Fulfen Online-Safety Newsletter

Focus on: TIME SPENT ONLINE!

Since the pandemic, children have spent increasingly long amounts of time online. This might be chatting to friends, playing games or listening to music. The IWF (Internet Watch Foundation) have recently written a hard-hitting report about the massive increase in online abuse and grooming over the last few years. Increasing numbers of innocent children have been involved in online conversations with strangers who they believe to be another child of a similar age.

"Their parents are often unaware there is this online backdoor into their homes which is leaving their children vulnerable. I fear this could be the tip of the iceberg."

Susie Hargreaves OBE, IWF CEO

The report focuses on **primary** aged pupils who are unwittingly tricked and coerced by child sexual abusers and reveals some disturbing statistics.

The long-lasting effects of this type of abuse can be devastating for families. The IWF stipulates that this isn't just children from unstable or deprived backgrounds; abusers **target all kinds of children from all kinds of backgrounds.**

"Self-generated" online child sexual abuse **often happens when children are at home, in their bedroom, behind a closed door, sometimes with other family members at home.**

Click on the image below to read the full report:

Online sexual abuse of primary children 1000% worse since lockdown

New data from IWF shows imagery of primary school-aged children sexually abusing themselves on camera has soared by more than 1000% since into lockdown.

www.iwf.org.uk

Parental Control on Streaming Services

Watching TV shows and films on services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Disney+ is sure to be part of many families' routine this summer. So how can we ensure our children are not able to freely watch content created for older audiences?

Parental controls are available on each streaming or Video on Demand (VoD) service but they are not automatically activated when signing in.

Parentzone have published these simple guidelines for parental controls available on some of the UK's most popular streaming services:

Safer Streaming Settings

There are also some Parent Help Cards on our school website to help you with making some popular apps safer for children to use: *Parent Help Cards*

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Safer Internet Day 2023

Safer Internet Day 2023 was Tuesday 7th February. At Fulfen, we always include internet safety as a central strand throughout our teaching. During this week, classes completed extra work and assemblies based on the theme of "Talking about issues linked to the internet and electronic devices".

In light of recent issues highlighted in the press and by the IWF, we ask that you support us in making time to talk to your child about their online experiences.

This advice for parents from the IWF is particularly useful:

WHAT CAN PARENTS AND CARERS DO?

TALK

TALK to your child about online sexual abuse. Start the conversation – and listen to their concerns.

AGREE ground rules about the way you use technology as a family.

LEARN about the platforms and apps your child loves. Take an interest in their online life.

KNOW how to use tools, apps and settings that can help to keep your child safe online.
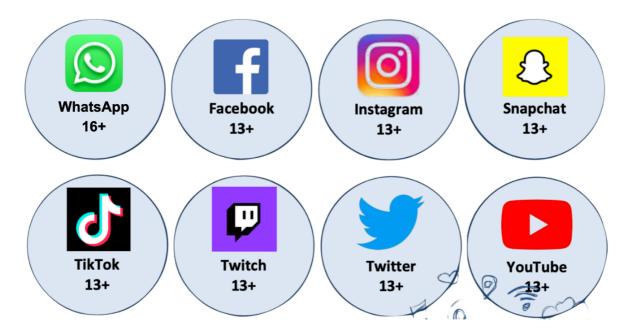
Further information about the TALK checklist here.

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Age Appropriate Use of Technology

Regardless of the minimum age allowances for social media sites, a recent study by Ofcom has found that:

"A majority of children under 13 had their own profile on at least one social media app or site; 33% of parents of 5-7s said their child had a profile, and 60% of 8-11s said they had one."

These age restrictions help ensure that the app is being used by responsible users. Responsible users are educated and aware of social media and tech safety. They understand the risks of sharing personal information, photos or locations.

As a school, we ask you to consider *if* and *how* your child is using any of these apps and to take on board some of the important messages in this newsletter.

In the News

Further to the IWF report mentioned earlier, Spotify has made the headlines recently as the app has been used to groom an 11 year old girl. Although this app is only a 'music streaming service', users of Spotify can chat in the comments and upload images - parents should be aware of this. Spotify have a parental guide on how to set up parental controls:
Spotify Parent Controls

Also look at the two information pages about TiKTok and Social Media and Children's mental health.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about
TIKTOK

AGE RESTRICTION 13+
(certain features are restricted to over-18s only)

TikTok is a free social media platform that lets users create, share and watch short videos ranging anywhere from 15 seconds to 10 minutes in duration. The app gained notoriety for its viral dances, trends and celebrity cameos and can be a creative, fun platform for teens to enjoy. Now available in 75 languages, it has more than a billion active users worldwide (as of spring 2022) and is most popular with the under-16 age bracket. In fact, a 2022 Ofcom report found TikTok to be the most-used social media platform for posting content, particularly among young people aged 12 to 17.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

While TikTok's "Following" feed only displays videos from users someone follows, "For You" is a stream of clips based on their previously watched content. Most videos on a child's "For You" feed will therefore be light-hearted and amusing, but it *could* potentially surface something unsuitable. TikTok's guidelines prohibit the sharing of illegal or inappropriate content, but the sheer volume of uploads mean they aren't manually monitored and vetted.

