

e-Safety for Parents

Edition 8 - Xmas 2014



Christmas Roundup

Before writing this edition I put out an email to a few hundred schools and parents to ask what their most common concerns are, or where they would like further advice.

There was a lot of responses, but what I thought was interesting was that the large majority were all of a similar theme and mainly centred around use of social networks and also gaming.

So in this final issue for 2014 these are the

two areas that I'm going to concentrate on, and with Xmas looming just round the corner it seems a very apt opportunity to re-iterate some of the advice and guidance that has already been given out.

I hope you have a wonderful Christmas, and if there is anything you would like to see in 2015 contact your school or drop me a note on Facebook

Alan Mackenzie

Online Gaming

Gaming has come such a long way in a short period of time and we should never lose sight that gaming can be hugely beneficial for children. Games such as Minecraft, used in the right way, build on the creativity of children and young people and can be hugely educational. But it goes without saying that there are games out there which are hugely attractive, but are wholly inappropriate.

I travel all over the country talking to children, staff and parents and every place I go to there are the same concerns about particular games, especially those that are rated 18. Whilst not picking on Grand Theft Auto, it is the one that gets the most mentions closely followed by Call of Duty, and with the newest release of GTA V that has just hit the streets in time for Xmas it is likely that we may see issues increase.



So what's the problem? Well firstly we have to remember that age ratings on games, whether you buy them in the shops or download from the internet, are not recommendations, they are law. That law (PEGI) is in place in the UK for good reason, and that's because the content in some games is simply not appropriate for our children, particularly when it is violent and/or sexual in nature.

www.facebook.com/esafetyadviser



For adults this isn't an issue; you have the right to choose or not to choose whether to play games such as this, but as adults we also need to be making those decisions for our children, not allowing them to be making the decisions for us due to pressure that other children are playing them.



Don't get me wrong, I'm not on some moral crusade, my biggest (personal) issue is that I don't believe we have enough scientific research and evidence to understand what these types of games are doing to the brains of our children simply because the whole phenomenon is so new.

Many will argue that playing the likes of Call of Duty is simply the modern version of playing cowboys & indians from years ago and there may be an argument there. However when I was playing cowboys & indians I don't ever remember paying a prostitute for sex, having graphic sex with murmurings from the lady that would

make your toes curl, and then beating said lady up to get your money back. I don't remember torturing somebody with electric probes or water torture in order to extract information. Whilst there may be a big difference between what is happening in a game and what you do in real life, remember that children are acting this out in the game, they are the person carrying out those acts, it isn't like the TV where you are simply watching something. By the way, those previous references are to content in Grand Theft Auto.

The brain is such a complex thing and we know so little about it, but what we do know is that psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors, schools and social workers to name a few are seeing a significant increase in behavioural issues with children, not only re-enactments of what they are seeing/doing in games, but also the extraordinary language that is used, and violent, sexualised gaming is a significant part of that.

For a brief explanation of the adult nature of some games, click on the link below or type it into your browser. I can't repeat it within this newsletter due to the fact I have no control over who reads it, but beware, the language is VERY adult:

<http://goo.gl/73FxEI>



It's all well and good me talking about this, what's the advice?

Firstly, **games are not bad**, it's about choosing the right games that are appropriate for the age of our children.

With Christmas coming up, **be careful with those boxed sets**, look carefully to see what games are included. Look at the age rating, it is illegal for a shop to sell you content that is rated 18 if they know it is for a child.

Have you noticed any **behavioural changes** in your child? Could the games they are playing be a factor in this?

What games are they playing round their **friend's house**? This is usually one of the most common concerns for parents so it is worth talking to other parents about this.

Have you got **parental settings** set up correctly on the Playstation, Xbox, Wii or whatever device your children are using? This will prevent your children downloading or playing games that are inappropriate for their age. If you're not sure how to do it have a look on YouTube, there are tons of videos that walk you through the settings, and they're all easy. For example, you can search YouTube for, "How to set up parental controls on Playstation 4."

Similarly, if your child is getting on at you

to let them play a particular game, go onto YouTube and search on the name of the game. There will be lots of 'walkthroughs', which are basically parts of the game that are filmed for others to learn from. Very popular with children and young people to watch or make/upload these videos.



Time is an important factor. Try to balance online with offline activities. Also, it has been well documented that screentime before bed has a negative effect on sleep patterns for children and adults. No devices an hour before bedtime is a good rule to keep to.

If they're playing online, **do you know who they're talking to?** Adults want to play with other adults, not children, and many won't hold back on their use of choice language. Online gaming can also be a platform for predators to contact children.



Like it or loathe it, social media is here to stay. It has been blamed for many things but don't forget the most important aspect of internet safety is behaviour. Sometimes that's our own behaviour, sometimes it is the behaviour of others.

Social networking is all about - being social. How amazing is it that we can now talk so freely and easily with people from other countries with diverse cultures, connect with other like-minded professionals, collaborate across the seas on educational projects?

Different social networks allow for a variety of information sharing, for example apps such as Instagram and Snapchat allow for sharing of photographs, Twitter allows you to send an update, make a comment or ask a question in 140 characters, Vine allows for a few seconds of video, and Facebook just wants to do everything for everyone. All of these SN's rely on you having "friends" or "followers". In other words these are people that follow you so that they can read your updates and perhaps have a discussion or share items of interest.

It's against the law for under 13's

This is a myth; there is a law in the United States called COPPA (Children's Online Privacy and Protection Act) which, amongst other things says that it is against the law to collect (harvest) personal information from children under the age of 13 to use for targeted advertising. Because social networks are unable to prevent this, they simply make it policy (terms and conditions) that under-13's cannot have a profile. Of course, all a child has to do is put in a false date of birth in order to be able to sign up, there is no verification process!



