

# ONLINE SAFETY NEWSLETTER

Providing online safety information for parents and carers

### In this issue:

- Back to school
- What parents need to know about grooming and sextortion



**Strategic Alliance**

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Back to school can mean big changes for your child both off and online. Perhaps they now have a smartphone, or perhaps they have changed schools and find themselves with more friends both off and online. It is a great time of the year to review their safety online and ensure you and they know what they are doing.

It is essential that the access that the child or young person has is appropriate for their age and developmental stage. For younger children, parents need to set up devices and apps so that children are protect-

ed as far as possible from content that would upset or harm them, and are not able to be contacted by people they don't know. Most games, apps and web-sites will have an age rating indicating age suitability, but parents should also do their own checks using sites like NSPCC [NetAware](#) or [CommonSenseMedia](#). If your child is wanting to use something that you think will put them at risk, find an alternative: for example, YouTube Kids is aimed at younger children and lets parents control more closely what videos children can access. If you don't know how to set up

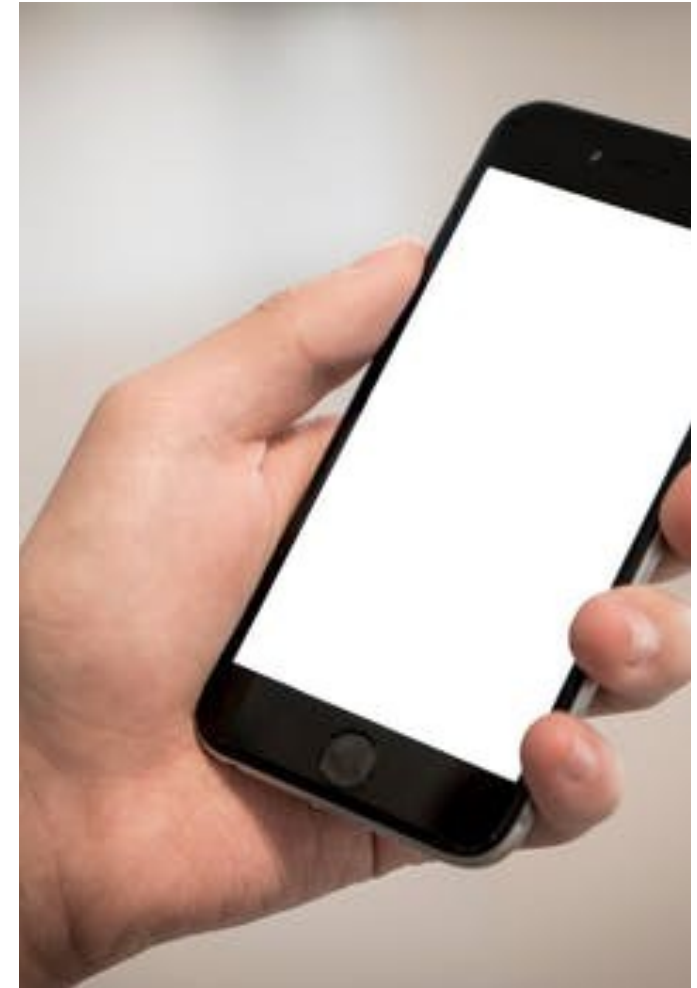
the parental controls on a device, get advice from [Internet Matters](#). Parents also need to talk to children about what is safe and what isn't and what they should do if they see or hear something that makes them worried or upset.

Moving up to a new school can present particular dangers. The new school is likely to be bigger and your child may well be making new friendships with children and families you don't know. Children will get more independence in school and this may also be reflected in what they do online; they may have a smartphone for the first time, or be allowed access to apps they weren't previously. Young people may be unaware about what the etiquette is on online gaming or social media leading to them falling out with their online friends; parents can assist young people in learning what are appropriate online behaviours.

Parents need to set clear expectations for children about their behaviour online in terms of what they are allowed to access, where they may use devices and for how long. For children at secondary school, parental controls are less important but talking about issues, especially for example about grooming and the sharing of naked images is essential. Parents also need to monitor the use of all devices, including phones and games consoles and support, educate and sanction children appropriately where they are not making good choices.

Schools often find that online apps can escalate issues that otherwise would have sorted themselves out, because the behaviour from school can continue into the evenings, weekends and holidays. While school can and will assist parents with managing children's behaviour online, ultimately it is up to the child and parents to take responsibility for this. Unlike in primary schools, most secondary schools have policies that do allow young people to carry phones in school. These are designed to protect children from having unwanted images taken, reduce online bullying and also so that young people are not distracted from their learning by social media, games or messaging.

It is important that parents work together with schools to educate and protect their children. Schools should have extensive programmes covering technical aspects of staying safe online such as using privacy settings and understanding security, but also helping children and young people to understand how their online lives will affect their friendships, romantic relationships and how they feel about themselves. Parental support is invaluable is getting these messages across to young people. Many children will talk to their parents if they are having problems online but if you are concerned that your child seems unhappy make sure school know about it as they may be able to help.



For more information see Internet Matters Back to School <https://www.internetmatters.org/start-school-safe-online/>

## What parents need to know about online grooming and sextortion

The NSPCC defines online sexual grooming as “a preparatory stage of sexual abuse. Grooming occurs when a known or unknown adult, or member of their peer group, uses online technology to communicate with a child or young person with the intention of encouraging or manipulating them to engage in sexual behaviour.” While historically the sexual abuse resulting from grooming took place face-to-face, increasingly this involves the sharing of naked imagery. A recent NSPCC survey of over 40,000 children and young people showed that, on average, nearly one child in every class had been sent a naked or semi-naked image by an adult, including those in primary school. Around half of these children and young people had sent a naked or semi-naked picture to an adult.

Of particular concern is the rise of young people livestreaming, i.e. broadcasting themselves or their friends live over the internet. Many platforms include the ability to livestream including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (via Periscope), Skype and TikTok (formerly Muscia.ly) There are significant risks involved in livestreaming which parents and young

people need to understand. Firstly, people behave differently online and may be prepared to engage in more risky behaviour from behind a screen and forget that other people can record the livestream to be reshown later. Users may be more in the moment and these moments will not be edited out of the final cut in a livestream. Viewers can often interact live with the broadcasters and encourage them with gifts or flattery to do things they would not otherwise do, for example removing clothing: often, this may happen as the result of a game and the young person is tricked into the behaviour. Research on livestreaming of this nature shows that the child is nearly always alone with their web cam in a bedroom when this type of abuse takes place.

Parents need to ensure that younger children cannot livestream without parental involvement and even then only to friends or family. They need to follow the basic guidelines given above in the Back to School section.

Older young people need to be aware that as well as possible sexual abuse, there is the possibility

that someone will try to sextort them. This involves the young person being blackmailed either for money or further imagery to try and prevent existing imagery being shared. Often, these crimes are committed by overseas-based organised crime groups.

Where grooming, sexual abuse or sextortion happens to a person under 18 years of age, there is usually a criminal offence that can be investigated by the police. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command recommends that if this happens to take the following actions:

- Contact the police
- Speak to your internet service provider for assistance
- Stop all communication with the criminal
- Do not pay any money
- Preserve evidence of what has happened

For more information

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/crime-threats/kidnap-and-extortion/sextortion>

