

E-SAFETY IN SCHOOLS



Published by Education Technology

Whose job is it to keep children safe online?

Where do the responsibilities begin and end for the school? Fundamentally it's the role of all adults working in or on behalf of a school who have the responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Under the umbrella of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education', schools have a responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn, as well as constantly monitoring and identifying any child that may need additional help or be at risk of harm.

In the broadest sense, the responsibility for safeguarding never ceases and the school has a duty of care and duty to report any information – at any time of day – that may place a child at risk. Naturally, child safeguarding nowadays often involves a multi-stakeholder approach.

What risks exist for children online? Which risks can schools most help mitigate?

As is often explained, children are digital natives, where the use of online tools is seen as a natural extension of their communication tools – and the caution and self-checks on potential implications that adults might apply are often absent. From bullying, radicalisation (Prevent Duty), to child sexual exploitation, the

risks are significant. The two key strands a school can use to help mitigate are: educating children on the risks, and employing effective monitoring tools so that activity can be identified quickly and effectively.

Are teachers and educators aware of all the risks? Is there enough training and CPD provided for teachers?

The risks are constantly evolving. Only last month we had the fresh challenge of so-called "suicide games" like the Blue Whale game, plus games that risk injury like the Salt and Ice challenge or Neknomination. The key is that training and intelligence sharing need to be a constant and ongoing process within the school. There is a risk with a never-ending focus on standards that insufficient time is spent on a child's broader education and that staff do not have sufficient time for their wider CPD in areas such as this.

What are schools obliged to do for safeguarding?

"Keeping Children Safe in Education" provides the statutory guidance all schools and governing bodies must follow to ensure that the school complies with its duties under the legislation. That includes providing a safe environment in which children can learn; ensuring all staff have

received and read a copy of the KCSIE guidance; have annual safeguarding training; that the school has a designated Safeguarding lead; that all staff should be prepared to identify children who may be in need of early help; and be familiar with the process to report any concerns.

How can schools educate children to behave with respect and consideration online?

This all begins with education both from a technology and a PSHE perspective. Often, this broader topic is referred to as Digital Citizenship. There is no shortcut to discussing openly (and, ideally, regularly) the best ways to stay safe online and to make children aware of the risks that can and do exist. Teaching children best practice on the use of social media (not sharing personal information, appropriate language, the ever-present risk of grooming and so on) has never been more important. Where possible, schools should engage parents in eSafety training to empower them with the knowledge and skills to support their children at home.

What products and technologies exist to help teachers?

There is a range of solutions designed for filtering access to online resources at the perimeter of a school network. Increasingly, the most effective solutions





are ones that work on a local device level and can monitor safeguarding keywords that may indicate a child is at risk of harm, can capture screen and supporting behaviour information for more serious topics (such as suicide or radicalisation) and help build a picture of trending topics to steer school assemblies. The latest generation of safeguarding and IT management solutions also provide self-service lists of safeguarding resources for children to access – covering everything from FGM helplines to drug and bullying resources.

Are parents fully aware of what products and resources could help them?

Absolutely not. The landscape is ever-changing and the functionality available within applications is constantly changing, often introducing a fresh risk in applications that were previously vetted and deemed safe. All OS providers now provide some form of child protection controls, time limits and activity recording and schools should encourage parents to review the tools available for each desktop and tablet platform. One of the more challenging areas to police, however, is the forum-based chat capabilities within console-based games. These are often the hardest to manage. A simple “door open” policy when gaming at home can be a great start. Good practice is to also encourage the school IT department to provide regular updates to parents on tools that may support their efforts to keep their children safe online.

How is it best to discuss online safety with children?

Talk to your child openly and regularly,

as it is the only way to help keep your child safe online. Sometimes, it’s helpful to set boundaries and agree what’s appropriate – and often it’s useful to keep focused and talk about specific apps and websites that you can review together. Ask children what apps and sites they use and why. Another important conversation is understanding what a child feels is appropriate and then explaining possible risks in a clear and understandable way.

How can teachers encourage wellbeing and healthy habits?

This question would normally fall under the broader topic of Every Child Matters, but now, in addition to thinking about a child’s physical health and wellbeing, an extra strand has to apply to their cyber wellbeing and digital citizenship. There is no shortcut to discussing the risks online with children and making them aware of the consequences of their actions. Schools often develop cyber clubs and digital newsletters (which students can be encouraged to help author) that focus on the long-term risks and implications of sharing inappropriate photos and personal data, to the reality of grooming and that not everyone online is as you might think.

Does BYOD help or hinder online safety?

It’s a double-edged sword. On one level, having a range of devices and platforms being used within the school network adds an extra layer of management for the school IT department – this often comes with a cost and increases the risk that the normal controls enforced on desktop devices are missed on tablets, for example. However, the silver lining is that, with parental consent, monitoring

tools installed on school devices under a BYOD policy can be used to protect the student away from the school as well. As with everything surrounding safeguarding, it’s about intelligence and visibility, so that help can be offered no matter what location the child is in.

Where can teachers turn for help? What advice or resources exist for educators?

There is a wealth of forums and online resources available to teachers. Firstly, ensure all staff know their KCSIE obligations, and then organisations such as the Internet Watch Foundation provide resources for child sexual exploitation; the UK Safer Internet Centre provides resources on eSafety and tools; technical forums like EduGeek provide a great platform to find out about the tools available for use in a school, from schools who already use them; and industry leaders, like NetSupport, will provide on-site discussions with Safeguarding teams on how solutions can be tailored to meet a school’s needs.

Will children always be one step ahead?

In a nutshell, yes. We are full circle to the concept of digital natives. Children will always discover and be more receptive to trying new technologies, new forums and new games before their “digital migrant” parents. Technology moves so fast, we have to always assume the risks online are ever-present and keep working, through education and supporting/monitoring tools, to ensure our children remain safe online.