apps and websites and search results are checked before children use them
- Maintain close and effective supervision of children
- Role model safe behaviour and privacy awareness
- *Help children to engage in and manage safe on-line practice themselves teaching them the dangers and importance of being safe at all time
- Make use of interactions with parents to help them to understand how to keep their children safe when at home or elsewhere
- Check privacy settings to make sure personal data is not being shared in advertently or inappropriately

**From September 2020, Relationships Education will be compulsory for all primary aged pupils in schools in England. The Department for Education have directed that 'through this new subject, pupils will be taught about online safety and harms.*



Online safety considerations for managers

Those with leadership and management responsibilities in the early years have a number of things to consider when undertaking their role. Online safety is clearly recognised as part of the settings safeguarding responsibilities.

1: The designated safeguarding lead should take 'lead responsibility for online safety concerns'. Once concerns are reported to the DSL, they should be recorded and actioned.

2: Children should be enabled to share online concerns with adults

3: Child protection policies should include procedures that follow regarding online safety concerns and should be accessible to staff and parents. They should be reviewed and approved by senior management teams, committees or equivalent
Setting policies should cover;

- Safe and appropriate use of personal devices, wearable technology, mobile phones and cameras
- Acceptable and appropriate use of technology within the setting
- Expectations regarding professional boundaries / behaviour of staff, including communication via social media

4: All staff should understand their safeguarding responsibilities and how this fits into their role in the setting. They should have read and understood policies relating to online safety and know how to follow procedures for reporting and recording online safety concerns in line with their child protection policy

Adapted from the UK Council for Internet Safety (2019)