

“Greg is 10, the 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.”

New Technology, Old Problem

The internet is a wonderful and quick way for young people to find information, help them study, keep in contact with friends, and even meet new ones.

Unfortunately the internet is also an easy tool for child abuse.

Paedophiles use chat rooms to become friendly with children or young people, often by pretending to be another child.

Other risks include people who want to get personal information such as names, addresses or telephone numbers for acts of fraud.

Using the internet too much can also lead to an unhealthy lifestyle, and can become addictive.



Keep it safe:

Keep an eye on what's going on by keeping the computer in a family room, rather than in a bedroom. Learn how to use a computer, access internet sites and try out a chat room for yourself, so you understand what can happen. Check out which sites your children are visiting to see if they are acceptable.

Ask other parents to tell you about good chat rooms or websites for your child. Look for sites that monitor messages in chat rooms and those which include clear guidelines for use, child-friendly advice, warnings, and how to report concerns.

You can buy software filters which block access to websites with a sexual content. However, these don't make the internet totally safe, so it's still much better for you to take an active interest in the sites your child is browsing.

Set ground rules:

- Limit the amount of time your child spends on the internet - and stick to it.
- Discuss the kind of websites they can visit, which are suitable for their age.
- Make it clear to your child that they must never give out their real name, address, home or mobile phone numbers, or any other personal details, or post photos of themselves on the internet.



It's important that your child understands why there need to be rules. Explain that because they can't see or hear the people they are chatting to on the internet, they may not always be who they seem. Paedophiles gain the trust of young people on the internet; remind your teenager that strangers on the internet can be just as dangerous as strangers on the street.

If your teenager keeps it secret when they are using the computer, if you notice changes in how they act, problems sleeping or changes in routine or if they are suddenly asking questions about sexual matters, you could look into whether their internet use has anything to do with it.

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Warning Signs:

Keeping it secret when using the internet, changes in how they act, unusual sexual questions, leaving clues (such as emails) that they are having chats with others which seem sexual or you are not comfortable with, problems at school or not telling you where they are going or who they are meeting.



Action:

Set up and stick to your internet - use ground rules. Learn all you can about the internet and how to use it yourself so you can understand what your child is viewing and whether it is suitable.



What to say:

Discuss with your teenager the dangers of chat rooms and looking at unsuitable websites. Make sure they know that any personal information, including their real name, should not be shared with anyone else. Be open-minded about the teen-websites they are viewing, but let them know that if they are worried about anything they can see or read on the internet, they can ask you about it.



Prevention:

Keep the computer in a family room, with the monitor facing outwards, so you can always see what is on screen. Discuss which websites your child is looking at and take a look for yourself. Make sure your teenager is aware of the dangers.

Contacts:

999 in an emergency

NSPCC: 0808 800 5000 www.nspcc.org.uk

Childline: 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP): 0870 000 3344 www.ceop.police.uk

Stop It Now!: 0808 1000 900 www.stopitnow.org.uk

Internet Watch Foundation: www.iwf.org.uk

www.kidsmart.org.uk

www.chatdanger.com