

# Internet safety

*"Greg is ten - same age as me. I haven't met him, but we chat on the internet all the time. He's really funny. He wants to meet up tomorrow to play football...I can't wait to see what he looks like."*

- Child exploitation has devastating effects on children, both physical and mental
- Exploitative adults have been quick to use the Internet as a tool; they are very sophisticated and well practiced in how they approach children
- Children are fascinated by the 'adult' world, but there are measures you can take to protect your child from online risks and help them make the most of the Internet safely
- Be sensitive to changes in your child's behaviour. It is up to attentive adults to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation.
- Recent research from the NSPCC revealed that one in five 9 to 16 year-olds use Internet chat rooms

## new technology, old problem

The Internet has proved a useful tool for people wishing to exploit children. Recent high profile cases in the news have revealed that Internet chat rooms can be used by paedophiles to establish deceptive relationships with children. They then 'groom' children to become victims, either psychologically on the Internet itself, or by arranging to actually meet with them. Often victims believe that they are chatting to other children online.

Internet pornography can cause psychological damage to children who are exposed to it. But worse still, the Internet is a major method by which pornographic images of children are obtained and exchanged by exploitative adults. Sadly such images are in high demand, so pornographers will go to extreme lengths to entice and coerce children into getting involved against their will.

### Making it safe to surf

There are ways in which you can help to protect your child online and ensure that the Internet is a safe way to learn and have fun.

Ask your Internet Service Provider or local computer specialist about installing parental controls, which can prevent your child accessing websites with sexual content. These methods cannot provide a total safeguard but do offer some degree of protection.

Learn all you can about the Internet. In the same way that you would teach your child about the dangers from strangers, warn your child about dangers on the Internet and lay down some ground rules regarding the time they spend online. If possible avoid your child going online in private, or at least ensure you have access to their computer. Make sure that they know they should never arrange to meet a new friend made on the Internet without a trusted adult present.

Watch out for possible signs of exploitation or abuse. Some of these signs are often completely innocent, but look out for changes in your child's mood or behaviour, sleep disturbances or bed wetting, unexplained marks, problems at school, going missing or self-harm, asking about sexual experiences and terminology or evidence of pornographic material. Be especially aware of any new friendships between your child and older people, whether male or female.

If your child does experience some form of exploitation, whether mild or severe, it is crucial to be 100% supportive, make it clear that it is not their fault and that you are there to help and protect them no matter what.

### Make Contact

If you are concerned about a child who may be exploited or abused through the internet, contact your local police or social services.

## WARNING SIGNS

*Prolonged, secretive periods on the Internet, changes in behaviour or mood, inappropriate sexual behaviour, asking questions about sexual experiences or terminology, leaving pornographic material, diaries or letters where they can be found.*

## ACTION

*If you think your child has been exposed to any form of exploitation encourage them to confide in you, assuring them that they've done nothing wrong and that you will support them. Contact child protection, youth services, child abuse or other appropriate organisations for further advice and support.*

## WHAT TO SAY

*Assure your child that you believe what they are telling you; create a positive sense of confidence between you. Explain in your own way why these things happen and avoid making them feel ashamed or foolish about what they have experienced. Let them know that you will protect them from further harm.*

## PREVENTION

*Know where your child is; be familiar with their friends and daily activities.*

*Teach your child to trust their own feelings and assure them that they have a right to say NO to what they sense is wrong. Listen carefully to your child's fears and be supportive.*

## CONTACTS

- Internet Watch Hotline  
0845 600 8844
- NCH Internet Safety Guide
- Wiltshire Police  
01380 735735
- Wiltshire County Council Children's Services:  
Main Switchboard  
01225 713000  
Area Offices:  
North Wiltshire  
01249 444321  
West Wiltshire  
01225 773500  
South Wiltshire  
01722 327551  
Emergency Duty Service  
(out of hours)  
0845 60 70 888
- NSPCC 0808 800 5000

*Check the Wiltshire ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:  
[www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk)*