



# Keeping Our Children Safe Online

## A Survival Guide for Parents and Carers

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- ❖ *Establishing rules and boundaries*
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Email: [liat@jewishinteractive.net](mailto:liat@jewishinteractive.net)

Tel: 0207 443 5101



## Positives and Negatives of Technology

As parents, your children look to you as models for how to be responsible with technology. They follow your lead when it comes to all other areas of safety and technology and the internet is no different.

There are many reasons why technology is encouraged:

- Communication with the rest of the world is a big positive. With the use of technology, we can video chat, share pictures and talk to people from all over the world.
- Social networks help us keep in touch with people who we've met and let us know about important events in their lives. Social networking sites such as LinkedIn also help us look for work and employees. Social media sites also help children express themselves and give them an outlet to show who they are as they develop their identities.
- Through the use of technology, we have the world at our fingertips. If you want to know information about a certain topic, all you need to do is search for it online. There is instant gratification that we have been able to learn something new.





Although there are many positives for using technology, it is also important to be aware of the negative effects that technology can have on children. As parents, you play a very important part in helping children deal with some of the negative issues and feelings which they might be facing.

Some negatives include:

- Addiction to technology and screens is something which is becoming more common in today's society. With more access to technology there is a risk that children will become addicted to their screens. When a child is addicted to their technology they will become irritable or angry when they need to put away the technology they are using.
- The availability of instant feedback can be a positive as well as negative effect of technology. With the popular increase of 'selfies', "social media has become as much about defining who we are as it is about connecting with families and friends" (Digital Parenting, 2015). Social media has become a way for children to develop their identities and value their self-worth on how many **likes and shares** their posts get on social media. Although how others view us is not a new concept, if children don't receive the instant like or the instant feedback on their photo or online posts, it can have a detrimental effect on their self-esteem and the way that they perceive themselves.
- The above point also relates to cyber-bullying. When children value themselves by what is posted by/about them online they are more susceptible to cyber-bullies. Cyber-bullying is now becoming more complex than just a mean text message or email. It gives the bully the option of being anonymous as well as giving them the opportunity to continue the bullying once they leave school.





## Talking to Your Children

It is important to have an ongoing discussion with your children about internet safety and the risks that come with being online. Children also need to be taught what behaviour is appropriate online.

Starting conversations with children about sensitive topics can be uncomfortable for both parents and children. The Centre for Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) recommends the following ways to speak to your children:

### **Find a good time and place**

Find a time when you know you aren't going to be interrupted and be in a space where you're both going to feel comfortable.

### **Think about how you want to introduce the subject**

Try and keep the conversation casual. You want it to be a discussion rather than you telling your children what they can and can't do on the internet. Mentioning something recent in the news could be a good starter for explaining why you're talking, otherwise explaining your concerns is a good way to start.

### **Explain why you are worried**

Most children will understand your worries over them meeting someone on the internet however a lot of children don't understand the consequences of sending photos on snapchat and other social media sites and apps. Explaining why you are worried and telling your children some examples might help them understand and can open up discussion.



## Let them talk

When talking to your children about these issues it is important to keep calm no matter what they tell you. When talking about different internet safety issues, your children might open up to you about experiences they or their friends have had. It is normal to get upset or worried at stories that your children tell you but you need to talk to them about solutions to their problems. Don't get them in trouble for possibly doing something that you do not agree with.

If your child isn't ready to talk to you about what they have been up to online, do not force the conversation. Try again at another time and look for different ways to start talking to them. Make sure that they are talking to someone and that they know where to go if they are ever in trouble online, even if that person isn't you.

## Questions to ask

- What websites do you visit and which are your favourites?
- Are you on any social media sites?
- What kind of social networking sites are you on and why do you like them?
- What type of things can you do on these sites? Is it just chatting or can you add/send photos?
- Are a lot of your friends from school on these sites? Are you friends with people who are not at your school?
- Do you know how to adjust your privacy settings on your accounts?
- What is ok to share and not ok to share?
- What is a strong password?
- What would you do if you or your friends were frightened over things that you've seen on the internet?
- What happens if someone you don't know contacts you online?
- Are people ever mean to each other online? Would you tell me?
- Has anyone ever taken inappropriate photos and sent them to other people?
- Do you feel like you could tell me if there was a problem online?



