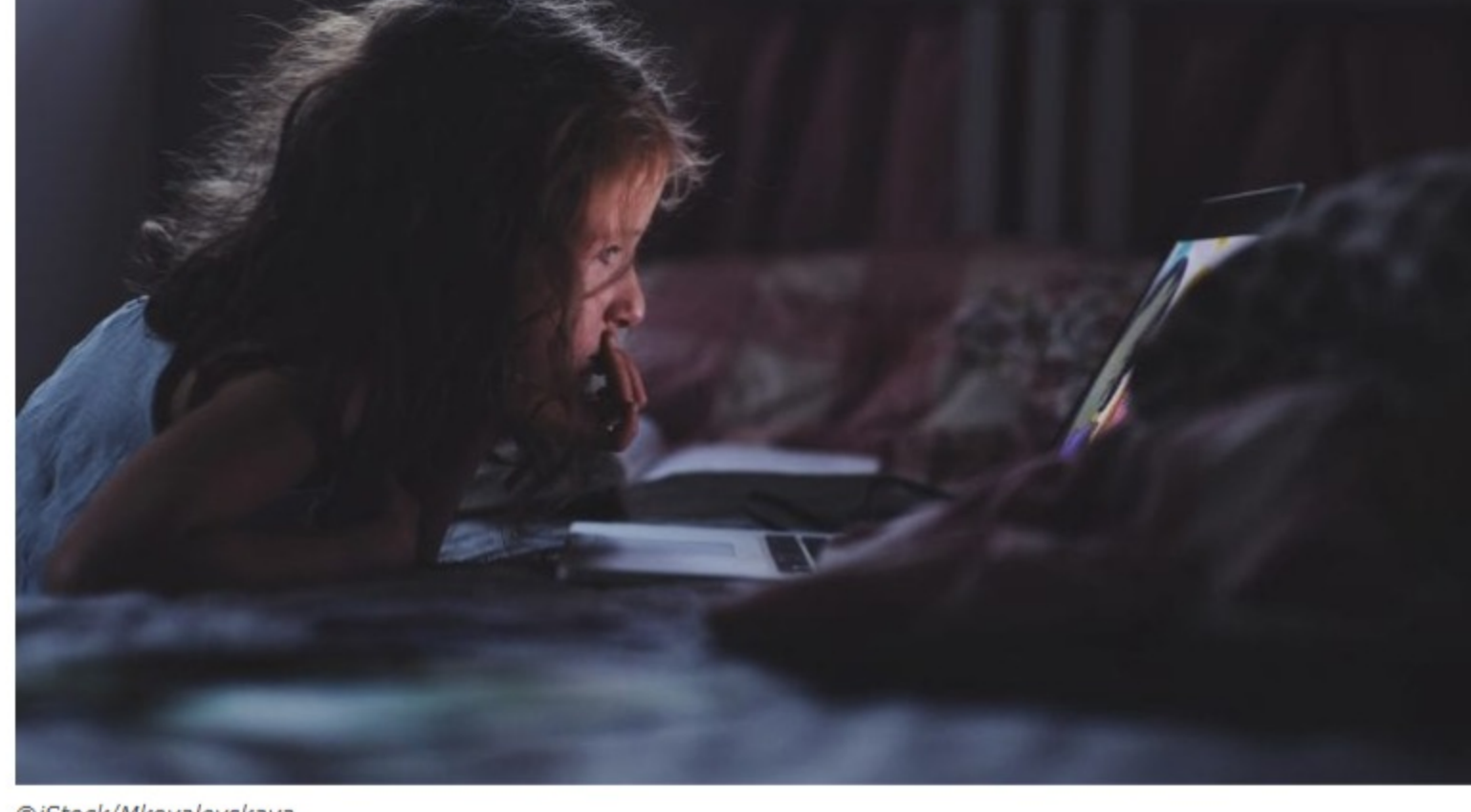


News Smart Futures News

# Online child safety with the UK Cyber Security Association

30th November 2018



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## Lisa Ventura of the UK Cyber Security Association has created the ultimate parental guide to online child safety.

Today we live in a world where information, education and knowledge are always accessible. Thanks to the internet children are now exposed to a world that is connected 24/7, with a myriad of new ways to play games, meet new people and learn. Conversely, they also risk being exposed to a multitude of different dangers online in the form of cyber-bullying, gambling, exposure to sexual predators and inappropriate material. The risk to online child safety increases if they use email, chat rooms, social networking sites and instant messaging.

If you are a parent, it is vital that you become aware of all the hidden dangers facing your children every day. While the internet can seem innocuous enough, cyberbullying is rife and there are some shocking online child safety statistics that make for very grim reading:

- Child pornography is one of the biggest growing businesses online, with content becoming much worse. In 2008, the Internet Watch Foundation found at least 1,536 domains that were linked specifically to child abuse.
- 20% of teenagers have posted naked or semi-naked photos or videos of themselves or sent images of this nature.
- In 2016/17 there were 55,236 registered sex offenders in the UK.
- One in six children who are in secondary school have seriously considered suicide as a way out from cyber bullying and problems online, with one in 12 attempting suicide.

