

Is your child safe on the internet?

There are increasing numbers of parents who have contacted the school concerned that their children seem to be using the internet a lot for 'MSN' or to use social networking sites like 'BEBO' or 'MySpace'. The concerns seem to be coming from the fact that parents don't know what their children are doing on the internet, or do not know what these social networking sites do.

"If you struggle to keep up with your child's internet activities, you're not alone. A 2006 survey for children's charity NCH and Tesco Telecoms found that two-thirds of parents couldn't define a 'blog' - a web diary or notebook that invites comment from strangers on the net." BBC Parenting, bbc.co.uk/parenting

For young people, having your own 'social networking' space is the current 'cool' thing to have, but both parents and pupils aren't always aware of the risks they face when using sites like 'MySpace' or 'BEBO'. One of the rules that you may not be aware of is the minimum age for the sites: 13 for signing up to 'BEBO' and 14 for 'MySpace'. Also it is worth remembering that these are public spaces which anyone can view and use the information how they please. These sites have their own guidance, available at the links below:

<http://www.bebo.com/SafetyTips.jsp>

<http://www.myspace.com/Modules/Common/Pages/SafetyTips.aspx>

Not only are people's personal details being taken and used, but also these sites are unfortunately a place that can attract people (who log on using false names and identities) who's aim is to target children, and can access photos, full names, addresses, school name, friend's names and communicate/chat to children without restrictions.

The first piece of advice would be to talk to your children about their use of the Internet. Beyond that, here are a few tips that will help you to keep your children safe online.

Parents' tips

Make sure your computer is safe:

- Do you have the most recent updates for your software?
- Do you have a working firewall?
- Do you have antivirus software and is it up-to-date?
- Do you have anti-spyware software installed and is it up-to-date?

Make sure your children are safe:

- Have your computer in a 'public' space (i.e. not in their bedroom)

- Monitor your children's use of the internet using the 'History' option on their web browser
- Enable content filters on regular search engines e.g. Google 'SafeSearch'.
- Use any parental controls that your ISP (Internet Service Provider) offers

Give your children advice:

- Never give out your full name or address
- Use a fake name where possible
- Do not give out your phone number
- Don't give out any passwords or bank details
- Hide your 'profile' (only allow your friends to see it)
- Do not put names next to photos on your profile

More information from:

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

Thinkuknow has a report abuse button that can be clicked by an adult or a child if they suspect they, or another child is in danger.

<http://www.getsafeonline.gov.uk> (government-run site)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/your_kids/safety_internet.shtml

<http://www.nch.org.uk/information/index.php?i=134>

Parent Feedback on this topic

New computers have a "report abuse" button, if families have an old one like mine, parents could try putting the "report abuse" link from the thinkuknow website on to their links tab, via favourites and link file. This gives youngsters the facility to immediately contact someone 24 hours a day.

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