## Building Digital Resilience

Children build resilience to many things as they grow older. Rather than stopping at the first sign of trouble or failure, children learn to pick themselves up and try again. Social resilience is something that is taught to children both at home and at school. These skills help children navigate social situations and learn when certain actions and phrases are appropriate and when they are not.

Digital resilience is a similar skill which is learnt through spending time on computers, tablets and other digital devices where they are interacting with people in different ways. It allows children to regulate their online behaviour and know when they are at risk and how to manage the situation.

As a parent, you worry about what your children are seeing and doing online. It is important however to understand that they are bound to make mistakes online just as they are likely to see something that is inappropriate or makes them uncomfortable.

When your children make mistakes it is important that you let them learn from these mistakes so that when it happens again they are able to rectify the error without it causing them any stress or discomfort.



## Establishing Rules/Boundaries

Agree on the rules together – everyone has to agree and commit

Listen to how everyone feels and what they enjoy – be open to discussion

Child listens to your concerns and you listen to theirs

Give them as much room as possible to be responsible

Rules must relate to stage development, personality and maturity level

Establish how you will monitor the rules

Related rewards and consequences

Rules shouldn't be a list of don'ts – rather a list of 'I will'

Be a good role model and keep to the rules yourself

You have your own personal family values and you know what is best. The rules can adapt over time and it is ok to change your mind.

It is mainly about communication and connection. Good rules are about empowering the child so they know what to do and ultimately develop effective habits.



## SMART Rules

### **S – Safe:**

Keep safe by being careful not to give out personal information when chatting or posting online. Personal information includes your email address, phone number and passwords.

### **M – Meeting:**

Meeting someone you have only been in touch with online can be dangerous. Remember that online friends are still strangers even if you have been talking for a long time.

### **A – Accepting:**

Accepting emails, messages, or opening files, pictures or texts from people you don't know or trust can lead to problems – they may contain viruses or nasty messages.

### **R – Reliable:**

Someone online might lie about who they are and information on the internet may not be true. Always check information with other websites, books or someone who knows. If you like chatting online it's best to only talk to your real world friends and family.

### **T – Tell:**

Tell your parent, carer or a trusted adult if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, or if you or someone you know being bullied online.







## Suggested Areas to Cover

- Which websites they can use
- How long they can spend using each device (use kitchen timer)
- When they can use their devices – after homework, how long before they go to sleep
- Where they can use certain screens – kitchen, bedrooms, family spaces
- How much time they can spend on certain apps
- How much money they can spend on the app store
- Follow age ratings on apps/movies/videos on YouTube – not to lie about their age
- Who they can communicate with online – real life friends/online friends
- Being kind and respectful to people on the internet
- Understanding that what goes online stays online
- Make sure they are happy for you to see what they are posting – if they aren't, they probably shouldn't be posting it
- Not sharing personal information
- Being careful around younger siblings



## Safety/Parental Controls

- Know the Privacy Policy for apps and websites that your children are using
- Set up secure passwords on games and apps
- Check age ratings before registering your child for anything online
- Disable location settings – a lot of apps have this enabled automatically
- Parental controls on all search engines – none can be 100% filtered
- Set parental controls on operating systems – Mac/Windows
- Parental control on every device
- Reporting tools – CEOP
- Check children's browser history often





## Digital Footprint

There can be a loss of control over comments, photos and videos that will stay online forever. There is a risk of cyber bullying, distress, blackmail and reputational risks. A digital footprint can affect university/job applications as well as community standing.

As parents it is important to keep track of your digital footprint. Make sure that you periodically Google yourself to see what comes up about you online. A lot of children will Google their friends and adults around them in order to test the boundaries of the internet.