### What are the dangers that children face online?

Given the seriousness of the statistics surrounding online child safety it is imperative to be aware of the dangers children face when using the internet:

#### Social networking

These virtual community sites are often where children go to chat, use instant messenger services, post pictures and write blogs. They have a huge appeal especially to teenagers as they provide instant celebrity, community and often have many of the online entertainment activities and tools that children love.

Blogging tools, photos, music, video sharing features and the ability to post creative work in real time is particularly appealing to children, as all this can be linked to a customised profile that is updated on a regular basis. Children often use these sites to seek approval, describe their interests and present themselves in a virtual world rather than the real one. Teenagers often use these sites to document everything in their hearts and heads that they want others to know about, connect with people and share information.

Online reputation for children is critical on these sites, with this being a huge concern for online child safety. Employers and schools often reject young people for college courses and jobs after checking out what applicants have posted on their social networking sites.

A good motto to remember is: "think before you post, because once you do, it will be up there forever". Many children post pictures, notes or videos that they later regret. It is extremely important to teach young people to think about what they post online; the online abyss is timeless, there is no way to remove any images or words which have been uploaded as the whole world has already had access to the opportunity to copy and save what they have witnessed.

#### Predators

A predator is often seen as trying to obtain or obtaining sexual contact with another person in a metaphorically 'predatory' manner. Those who commit sex crimes – such as child sexual abuse or rape – are often referred to as predators, especially in the media and sometimes in government as a power phrase by MPs.

The internet has opened up the door for young people to interact with virtual strangers, and while traditionally predators threaten online child safety via chat rooms they can be found wherever young people are online.

#### Pornography

The explicit portrayal of subject matter of a sexual nature often exists purely for the purpose of sexual gratification and arousal, however, one of the worst online child safety risks surrounding the internet for many parents is that of the accessibility for pornography to appear on sites and surprise their children. In fact, many parents do not realise that a vast majority of children are going online specifically to seek out pornography.

#### Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying according to Wikipedia is the use of the internet and other technologies to harass or harm people in a deliberate, hostile and repeated way. This has become extremely common in society, especially among younger people. Therefore, legislation and online child safety awareness campaigns have arisen to try and counteract it. Cyberbullies often pose online as their victims and send out messages that are intended to harass others; or post videos that humiliate other children. Often, those affected do not tell their parents that it is happening to them.

#### Online gambling

There are innumerable gambling sites online and anyone with access to a credit/debit card can enter these sites and gamble. While it is illegal for minors to gamble, many websites do not have adequate authentication means, therefore it is essential to online child safety that parents check their credit card payments every month to ensure that no suspicious or unauthorised payments have been made.

#### Education begins at home

With all the pressures that parents are under to teach their children about the rights and wrongs of the world and society, education on online child safety is key. Years ago, social networks consisted of neighbours, family and classmates. Today, there is a very different landscape on social networking sites and privacy is very limited and easily evaded. Parents need to ensure they take the time to not only understand what their children are doing in school, but also what they are doing online. Their digital lives and what they post is as important today as their 'real world' lives.

With networks being much smaller in years gone by, parents had total control over the influences their children encountered, meet other parents and talk to each party when children were mean to each other or got into fights. Today their networks could include anyone in any country across the globe. Younger children can be much more naïve, believing that everyone they know is doing it, so why shouldn't they. Parents need to take the time to learn about online child safety and understand what their children are posting and sharing online.

#### Use technology to ensure online child safety

This might sound counterproductive, but technology can play a big part in protecting children from dangers faced online and help parents understand what their children are doing online. There are many software tools out there which block and sends alerts to you on your child's online activities. Additionally, it shields them from potential online child safety hazards that exist when browsing the net, chatting with friends or using webcams.

Restriction settings on these programs can be customised depending on the child's age, and instant text alerts and emails can be sent to parents which are often triggered when the child enters any key words – flagged up by the parents – into Google, visits any restricted web sites, social networking sites, or tries to use their webcam.

#### Five simple ways to protect children online

Safeguarding online child safety is critical, so it is imperative that parents communicate with their children and take an active role in what they are doing online and when using electronic devices such as tablets and smartphones. Here are five simple ways that can help keep children safe online:

- Talk to children and advise them not to post any personal information online such as their phone number, email address or home address;
- Advise children to think carefully before posting any photos or videos of themselves online, once they have been posted other people can see it and may even be able to download it;
- Never give out passwords, not even to close family;
- Do not become friends on social networking sites with anyone you do not know, and never meet up in person with anyone you meet online; and
- Ensure your privacy settings are as high as possible and that you have adequate anti-virus protection installed.

#### The UK Cyber Security Association

The UK Cyber Security Association (UKCSA) is a new membership organisation responsible for providing centralised contact for resources within the cyber security industry across the UK. It exists to support individuals and companies within the industry and works towards a specific set of objectives to promote the importance of cyber security for businesses and individuals.

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