DANGEROUS CHALLENGES

Due to TikTok's immense popularity, some young people have unfortunately been influenced by videos challenging them to perform harmful, criminal or even deadly acts. One extreme example was the 'blackout' trend, which encouraged users to hold their breath until they passed out from a lack of oxygen. It led to two families filing lawsuits against TikTok over the tragic deaths of their children.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

With around 1.1 billion users globally, the potential for contact from strangers on TikTok is high – especially as accounts created by over-16s (or youngsters using a false date of birth) are set to public by default. This not only means that someone's profile is visible to everyone else on the app: it also lets their videos be suggested to others and enables anyone to comment on them or download them.

IN-APP SPENDING

TikTok is free, but users have the option to buy TikTok coins, which can be used to purchase emojis in the app. These emojis are then sent as rewards (retaining their monetary value) to other users for videos they've created. Coin bundles range from £9.99 to an eye-watering £99; TikTok's policy is that they can't be bought by under-18s, but it's possible to bypass this with a fake birthdate.

ADDICTIVE NATURE

Like all social networking platforms, TikTok can be addictive: figures show that young people are investing increasing amounts of time in it. In the UK, children with TikTok spend an average of 102 minutes per day on the app, versus 53 minutes on YouTube. This compulsive repeated use can interfere with their sleep patterns – leading to irritability – and distract them from other activities.

TIKTOK NOW

Introduced in late 2022, the 'TikTok Now' feature lets users post a daily video or photo at the exact same time as their friends. Users receive a synchronised notification at a random time of day, giving them three minutes to take a video or real-time photo. This addition can not only be a distraction to young people but could lead to them inadvertently sharing private content such as their location.

Advice for Parents & Carers

ENABLE FAMILY PAIRING

Family Pairing allows parents to link their TikTok account with their child's and control their settings remotely. Parents can then, for example, turn on Restricted Mode (reducing the chances of a child seeing inappropriate content); set screen time limits; and manage their child's ability to send messages (and to whom). Children can't alter these settings without parental approval.

MAKE ACCOUNTS PRIVATE

Although under-16s will have their TikTok account set to private by default, bypassing this setting is relatively easy. However, parents have the ability to manually set their child's account to private – meaning that their videos won't be visible to strangers and they won't be able to exchange messages with people who aren't on their friends list.

LIMIT IN-APP SPENDING

If your child is using an iPhone or Android device to access TikTok, you can alter the settings to prevent them from making in-app purchases. We'd recommend that you enable this feature, as it's quite easy for a young person – without realising what they're doing – to spend a significant amount of real money buying TikTok coins so they can unlock more features of the app.

DISCUSS THE DANGERS

If your child wants to use TikTok and you're happy for them to do so, it's crucial to talk about the potential risks in this type of app. For example, ensure they understand not to share any identifying personal information – and that they realise they could be exposed to inappropriate content. Thinking critically about what they see on TikTok can help children become generally more social media savvy.

READ THE SIGNS

If you're concerned that your child might be spending too much time on TikTok, or that they've been emotionally affected by something inappropriate or upsetting that they've seen, it's important to know how to spot the possible signs. Increased irritability and a lack of concentration are potential red flags, as are failing to complete homework or regularly not eating meals.

Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is an experienced technology journalist with a track record of more than 10 years in the industry. Previously the editor of tech tabloid The Inquirer, Carly is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant.

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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about
SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

An estimated one-third of children have a social media account, so it's important that trusted adults know what content young people are consuming, what they're posting and the interactions they're having. On social media, it can be easy to go down 'rabbit holes' that aren't beneficial to our wellbeing. As platforms grapple with managing such 'legal but harmful' content, lives are being impacted – sometimes to tragic effect. We might be daunted by the scale of the tech giants and their content which so enthrals young people, but we can still help children to be aware of their mental wellness: recognising when something isn't OK ... and knowing what to do about content that upsets them.