It is also important to remember that as parents you contribute to your child's digital footprint. Any photo you post of your family or your children adds to their ever growing digital footprint.

### Sharenting: the facts



Source: Survey for Channel 4 News/Parent Zone, May 2017 with 1002 UK parents around the UK



## Social Media

Every social app/website has a legal age limit that is required before being able to join. While it is possible to lie about how old you are on social media, if these social apps are alerted to someone underage they will generally freeze the account.

Some apps however such as TikTok (formerly Music.ly) will allow children over the age of thirteen but under the age of eighteen to use their app as long as they have parental permission.

The following apps currently have an age restriction of 13+:

**Facebook, Google+, Instagram, KiK, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, Vimeo, YouTube** (need to be 13+ to have an active account and upload videos),  
**Houseparty**

**Whatsapp** has an age restriction of 16+ if you live in the UK/EU. Anywhere else in the world and the restriction is 13.

## Viral Online Scares

Recently there have been stories, articles and warnings online about challenges which encourage children and young adults to engage in harmful activities such as self harm and suicide. While most of these have been debunked as fake or are widely exaggerated, the images and stories can still be distressing for anyone who comes across them.

If your child hasn't seen or heard of the challenges before, don't bring the name of the challenge to their attention. The last thing you want is for them to be googling or looking up something that could scare them or make them uncomfortable. Make them aware that they can always come to you if they need to talk about anything or if they need help with something online.



If they have seen images or information online about these viral scares, it is important that you reassure them that they've done the right thing by coming to you. You can also explain that these images have been put online with the specific intent of scaring the people who see them. No harm will come to them if they don't complete challenges put forward on social media and that they should report any of these images and challenges to the websites where they are found.

## Dangers of Technology

### **Addiction/Distractio**n:

Addiction to technology is becoming more of a problem with younger children. Like anything else they do, moderation is a big issue. At home it is important to give children proper warnings before the technology needs to be put away. For a child who is addicted to technology, having the technology taken away could make them angry and upset. Introducing a timer is a good way of letting children know how much time they have left with their computers/laptops and tablets.

### **Advertising:**

A lot of apps and games on the internet have advertisements that might not be very appropriate or child friendly. If you will be watching videos on YouTube, running the video through once before you show your children will stop the advertisement from playing. With apps, most of the time you need to pay to remove the advertisements. Depending on what adverts are appearing, you may need to pay to stop inappropriate adverts.



## **Grooming:**

Children trust online friends much quicker than face to face friends. They are also easily manipulated as children are generally very trusting. It is important to teach children to be critical of whom they are talking to online. If they don't know a friend in the real world, they are not a real friend.

## **Expenses:**

Your child can rack up huge phone bills – roaming, premium rates and data. Watch for in-app purchases and make sure that you turn this off in your child's device settings. Explain that this is real money even if it is a virtual world/

## **Plagiarism:**

You are breaking copyright laws if you pass something off as your own work – this needs to be carefully explained – best time is while doing research for homework. Don't cut and paste – if you do, remember to write where it was taken from.

Make sure to also discuss illegal sites such as those which let you download music, movies/television shows and games which have been copied.

## **Inappropriate Content:**

This can and will mean different things for different people and will change as children get older.

Children may be exposed to violence, swearing, pornography, sexual content, race hate, pro eating disorder sites, drugs and unhealthy images. It is natural for children to push the boundaries and be curious and want to explore. Don't rely on parental controls or web filtering services as a lot of sites which might be inappropriate are promoted differently in order to make it through filtered systems.



It is vitally important that you have an on-going, unthreatening conversations with your children and that they should come to you if they see something inappropriate.

## **Cyber Bullying:**

Cyber bullying is done to intimidate, harass, embarrass, tease, threaten or hurt. Anonymity of a screen makes it easier for the bully. They can't see the reaction of the other person so it takes away a lot of the guilt.

