**Internet Safety Advice for Parents of Young Children**

It is never too early to think about your child’s safety online. If you are a parent of a young child who is just starting to discover the online world, there are a few things to consider:

**Talk about internet Safety with your Child** Have a conversation with your child on some of the important things to watch out for when going online for the first time. Young children will not be aware of the dangers, so it is very important to talk with them about who they talk to and about sharing personal information online.

**Use Parental Controls** Most internet technologies have built-in controls that allow you to limit the amount of time your child can spend online, restrict their access to adult content, and switch off functions like shopping and chatting. Filtering controls are particularly useful at preventing young children from accidentally encountering content that might bother them.

**Disable In-App Purchases** Many apps and games give their users the option of buying additional game functionality, additional points/bonuses, and a host of other extras. Children can easily make purchases without even realising. You can disable in-app purchases using your phone or device settings.

**Activate Safe Search** Help minimise the risk of your child coming across inappropriate content in response to search queries by activating ‘safe search’ in your search engine.

**Agree on what to do when things go wrong** We recommend that you speak to your child about what to do if they come across something on the internet that bothers them. This could be closing the laptop lid or turning off the screen and coming to get you.

**Set Up a Family Email** Set up a family email address that your children can use when signing up to new games and websites online.

**Play it Safe** For young children we recommend that parents choose safe and appropriate games for their child to play online. Most games have a rating you can check to see if they are age appropriate. You should also check if a game allows for player interaction and if there is a safe chat mode.

***Taken from “A Parents’ Guide to a Better Internet” found on the www.webwise.ie/parents***

**Screen Time Advice**

Here are some pointers to help you deal with this tricky issue that is causing conflict in our homes. It is important to remember that children often welcome time-off from social media and games and can welcome clear guidelines and boundaries in this area.

1. **Agree a clear set of rules with your child on screen time in the home.** Talk to your child on when and where you think it is appropriate to use screens. Agree times when screens are allowed and when they are not allowed in the home. We suggest dinner time, homework time (unless you are using it to help with your homework) and bed time is a good start to the not-allowed list.
2. **Do as you say.** Modelling behaviour is the most powerful way you can influence your child’s behaviour.
3. **Restrict the use of computers and devices in the bedroom.** Depending on the age of your child you may want to set a curfew or ban devices from the bedroom completely.
4. **Buy an alarm clock for your child’s bedroom** and charge their phones and devices in your room or downstairs at night time. This can be a helpful way of giving them a break from the internet.
5. **Try not to rely on screens too much to keep the kids amused.** It can be easy to encourage them to pick up the tablet or play a game on the computer to keep them occupied. This only confuses rules on screen time, try and stick to the agreed rules with your child and remember to set a good example.
6. **Chat to your child about what they do online** and encourage them to use their screen time for learning and education.
7. **Pick one evening a week where you do a family activity together**, whether it’s movie night or games night. Doing activities together as a family will help implement screen time guidelines and offer fun alternatives.
8. **Don’t have screens always on in the background.** Turn off TVs and computers when not in use, these can be distracting for kids if they are trying to participate in another activity.
9. **Finally, join in!** Why not set some time aside to play your child’s favourite computer game and discover the online world together.

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**Children & Social Media**

**What is the Right Age to Start?**

Deciding at what age to allow your child to start using social media is a common dilemma for parents. Age restrictions vary across social media platforms; usually users should be no younger than 13 years old (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.). On WhatsApp users should be at least 16 years old; 18 on Tinder. With almost all services it is very easy to sign-up with a false date of birth. That said, the companies are pretty quick to delete the accounts of users when they discover they are underage.

**Why 13 years old?**

The threshold of 13 years is not related to safety concerns but to US data protection laws governing the collection of data about children. In short, they can’t do this without parental consent. Getting consent is an administrative headache; most companies don’t want the hassle. In Ireland data protection legislation doesn’t specify a particular age, instead it depends on what is called ‘informed consent’. This means that if a child understands what their personal information will be used for and who will have access to it, they can give consent themselves. Similarly, children with learning difficulties might not be in position to give ‘informed consent’ at any age. Regardless of the data protection legislation in Ireland, most services stick with the US restriction of 13 years old in their terms and conditions.

**What are the Key Things to Think About?**

We know that some parents give permission to their underage-children to set up accounts on social networking services and it’s easy to get past their age checks. Ultimately, you need to decide if your child is equipped to deal with the social pressures that arise from social networking. The pressure to ‘fit in’ and/or to ‘be popular’ can be intense. Romance, group dynamics, and bullying can contribute to creating choppy waters that even adults find difficult to navigate.

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**Dealing with Cyberbullying**

**What is Cyberbullying?**

Cyberbullying or online bullying is something you should talk about with your child before it happens. Opportune times might be: when your child starts using social media for the first time, when they are moving from primary to secondary school, and regularly thereafter.

This type of bullying is increasingly common and is continuously evolving. It is bullying carried out through the use of internet and mobile phone technologies. Being the target of inappropriate or hurtful messages is the most common form of online bullying. Cyberbullying does not require face to face contact, it can occur at any time (day or night).

Many forms of bullying can be facilitated through cyberbullying. For example, a child may be sent a hurtful text messages or pictures may be posted with negative comments about a person, their appearance etc.

Be clear on what constitutes online bullying. The procedures recently published by the Department of Education and Skills say “placing a once-off offensive or hurtful public message, image or statement on a social network site or other public forum where that message, image or statement can be viewed and/or repeated by other people will be regarded as bullying behaviour”.

Cyberbullying can happen to anyone. It’s always wrong and it should never be overlooked or ignored. You know your child better than anyone else. It means you are best placed to identify and deal with any cyberbullying they may encounter.



**What Advice Should I Give my Child?**

**Don’t Reply:** Young people should never reply to messages that harass or annoy them. The bully wants to know they have upset their target. If they get a response it feeds into the problem and makes things worse.

**Keep the Messages:** By keeping nasty messages your child will be able to produce a record of the bullying, the dates and the times. This will be useful for any subsequent school or Garda investigation.

**Block the Sender:** No one needs to put up with someone harassing them. Whether it’s messaging apps, social networking or playing games, children can use the technology block anyone who is bothering them.

**Report Problems:** Ensure your child reports any instances of cyberbullying to websites, apps, or other service providers using their reporting tools. By using these, your child will be passing important information to people who can help.

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**Safer Internet Day**

A Parents’ Guide to a Better Internet

A message from Webwise and Castletown GNS