

Internet and Online Safety: Practice Guidance

Purpose and Aims

This guidance has been designed to provide a foster carers with a comprehensive insight into the key considerations when managing on-line safety; and aims to equip carers with the knowledge and tools to confidently navigate the on-line space in order to safely care for children looked after in an all prevalent digital world.

In order to keep carers in touch with the most up-to-date knowledge, the guide has used links to external websites which direct you to key organisations that produce advice, guidance and ‘top-tips’ in accordance with regularly revised research and knowledge which will enable you to keep your finger on the pulse.

With safer caring at the forefront of your responsibilities as foster carers, the guide places on-line safety in this context first and foremost; and aligns this with the care planning process and the principles of safety planning. It looks at how you will be supported, within our statutory framework at West Sussex County Council, moving on to address key areas relating to digital safety, and access to the information which will support you with these

Whilst the guide provides you with a comprehensive overview, it has been set out with a contents page that will enable to you to select a particular issue or topic area and find the information that you need. It endeavours to support you so that you have the relevant information at hand when you need it.

Contents

Introduction.....	<i>page 3</i>
Safer Caring for Foster Carers.....	<i>page 4</i>
General Guidelines for Foster Carers – On-Line Safety.....	<i>page 4</i>
Planning (Care Plan, Safety Plan, Safer Caring Plan)	<i>page 4&5</i>
On-going Support for Foster Carers.....	<i>page 6</i>
Personal Responsibilities as a Foster Carer.....	<i>page 6,7,8</i>
- Taking the Lead.....	<i>page 7</i>
- Protecting Data & Information.....	<i>page 7</i>
- Social Media & Social Networking.....	<i>page 7&8</i>
Safely Caring for a child or young person navigating the on-line space.....	<i>page 8</i>
- Becoming Aware: Risks and Support.....	<i>page 8</i>
- Thinkuknow.....	<i>page 8</i>

- UK Safer Internet Centre.....*page 9*
- Balancing Screen Time..... *page 9&10*
- Parental Controls..... *page 10*
- Sites, Apps, In-App Purchases and Premium Rate Content..... *page 11*
- Gaming and Live Streaming.....*page 11&12*
- Location Services..... *page 12&13*
- Internet Connected Devices..... *page 13*
- Social Media..... *page 14*
- Cyberbullying.....*pages 14 & 15*
- Inappropriate, Explicit Content, Sexting.....*pages 15 & 16*
- On-Line Grooming.....*pages 16 & 17*
- On-Line Pornography.....*pages 17 & 18*

Children with Special Educational Needs.....*page 18*

Unaccompanied and Asylum Seeking Children.....*page 18*

The Importance of Conversation.....*pages 18 & 19*

A Family Agreement.....*page 19*

Reporting Sexual Exploitation or Grooming.....*page 20*

Other Sources of Helpful Information.....*page 20*

Appendix 1.....*page 21*

Introduction

The internet and social networking sites can be a positive and hugely beneficial resource for children and young people; enabling them to learn, connect, communicate, gain support and explore their creativity. On-line technology and social media are undeniably central to the lives of children and young people today and accessibility is far reaching. Computers, laptops, tablets, games consoles, televisions, mobile phones, and portable audio players such as Ipods all have this in-built function. Children can widely access these at home, or through school, libraries and friends.

The following *Parents Guide to Technology* by UK Safer Internet Centre provides advice about the various devices available to children and young people today and answers commonly asked questions.

<https://www.childnet.com/resources/a-parents-guide-to-technology>

Due to the fast paced and ever-changing nature of the on-line world it is an essential that, as far as possible, foster carers have a detailed up-to-date knowledge of the presenting issues. Children and young people face inevitable risks when they are engaging on-line and need protection from the associated dangers.

The considerations for children and young people looked after are even greater because of their added vulnerabilities, which extend these risks and introduce others. Being able to effectively connect with children and young people's experiences in a way that is one 'step-ahead' is therefore integral for foster carers/carers, in order to keep children and young people safe on-line and minimise opportunities that may place these vulnerable children in the way of harm.

Safer Caring for Foster Carers

Foster carers have a really important role in keeping looked after children and young people safe. Where *Delegated Authority* is in place, foster carers are enabled to take on everyday responsibility for looked after children and young people, which includes making day-to-day decisions for them. Foster carers therefore have to consistently balance risk in these decisions, as well as in the decisions that they make for themselves and their birth family.

Safer caring is all about being "risk-sensible", not risk-averse. It is about foster carers working in partnership with children and young people, their parents wherever possible, and the key facets for social workers to develop the right safer caring plan for that child; and day-to-day, understanding and balancing the risks involved in a particular activity or decision, rather than applying a set of rules in all circumstances. It is about making well thought through decisions. (Fostering Network, Safer Caring in a digital world 2017)

General Safer Caring Guidelines for Foster Carers when Managing On-Line Safety

First and foremost, if a foster carer has any worries or concerns relating to a child or young person's use of the internet or needs additional advice, they should speak to their supervising social worker and the child or young person's social worker at the earliest possible opportunity.

