



Guidelines for Educators on Child Online Protection

2020

Introduction

The Internet has transformed how we live. It is entirely integrated into the lives of children and young people, making it impossible to consider the digital and physical worlds separately. One third of all Internet users today are children and young people, and UNICEF estimates that 71 per cent of young people are already online.

Digital technologies have opened up many new ways to communicate, play games, enjoy music and engage in a vast array of cultural, educational and skill-enhancing activities. The Internet can provide crucial access to health and educational services as well as information on topics that are important for young people but may be taboo in their societies.

However, just as children and young people are often at the forefront of adopting and adapting to the new technologies and opportunities provided by the Internet, they are also being exposed to a range of content, contact and conduct threats and harms online. Parents, carers, guardians and educators have a crucial role to play – they are responsible for the safety, wellbeing and education of children and young people, yet are often told that they are ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that children and young people face when they go online. Adults can be portrayed as lacking in the necessary skills and understanding to be able to support these younger users yet in reality this is not about technology but about behaviour, something which parents, carers, guardians and educators should feel able to guide children in.

These guidelines for parents, carers and educators seek to empower those adults and suggest ways to encourage a meaningful dialogue and debate around online related issues which can support children and young people in becoming resilient users of technology who know how to keep themselves safe and when and where to ask for help and support if they need it.



Table of Contents

Introduction	ii
1. What is child online protection?	1
2. General recommendations	1
3. Guidelines for educators	2



1. What is child online protection?

Child online protection (COP), is the holistic approach to respond to all potential threats and harms children and young people may encounter online. It is everyone's responsibility to protect children from these harms.

In context of child online protection, whilst most children will be susceptible in one form or another to online threats and harms, it is important to appreciate that some children are especially vulnerable, particularly migrant children or children living with a form of disability.

2. General recommendations

There are a range of aspects for parents and educators to consider when supporting their children or pupils as they go online. The guidelines highlight that alongside the many benefits there are also challenges and parents and educators will want to identify effective ways to protect children from harmful and inappropriate content online.

Parents will often be supported by Internet services providers and mobile operators who will provide parental control tools, ways to block and restrict access to certain types of content as well as the ability to limit the amount of time spent on devices. Education settings may include online safety within their curriculum and may be more likely to filter and monitor access. However, this is only part of the solution, dialogue and discussion are crucial and a key element is establishing a positive relationship between adults and children and young people. It is important that if children and young people are upset, worried or concerned by something that they have seen or that has happened to them online that they should feel able to speak to someone about this. The way that adults react is crucial – research¹ has shown that many young people are reluctant to speak to an adult about a negative online experience for fear of the consequences – they talk of being banned from particular sites or devices and being blamed for something that may not have been their fault. Given the nature of some of the harmful content available online it is perhaps understandable that parents may be shocked when they are made aware of their children being exposed to it – but they need to carefully consider their reaction – did the child go looking for it or did they stumble upon it – or perhaps it was sent to them by someone else? Children and young people have always been naturally inquisitive, something which was welcomed in the past, but their curiosity online can sometimes lead them into being exposed to more challenging content.

Educators have an important role to play as part of a wider stakeholder approach. Delivering effective online safety education within schools and in more informal education settings is important as not all parents will engage with their children on these issues. Ideally educators will embed online safety within the wider curriculum or programme of work as well as addressing issues as they arise on a more ad hoc basis.

These guidelines highlight a series of further recommendations for parents and educators to consider when having conversations with their children or pupils about what they do when they go online and how to support them when things go wrong.

¹ Project deSHAME (2017) www.deshame.eu



3. Guidelines for educators

1. Ensure that all devices are secure and password protected.
2. Install anti-virus software and firewalls.
3. Ensure that there is a policy which details how technology can be used.
4. Consider how to manage taking and storing images of pupils.
5. Ensure that Internet feed provided by the school is filtered and monitored.
6. Raise awareness of the importance of digital footprint and online reputation.
7. Recognise the importance of professional online communication with pupils, parents and other stakeholders.
8. Understand the risks and benefits that pupils can be exposed to when they go online.

International
Telecommunication
Union
Place des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland

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