

Safer on the Internet

by Sue Thomas - Champion for Children - Vast Children & Families Team

February 9th was European Safer on the Internet Day. Safety Online is an issue that affects us all. Sometimes we just don't realise how vulnerable the internet is to misuse.

Benefits of the internet

The internet can provide children and adults alike with a world of exciting opportunities. It offers:

- Programmes and games that develop skills and interactions and improve learning.
- Research information for school projects and business.
- The opportunity to meet and communicate with people from all across the world.
- The opportunity to share resources and ideas with people that have the same interests
- Shopping for just about anything without leaving your computer.

The internet uses written work, video, sound, music, sound effects all by the single click of a 'mouse' which opens up whole new worlds. The problem is that the 'new worlds' are open to the good and not so good alike. We have to ensure that our children and young people are safe as they take these journeys into the world of cyber space.

These are just some of the ways our children and young people can get 'online' today.

Challenges of the Internet

The increase in social networking sites such as Facebook, Beebo and others, give adults and young people alike a way to keep in touch 24/7. The security settings can be complex and in the excitement and fun of chatting to friends and relatives across the world, sometimes we forget that others can see what we are doing.

- We all have a duty to protect children and vulnerable adults but we are also susceptible to risks
- Did you ever think that people that don't like you and even complete strangers, could actually access your Facebook, Live Journal or MySpace site if you do not use the correct settings for security?
- Despite age restrictions on some sites, some parents still allow their children to use them.
- Do you realise that when you show your profile including your date of birth, fraudsters have most of the information they need to commit identity theft. If your grandad, ladies, is on your networking site, they have your maiden name too! Scary isn't it!

We need to make sure we are aware of the ways our children are using the internet. Keep computers in public rooms, check regularly and seek help. The links below offer help and support.

A word or two of caution

- Be careful what information you give out...
- Be careful who you agree to accept...
- Think through who you want to chat to...
- Know where to go for help...
- Children and young people are more vulnerable to strangers online than in the street. Do you know who they are talking to? Are you sure?
- Use the Report Abuse buttons.

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Resources and information

- www.safeguardingchildren.stoke.gov.uk
- www.childnet-int.org
- www.childline.org.uk
- www.getsafeonline.org
- www.getnetwise.org
- www.Parentchannel.tv
- www.bullying.co.uk
- www.ceop.gov.uk
- www.thinkuknow.co.uk
- www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- www.iwf.org.uk
- www.thinkuknow.com

For further information about European Safer on the Internet Day please visit www.thinkuknow.co.uk/saferinternetdayuk. To contact Sue Thomas please call 01782 683080 or email sue@vast.org.uk

How children may access the internet.