Cyber bullying can also be relentless. There is no escape for the children. Usually when a child is bullied at school, they are able to escape the bully when they leave the school. Cyber bullying is different as the bully still has access after school hours. If the bullying is occurring by phone or email, it can be coming through 24 – 7. Children who cyber bully don't always fit the stereotype of playground bully.

## **Privacy Theft:**

Teach your child that nothing is private online as well as what constitutes personal information. Make sure they understand that once something about them is on the web it is very difficult for it to be taken down or undone.

Check apps and websites privacy settings to make sure that your child is as protected as possible.



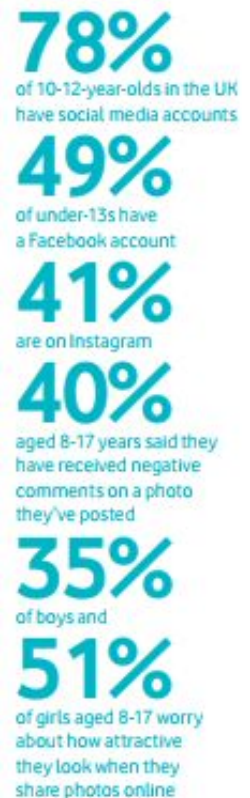
## Self Esteem:

Self-image is something that both boys and girls deal with as they grow older. Social media gives us the ability to ask for immediate feedback on our image. The preoccupation with how we look and how others will react to certain images/posts online can lead young people and children to feel unsure about their value or could lead to a negative image of themselves. What a lot of young people don't realise is that many images online have been altered to get maximum approval and are not necessarily an exact representation of how people live.

## Body Image and Mental Health:

As mentioned above, this is not something new that young people are dealing with. While access to information gives students the power of information, not all the information they are seeing will have a positive impact on their mental health. Seeing perfect images of perfect people gives them something to aspire to but can also make their current lives/looks feel inadequate.

The internet can also facilitate risk taking behaviour making it easier for young people to make spur of the moment decisions that could have far reaching impact. This is contributed by the new trend of social challenges that are going viral on the internet.







## **Location Services:**

All smart devices come equipped with location services enabled. For some apps like Google Maps location services are a necessity as they need to have access to your location in order to share with you directions from where you are to where you want to go. When you first log into any social media account on your smart device it will ask if you wish to enable location services.



As adults, we are able to regulate our online activity and we know which apps should have location services enabled. Children need more guidance in this area as they may not understand the risks and dangers associated with having their location broadcast publicly at certain times of the day.

## **Snapchat – Snap Maps:**

Snapchat recently released a new feature called Snap Maps. If location services are enabled, anytime a photo is sent using Snapchat it places a mark at your location on a map. Your followers can now see where exactly you have posted the photograph from. If children are posting from their home or their school, anyone who follows them on Snapchat can see where they are.

As teachers, you need to be aware that sharing photos on Snapchat from your school could be putting children in danger as your school's location will appear on the Snap Map.

Putting yourself on Ghost Mode means that you can still see other people's locations but they are unable to see yours.



## Useful Websites

<https://tosdr.org/>

Has information regarding the terms and conditions on popular apps and websites

<https://howsecureismypassword.net/>

A password checker – make sure that you have strong secure passwords you will remember for your accounts

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

Has recourse for all age groups, teachers and parents. Good starting point for discussions and free to register for resources

<https://ceop.police.uk/>

Reporting someone's behaviour towards a child – a lot of resources for teachers as well

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/>

Has an opinion of various sites and suggestions on age appropriateness

[www.kidsmart.org.uk](http://www.kidsmart.org.uk)

Guidance for children in a very child friendly way

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

<https://www.childnet.com/ufiles/Online-gaming.pdf>

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

Site to complain about websites, TV programmes, adverts and products

[www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org)

Excellent advice for how to tackle issues – with links to other sites

[www.kids-search.com](http://www.kids-search.com)

Search engine designed for kids

<http://parentinfo.org/>