Should I let my child use social networking?

That's not an easy decision. Remember that many social networks will have an age policy, so the first thing to do is to find out what the lower age limit is. Predominantly the lower age limit is 13 but some are higher. I don't recommend allowing an under-age user to have a social networking account, not least of which is because they can be opened up to all sorts of unsavoury content.

The trouble we have here is that many children under the age of 13 will want to be where their friends are, and many of those friends are using social networks, so you can't blame them for wanting to be there.



This presents parents with a dilemma. Do you allow it and keep it out in the open, or do you say no and run the risk of your child creating a profile on a social network behind your back? If the latter there is an increased level of risk, particularly if something goes wrong and your child is too afraid to come and talk to you. Or, do you say yes and therefore tell children that it's okay to flaunt the terms and conditions? This is a real moral dilemma. Added to this there is the issue that we can't wrap our children up in cotton wool to protect them because that simply doesn't work.



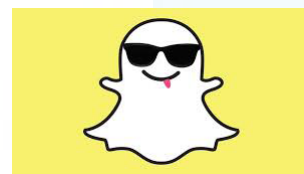
There's always an argument that children know more about technology than parents. Even if this is true for you, it's irrelevant. Remember, it's about behaviour. Children don't always understand what risk is or how to respond to risk; due to their inquisitive nature some children may be more risky with the things they do and who they talk to; and schools are having to deal with a significant amount of fallout by children due to inappropriate comments, misunderstandings and to some extent, bullying.

So what can we do?

Whilst the terms and conditions of each social network are absolute, there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all advice; all children are different as are parenting styles, and we have to be guided by our parental instincts and our moral and ethical principles, not by the pressure of the children and their friends.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm a huge supporter of social media, there is so much good that can be done but we rarely get to hear about that, we only tend to hear about the bad things. But we also have to understand that social media is one of those things that can bring out the worst in people (this is a subject called online disinhibition which is a bit too much to go into within this newsletter).

In the real world we eventually want our children to be streetwise, to know what risk is and how to respond to or manage risk. It's no different in the online world, and that building of resilience along with good education is the number one key factor.





Safe as Sam

To clarify some of the issues:

All social networks have minimum age requirements, mainly 13. See here for more information:

<https://www.common sense media.org/app-reviews>

There is an extraordinary amount of inappropriate content for children.

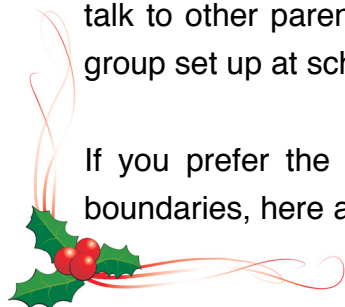
Children are social, as they are curious. This could put them at increased risk. However, risk is not always a bad thing, it increases resilience and reduces the potential for harm (streetwise).

Do we just say “No” and run the risk that they will create profiles without you knowing? This is the biggest risk of all, if something goes wrong who do they turn to?

Or do we say “Yes” but with very strict boundaries (dependent on their age) so that parents can empower their children with the safe and appropriate use? Don’t forget, schools are very limited by what they can do here as they must adhere to terms and conditions, so the parental aspect is fundamental.

If you prefer the former option, just say “No”, there are things that you can do. Children need to be introduced to social media eventually, so look for age-appropriate apps such as **Kuddle** which is a great way to get them started. Also talk to other parents or try to get a discussion group set up at school.

If you prefer the latter option, “Yes” but with boundaries, here are some thoughts:



Make very clear to your child that there is a significant amount of trust involved. If that trust is broken have clear sanctions in place.

Be very clear with the boundaries: no sharing personal information, no talking to strangers, no inappropriate comments or activities that may upset others.

Set the security and privacy settings. Better still get your child to show you, that gives you some assurance that they know what they are doing. Ensure they know how to **BLOCK** and **REPORT**.

Know their password and audit their use, this could be daily or weekly as your instincts tell you.

Don’t put the pressure on the school to sort things out. Work with them.

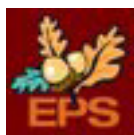
Most important of all, keep an open dialogue. They must know that they can come and talk to you if something goes wrong.

If you are concerned about your child and their mobile device use, see here (note: I am not affiliated with this company):

<https://www.mobileguardian.com>



Great Links



Eastlands Primary School created a couple of fantastic, award winning videos called, “The Anti-Social Network,” and, “Not Such a Sweet Tweet.” Both are really worth watching. Go to their website here (e-Safety menu):

<http://www.eastlandsprimaryschool.co.uk/>

Lots of fantastic advice for parents and carers of children of all ages from Childnet. There is also lots of advice and guidance for setting up parental controls on games consoles, advice for mobile phones etc. here:



<http://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers>



A huge resource for parents that lets you find out things like age-ratings, advice for particular apps that children are using, minimum ages, content and so much more:

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

Many broadband providers give you access to parental controls (internet filters). These are not a replacement for good education and parental guidance, but can help in some circumstances:



<http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers/parental-controls>



One of the most useful resources for parents. Do you need to find out how to set parental controls? Need to see what that game is all about that your child keeps asking you for? How about setting privacy and security settings on social media apps, or just finding out what those apps can do and why they're so popular? YouTube is fantastic for all of this. While you're at it, find out how to use YouTube Safety Mode (it's at the bottom of every YouTube page):

<https://www.youtube.com/>





**Have a wonderful
Christmas.**

See you in 2015

