

THE INTERNET

The dangers

Advice for Parents

Many families have access to the internet in their home. It provides many benefits for independent study but unfortunately parents need to be aware of some of the dangers of Internet use.



The following are activities that you should be aware of and some of the steps you can take to protect you and your family.

Journals

Also known as

- Blogs
- personal web pages
- personal journals
- chatrooms

They are commonly connected to an instant messaging service such as Yahoo or Microsoft messenger (MSN). A novice can create a simple web

site in about 10 minutes.

False Accusations / Cyber Bullying

Unfortunately these websites can be used to create pages that bully, belittle and spread lies. This could be illegal and a crime may have been committed under Libel laws which could lead to a prosecution. If someone thinks that what was written about them is either untrue or damaging, it is the responsibility of the writer to prove that the comments are true in court.

Revealing personal information

Children need to be aware that providing personal information about their address / full name / telephone numbers / school name may be misused by other people.

Caution using photographs

An innocent photograph may also reveal more than you realise. Have you looked at the background? Does it show a street name or is there a school badge showing identifying a particular school. A person who may wish to cause harm could identify a child or a location.

Examples of Web based Journals

The largest is MySpace with approx 70 million users and Bebo with 22 Million users worldwide. But there are hundreds of similar sites. Anything posted on these sites can be seen potentially by millions of people worldwide.

E Mail

Hurtful messages

E-Mails can be used to bully as well. Anything written in an E-Mail could also be subject to the Libel Laws and a criminal offence may also have been committed.

Unwanted images or SPAM

E-Mails may also contain harmful computer virus or unwanted advertising known as SPAM, which can be pornographic in nature. If the sender is not familiar it may be safer not to open the email.

Protection from virus

It is recommended that you have an up to date virus protection on your computer to safe guard your system and you may want to consider some filtering software to protect your children from adult images and material on the internet.

Texting

This is like sending an email but via your mobile phone so the problems caused by people sending hurtful and threatening messages to another are treated in the same way by the authorities as sending an E-mail.

THE LAW

The law relating to electronic communications relates to text messages, the Internet, E-mail and computers. A number of offences can be committed using this technology:

Relating to the content of a message: S.127 Communications Act 2003. And S.1.(1).(a) and (4) of the Malicious Communications Act 1988.

Harassing a person causing them alarm or distress: Protection from Harassment Act 1997.

Child abuse pictures: Protection of Children Act 1978 and S.46 Sexual Offences Act 2003.

Criminally obscene content of a message: Obscene publications Act 1964.

Criminally racist content of a message: Incitement to racial hatred under the Public Order Act 1986.

How could this be dealt with: -

- School Sanction i.e. Detention, Exclusion
- Police Reprimand
- Police Final Warning
- Anti Social Behaviour Order
- Criminally charged with an offence. Punishment awarded by a Court.

Guidance

Make sure your child is **SMART**

SAFE. Advice your child to be careful not giving out their name, address, mobile phone no., school name or password to people online...

MEETING. Warn your child of the dangers of meeting someone they met on the internet. They should only do so with your permission

ACCEPTING E-mails or opening files from strangers or people they don't trust may cause problems for your child - they may contain viruses or nasty messages.

RELIABLE. Someone online maybe lying about who they are, and information found on the Internet may not be reliable.

TELL. Encourage your child to talk to you if someone or something makes them feel uncomfortable or worried...

AlsoKeep a record of bullying incidences by saving or printing E-mails and inform your school. If an E-mail or text message is particularly disturbing or breaks the law, contact the police.

Establish rules for online use

1. Screen what your child plans to post . Seemingly innocuous information, such as a school badge and town photo, could reveal where the author goes .

2. Ask yourself (and instruct your kids to do the same) if you are comfortable showing any of the content to a stranger. If in doubt, have them take it out.

3. Evaluate the blogging service and find out if it offers private, password-protected blogs.

4. Save the Web address of your child's blog and review it on a regular basis.

5. Check out other blogs to find positive examples for your kids to emulate.

6. Consider using the Web Safe Contract on the last page.

Resources

Barnet Police - Tel 020 8200 1212

Childline - Tel 0800 1111

Internet Watch Foundation (web site) – www.iwf.org.uk

UK based website offering advice about computers and the web. www.getsafeonline.org

UK based website explaining safe surfing and the benefits of filtering and dangers of virus' www.besafeonline.org

Kidsmart is another Internet based website run by a charity called Childnet International which provide online interactive tutorials aimed at all age groups www.kidsmart.org.uk

This leaflet has been produced in collaboration with the 19 Secondary Schools of the Borough of Barnet and Barnet Borough Police



Web Safe Contract.

- 1) I will tell a parent, adult or support organisation immediately if I encounter something that is disturbing, confusing, weird, upsetting or threatening.
- 2) I will not give out any information online which could be used to track me. This includes my full name, home address, school name and address, telephone number, passwords or answers to secret questions or information about people I know (whether they are my friend or not).
- 3) I will not send pictures of myself or people I know (whether they are my friend or not) to people I have never met. Nor will I post these same pictures so that everybody see them on the Internet.
- 4) If I receive an abusive message, I will save it, print it out and tell an adult. The adult will then contact the online service or the appropriate support organisation.
- 5) I will generally avoid people online who suggest face to face meetings.
- 6) If I really want to meet up with an online friend, I promise to let my parents or guardians know of any such meeting. Before agreeing to this meeting, my parent or guardian will get to meet my friend online. I will make sure we meet in a public place and that a parent/guardian or somebody equally responsible comes with me.
- 7) I will not sign up for services which ask for money without first asking an adult.
- 8) A parent/ guardian will be present whenever I use a credit card online.

I understand that by breaking this contract, the following action will be taken (sanction to be agreed by both parties).

Signed. The young person.....

Signed. The adult.....