1. UNDERSTAND THE ALGORITHM

Algorithms rank content by user interest: someone who regularly interacts with sports news, say, will see the latest results at the top of their feed. Likewise, if a user browses content that can cause harm, that's what will be recommended to them in future. Someone who's had a bad day and looks for posts which reflect their mood will find similar content being suggested to them more and more.

2. AVOID THE MAIN FEEDS

Avoiding the default feeds on social media platforms limits the amount of recommended content that's shown. Users can opt to only scroll through the accounts they follow, use restricted modes, or highlight posts that they don't want to see more of. Explore the platform safety settings to see how you can take control of what your child's phone shows them when they open the app.

3. DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE SEEN

Chatting about what your child's seen online keeps you aware of the content they're interacting with. Don't assume that platforms are screening out inappropriate material, or even that your child would recognise content as being harmful. Discuss who they follow, what posts they like and what comes up in their feeds: if alarm bells ring, it could be time for a more in-depth talk or to seek support.

4. LEARN HOW TO HIDE CONTENT

If your child stumbles across unsuitable content on social media, there's the option to hide that post as well as indicating you'd prefer any similar material not to be suggested in future. On some platforms, you might also be able to block posts that contain specific words, which is an excellent way to start taking control of what your child sees online.

5. SET DAILY LIMITS

Phones and most apps can tell you how much they're being used. Spending too long online can mean a child misses out on other activities that are important to all-round wellbeing. You could set some family rules – for everyone to follow – around device use, such as screen time limits and tech-free spaces: involving your child in creating this agreement makes them more likely to stick to it.

6. MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITY

Keeping a discreet eye on how your child is using social media can help ensure they're not entering potentially dangerous situations. As they grow up, of course, children need space to exercise their independence – but you can still occasionally ask to see what they're looking at. Be transparent about your own social media use and try not to sound judgemental about your child's.

7. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Even for adults, it's tempting to check an email or message as soon as the alert sound pings. Push notifications encourage people to open their apps and spend time on their device, so turning them off will help your child to practise mindful use of tech. Most of us have other things that we need to focus on as a priority – and those notifications will still be there later, when we have more time.

8. USE DEVICES TOGETHER

Giving children internet-enabled devices and complete freedom to explore platforms on their own can result in exposure to hugely damaging content. You could consider making a particular area at home a designated space to use phones, tablets and so on – making it much easier to monitor what content your child is viewing and (if necessary) steer them away from any potentially harmful paths.

9. ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mental health professionals often highlight the importance of exercise, quality time with loved ones, a balanced diet and restful sleep for our mental wellbeing. Spending hours on social media can cause us to sacrifice other activities that our brains need to feel well – so encouraging your child to put down their phone and enjoy something that doesn't involve a screen can be immensely beneficial.

10. TALK ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Most platforms default children's accounts to private, so only people they've accepted as friends can see their posts. This reduces the risk of bullying or unkind comments, but – just like offline life – the digital world can still make children feel as if they need to act or look a certain way to fit in. Talk to your child about peer pressure, and listen to any concerns so you can provide the support they need.

Meet Our Expert

Shazia Sarwar-Azim is executive headteacher at a specialist primary school and, as an emotional therapy coach, works with school leaders to focus on the SEND, mental health and wellbeing agenda. A passionate advocate for vulnerable learners, Shazia is a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching and the author of The Rainbow Within, a book which supports children with SEMH needs.

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Help Children Balance Their Media Lives

From phones and tablets to streaming movies and YouTube, tech and media are everywhere. Children love easy access to shows, games and information. Parents and carers love that children can learn on the go (and stay busy when dinner's cooking). But it's easy to overdo it when the phone never stops pinging and the next episode plays automatically. Families can keep media and tech use in check by following a few simple practices. Children have been learning about controlling their media balance in their online safety lessons over the last few weeks.

Check out these 5 tips 🌿

1

Create screen-free times and zones.

Help children take breaks from tech by limiting screen time in bedrooms, during study time or at the dinner table.

2

Try parental controls.

Set content limits that make sense for your family. Alongside talking about healthy media habits, use features such as content filtering, privacy settings and time limits offered by the apps and platforms to help manage access and exposure to media.

3

Establish clear family rules.

Decide together what kind of media and tech is OK -- and when it's OK to use it. A family media plan can help get everyone on the same page.

4

Watch and play together.

Choose quality, age-appropriate media to enjoy with your children. Visit commonsensemedia.org to find movies, shows, games and more.

5

Help children identify healthy behaviours.

Practise talking about feelings -- both physical and emotional -- during screen and non-screen activities.

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