



BEECHEN CLIFF

Online Safety Advice for Parents during Lockdown

As we have all experienced over the past six weeks, more and more aspects of our daily lives are moving online. Internet usage is up 50% in some parts of the world following the spread of COVID-19 and all of our children's learning experiences are being reshaped by the sudden introduction of remote learning.

In addition, online games, social media and video chat programs are providing opportunities for us all to connect with and play with our friends, parents and relatives whilst in isolation, an important factor in trying to maintain our mental health during these uncertain times.

More than ever, it is vital that we understand how to keep our children safe online; only this week an interview with the NSPCC's Head of Child Safety Online Policy outlined the risks to our children:

"We have heard the voices of lonely, vulnerable children and they told us how they are at greater risk of online abuse."

"What is particularly concerning now is that many more young people are likely to be understandably feeling isolated and anxious during this lockdown and, like everyone, are increasingly using social media to interact with friends and family."

The coronavirus pandemic has brewed the perfect storm for abusers to exploit existing platform weakness and groom children".

Although we will all have experienced the feeling of isolation, some children may be feeling more isolated than others. This in turn may lead some of them to more daring online behaviour or more adventurous connections. Both younger children and teenagers can be prone to this during the confinement period, making them more vulnerable to being targeted and falling victim to grooming, cyberbullying, sextortion and other online risks.

Here are 5 tips to help keep your child safe online, particularly during this period of lockdown:

1. Keep them safe with open communication

Have an honest dialogue with your children about who they communicate with and how. Make sure they understand the value of kind and supportive interactions and that mean, discriminatory or inappropriate contact is never acceptable. If your children experiences any of these, encourage them to tell you or a trusted adult immediately. Be alert if your child appears to be upset or secretive with online activities or if they are experiencing cyberbullying. Work with your child to establish rules on how, when and where devices can be used.

2. Use technology to protect them

Check that your children's device(s) is running the latest software and antivirus programs, and that privacy settings are on. Keep webcams covered when not in use. For younger children, tools such as parental controls, including safe search, can help keep online experiences positive.

3. Spend time with them online

Create opportunities for your child to have safe and positive online interactions with friends, family and you. Connecting with others is more important than ever at the moment and this can be an excellent opportunity for you to model kindness and empathy in your "virtual interactions". Help your child recognize and avoid misinformation and age-inappropriate content that may increase anxiety about the COVID-19 virus.

4. Encourage healthy online habits

Promote, monitor and model good behaviour online and on video calls. Encourage your children to be kind and respectful to classmates, to be mindful of what clothes they wear and to avoid joining video calls from a bedroom.

5. Let them have fun and express themselves

Spending time at home can be a great opportunity for your children to use their voices online to share their views and support those in need during this crisis.

Further Advice

There are an almost overwhelming number of places to look for advice, here are links provided by the government should you wish to find out more:

- [Thinkuknow](#) by National Crime Agency-CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) provides resources for parents and carers and children of all ages to help keep children safe online
- [Childnet](#) has developed [guidance for parents and carers](#) to begin a conversation about online safety, as well as [guidance on keeping under-fives safe online](#)
- [Parent Info](#) is a collaboration between Parent Zone and NCA-CEOP, providing support and guidance for parents and carers related to the digital world from leading experts and organisations
- NSPCC has [guidance for parents and carers](#) to help keep children safe online
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) provides tips and advice for parents and carers to keep children safe online - you can also [report any harmful content found online through the UK Safer Internet Centre](#)
- The BBC's Own It app helps young people new to social media manage their well-being, whilst empowering children to make smart choices, and helping them to lead a positive life online. <https://www.bbc.com/ownit/take-control/own-it-app>

As a final point, remember to balance online recreation with offline activities, including time outside, if possible. Keep safe, both on and offline.

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