Internet Safety Is As Easy As Crossing The Road.

The world around us is changing more rapidly than at any time in human history and one of the fastest areas of change is wireless technology. We would guess that there is not a single School family that does not have a number of different wireless technologies in their homes, and very few whose children do not have access to one or more of these devices:

i-Pad	Smartphone	Laptop Computer	Tablet Computer
Internet enabled TV	i-Pod (with wifi)	Camera (with wifi)	Kindle
Playstation	X-Box	Wii	BluRay player (wifi)

There are a lot of excellent reasons why children should be using and exploring the internet:

- information;
- learning;
- communicating with friends and family;
- playing games;
- reading news to name but a few.

One issue for us, as adults, is that we are not always fully familiar with the rules and etiquette of the on-line world and whilst we can manage it in our daily lives, we are doing this through our experiences in the real world. For many of our children, they do not have the benefit of this experience, and so are learning, very quickly, how to interact in cyberspace.

A bit like crossing the road, this can be a dangerous activity. Clearly we would not expect our children to cross the road without first showing and explaining the dangers, then showing and modelling best behaviour and best practise. We point out safe areas whilst highlighting situations that need to be avoided. We clearly explain that there are a number of routes that can be taken that will reduce the risk of danger, though remind them that the need for vigilance must remain. In short, we hold their hands to ensure that they are safe and over time we give them the tools they need to survive. Only when we are happy that they have mastered these, do we then, rather reluctantly, allow them to explore by themselves.

Parenting on-line need not be that much different from parenting in the real world. It involves knowing what your child is doing and with whom. Vetting the places that they go to, monitoring their friends and ensuring that they are behaving in an appropriate manner. Whilst in the real world mistakes can be over looked or even missed; in the on-line community these mistakes are open for all and sundry to see, review and examine. You only need to take a look at any gossip column to discover the consequences of a stray text message or photograph.

Increasingly in school we are dealing with a range of friendship issues that develop within the on-line community. In many respects these are not very different from the issues that we deal with on a day to day basis. As human beings, we all have the capacity to be moody, mean to our friends and even sometimes down-right rude. We try to manage these situations in school in a consolatory manner so that all parties are aware of the issues and are happy with the resolution – very often just a simple smile and shake of the hands. In our experience, issues regarding social media and on-line content tend to happen away from the parental watch. A simple solution that we, as a school, recommend, is that children should only have access to on-line activities (such as internet, chat rooms, messenger services, multi-player on-line games etc.) on internet enabled devices, that are

age appropriate, when in the family space with a responsible adult nearby, who has full access to all communications.

Until you trust your child's judgement in the on-line world, it would be advisable to restrict their access to websites that you are familiar with, manage their on-line friendships to those people whom you know and review their communications on a regular basis. This is not a trust issue; it is simply making sure that your child is learning the correct way to interact in cyberspace and not spending time in parts of the internet that are not suited to their age. Please remind your child to think before they send or share. They need to ask themselves – would I say this in front of the Headteacher or my parents? If not, perhaps it is best left unsaid.

Below is some additional advice from the **Thinkuknow website** (https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/), managed by CEOP (Child Exploitation and On-line Protection Agency.

- **Talk to your child about what they're up to online**. Be a part of their online life; involve the whole family and show an interest. Find out what sites they visit and what they love about them, if they know you understand they are more likely to come to you if they have any problems.
- **Watch Thinkuknow films and cartoons with your child**. The **Thinkuknow site** (https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/) has films, games and advice for children from five all the way to 16.
- **Encourage your child to go online and explore!** There is a wealth of age-appropriate sites online for your children. Encourage them to use sites which are fun, educational and that will help them to develop online skills.
- **Keep up-to-date with your child's development online**. Children grow up fast and they will be growing in confidence and learning new skills daily. It's important that as your child learns more, so do you.
- **Set boundaries in the online world just as you would in the real world**. Think about what they might see, what they share, who they talk to and how long they spend online. It is important to discuss boundaries at a young age to develop the tools and skills children need to enjoy their time online.
- **Keep all equipment that connects to the internet in a family space**. For children of this age, it is important to keep internet use in family areas so you can see the sites your child is using and be there for them if they stumble across something they don't want to see.
- **Know what connects to the internet and how**. Nowadays even the TV connects to the internet. Make sure you're aware of which devices that your child uses connect to the internet, such as their phone or games console. Also, find out how they are accessing the internet – is it your connection, or a neighbour's wifi? This will affect whether the safety settings you set are being applied.
- **Use parental controls on devices that link to the internet, such as the TV, laptops, computers, games consoles and mobile phones**. Parental controls are not just about locking and blocking, they are a tool to help you set appropriate boundaries as your child grows and develops. They are not the answer to your child's online safety, but they are a good start and they are not as difficult to install as you might think. Service providers are working hard to make them simple, effective and user friendly. **Find your service provider and learn how to set your controls**