

SMART PARENTING

Do you know there are strangers in your child's bed every night?

Bringing up children who were born or brought up during the age of digital technology and so familiar with computers and Internet at an early age compared to their parents requires an additional skill set. The internet is the playground for this generation as it is a great interactive platform for kids to learn and play.

This vast sea of information, however, does not come without risks. With just one click, young users face constant threats online that can affect them negatively. On the other hand, children should also be made aware that their behaviour online could also result in negative consequences both to other people and themselves.

It is important for parents to realize their critical role in ensuring that these young digital citizens use the digital technologies in a safe, secure, and responsible manner so that they and everyone else will have a positive experience online.

According to UK's Safer Internet Centre, the key online risks to the children are:

Contact: children can be contacted by bullies or people who groom or seek to abuse them

Content: age-inappropriate or unreliable content can be available to children

Conduct: children may be at risk because of their own behaviour, for example, by sharing too much information

Commercialism: young people can be unaware of hidden costs and advertising in apps, games and websites.

Here are the challenges young Internet users face online:

UNHEALTHY CONTENTS

Not all contents online are appropriate and healthy for the young users. Inappropriate contents are images, information, and activities that can upset children and misleading information or information that might lead or tempt your child into unlawful or dangerous behaviour. They are usually violent, dangerous, and sexually explicit in nature, including:

- pornographic material
- content containing swearing
- sites that encourage vandalism, crime, terrorism, racism, eating disorders, even suicide
- pictures, videos or games which show images of violence or cruelty to other people or animals
- gambling sites
- unmoderated chatrooms – where there's no one supervising the conversation and barring unsuitable comments.

Children are exposed to unhealthy contents either by actively seeking these contents or accidental such as through pop-up advertisements or sent by other people to their devices (links, images, or information).

Talk to Your Children

Prepping Your Child

Start a conversation with your children as you are about to let them off into the Internet world about what they might find online, including inappropriate contents online and the unhealthy consequences to them. It is good to have these conversations regularly.

Agreed Ground Rules

Find out the kind of things your child likes to do online and explain on the types of websites and apps that are the best for them to use. These should include the search engines they use to find information. There are child-friendly search engines that are especially suitable for children.

Age Limits

Explain to your child that many sites have a minimum age limit of 13 years old and that it is to help protect them from unsuitable content and harm.

Build Their Resilience

Young users might not know how to respond appropriately to unhealthy content. Parents should ensure that their children are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed for them to be resilient to these harmful elements. Among other things,

children should know how to stop pop-ups from constantly appearing on the screen;

never click on links in emails and messages or chats that are unexpected or from unknown persons;

and most importantly, immediately close the page showing the unhealthy content and report to you or other trusted adults about it. Let them know they have the right to a positive online experience and legal actions will be taken against those sharing unhealthy content with them.

Source: internetmatters.org

SEXTING

Sexting is a form of messaging that is sexual in nature. It commonly includes obscene content such as naked pictures/nudes, sexual or 'dirty pictures', and underwear shots. Your child may unknowingly fall victim to a sexual predator.

Remind your children that:

once they share their sexual photos with others, strangers or not, they are no longer in control of what happens to them afterwards.

they should not let someone guilt-trip or pressure them into sending a sex text.

if an indecent or nude photo of them is posted online, they can ask the admin to remove it or report the incident to MCMC.

to block anyone who tries to send them any inappropriate messages.

ONLINE GROOMING

Online grooming is a process where a predator establishes an emotional connection with a child or young person for the purpose of sexual abuse, exploitation, or trafficking, or other criminal acts. It can come from a stranger or someone known to the child, such as a family member, friend or professional who has regular contact with the child. Always remind your child to never share sexual images or videos of themselves.

How to Tell If Someone Is a Groomer

Sends Lots of Messages

This could be really often and they might message the victim in different ways, for example through Facebook, text messaging and chat rooms.

Profiling

Ask the victim who else uses their computer or which room the victim's computer is in, to find out if they could get caught by the victim's parents or carers.

Gaining Trust

Sometimes, the predator might pretend to be like your child and have the same interests or problems as them. They could just be doing this to get your child to trust them, so later on they can get you to do what they want.

Asks to Keep the Conversations Secret

The predator might ask the victim not to tell anyone about their communications or relationships, saying that it's their 'special secret'. They might also ask the victim if they trust them.

Starts Sending Sexual Messages

This might be really subtle at first. They could start to say nice things about the victim's appearance or their body or ask things like "have you ever been kissed?"

Tries to Blackmail

A groomer might try to persuade the victim to send sexual images of themselves by saying they'll be hurt or upset if the victim doesn't comply. If the victim complies, the groomer could threaten to post the images online or show them to people the victim knows if they don't send them more.

What to Do If You Think Your Child Is Being Groomed

Keep calm - Comfort your child; tell them that they have not done anything wrong. Speak to a counsellor to report your concern.

Ask the person to stop - The child can ask the groomer to stop and state that he/she is uncomfortable with sending sexual images or videos of themselves.

Report it- Tell your child that they can report any behaviours that makes them feel uncomfortable to you or any trusted adults, and you would then report it the appropriate authorities such as the police or MCMC

How You Can Protect Your Child

Utilize filtering or parental control software.

Spend time with your child and guide them online.

Teach your child to keep personal information a secret.

Get to know your child's online friends.

Encourage your child to tell you when they run into suspicious activity or content.