There are a number of practical steps foster carers can take to ensure that devices and/or internet access by Children and Young People is as safe as possible:

- If a child has access to a computer or laptop at home, ensure that this is positioned in a central place in the home and that it is facing outwards so that it can be easily viewed or monitored.
- Ensure that parental or safety controls have been set up on all devices. Please see page 10 in this guidance for support on how to do this.
- Acknowledge that Children and Young People in foster care who have experienced past trauma or low self-esteem can be more vulnerable to the dangers associated with the internet.
- Try to understand what a Child or Young Person is doing online through becoming involved in their sessions and have conversations with them about their use of the internet and social media. Do not be afraid to connect with a child or young person by asking them for help in understanding new applications and the language used.
- Regularly check the devices history and sites visited wherever possible.
- Develop a family agreement which is specific to the family or individual child or young person (this can be incorporated into the Safer Caring Plan). For more information about this please see page 20.
- Where required obtain parental/social worker consent for allowing children or young people to use social networking sites (see care planning section pages 4 & 5).
- Do not encourage the use of webcams.
- **Never allow a child or young person to meet anyone they have met online.** If you become aware of any arrangement, contact the child or young person's social worker immediately. This may also require a discussion with the police.

Please note: it is important to record any worries, identified patterns of internet use; or any new information about a child or young person's engagement with the on-line space that falls outside of prior agreements, in your foster carer diary recording sheets.

Planning

Meetings about the Care Plan and Placement Plan/Agreement should fully consider the child or young person's use of the internet and social networking sites. As part of the team around the child or young person, foster carers are not alone in making key decisions regarding any specific safeguarding issues. Children's social workers and supervising social workers will have an essential role in making these important decisions; taking into consideration any child's unique or individual circumstances. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for the child/ young person will have scrutiny over the overall case and journey of the child. Factors such as a child's previous experiences of boundary setting, role modelling and general engagement and interest from birth parents or family members about their social and on-line activities will all play a significant part in assessing risk; as will a child or young person's emotional development, self-esteem, mental and emotional well-being and their personal capacity to understand risk. The overall impact of adversity and trauma inherently makes them more vulnerable than their peers.

A child's Care Plan and relevant discussions at a Placement Agreement Meeting should inform the individual Safer-Caring Plan that is put in place for that child or young person in his or her respective placement. Supervising social workers have a key role in supporting foster carers to complete this plan; which should be underpinned by the Safety Plan that has been put in place for the child by his or her social worker.

When assessing risk or potential safeguarding issues for a child or young person looked after, it is worth considering the following areas:-

- Are the details of the child or young person's placement kept confidential? What's the likelihood of birth family members tracing the child or young person if this is the case?
- Is there any previous experience of birth family members actively trying to trace or contact children looked after via the on-line space?
- Are there specific risk-taking behaviours that have historically been demonstrated by birth family members that may cause harm or danger to the child in placement?
- What do we know about a child or young person's previous or historical use of the on-line space, relevant to risk, vulnerability and harm? E.g. access to inappropriate material, developing relationships with unknown people on-line that might pose a risk?
- What are the agreements regarding the supervision of a child or young person's on-line activity? What entitlements does a foster carer have under delegated authority to check a child or young person's phone? What is the view about you, as a foster care, becoming friends with a child or young person on their social networking sites? (This should be addressed at the Placement Agreement Meeting and written into the Safer Care Plan.

The Safer Care Plan, Guidance Notes and 'What if Safety Plan' can all be found by following the link below:

<https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/westsussex/guidance.html>

On-Going Support to Foster Carers

In addition to this guidance, foster carers can expect on-going support in relation to digital and on-line safety through training and on-going supervision; care plan or placement plan review meetings; review of contact arrangements and through safer caring plans.

The on-line safety aspect of a child or young person's plan in all regards will need to be reviewed, and revised, in response to any emerging issues. **It is important that foster carers discuss any identified worries and concerns with the team around the child (child's social worker, supervising social worker, IRO) at the earliest possible opportunity in order to ensure that these arrangements are revised in 'real-time' and safeguard the child or young person.**

What are my personal responsibilities as a Foster Carer?



Taking the Lead

A key consideration when thinking about on-line safety for children and young people looked after is the principal of how carers approach their own 'cyber security' (a concept referred to by the Fostering Network 2017) and that of their family. There are many things to navigate in the on-line space; and if you take the lead in developing your own understanding, you will be able to support a child or young person more effectively and provide good role-modelling.

Protecting Your Data, Your Personal Information and Your Identity

Without the right protection in place, your electronic devices could be vulnerable to cyber-crime or on-line safety risks:-

- A device becoming infected with a virus or malware, losing important data and documents or crashing. In some cases your computer can be rendered unusable.
- Gaining access to personal information which could leave you open to fraud.
- Phishing or internet scams
- Cyberstalking including; defamation, threats, harassment and identity theft.
- Obscene or offensive content, which could manifest through pop-ups or unsuspecting links.

Or, they could potentially be misused by someone in the household (Eilleen Fursland 2012) through:

- Accessing confidential information.

- Downloading inappropriate materials
- Giving information out about where you will be at a particular time i.e. through location settings, updating social media posts or through instant messaging.

Not all of these are illegal activities, but either way they can have significant implications. It is therefore important that Foster Carers and other household members ensure that they use appropriate caution and are aware of what their devices are being used for. It is important to use strong and secure passwords, endeavour to have unique and individual passwords for each on-line activity that requires it; and to keep passwords private and safe. Warn family to be cautious about what they click on and to be mindful of identity theft. Install and regularly update anti-virus software. Where you have shared devices, make sure you log out of websites or apps after using them.

There are a number of steps you can take as carers however to minimise these risks and put safeguarding measures in place. Please see the following links for suggestions:

<https://uk.norton.com/internetsecurity-how-to-8-ways-to-protect-your-private-information-online.html>

<https://uk.norton.com/internetsecurity-how-to-ten-ways-to-keep-your-data-private.html>

Social Media and Social Networking

When using social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram or Pinterest think carefully about the possible ramifications for yourself or any children and young people in placement. Be mindful that family members linked to the child or young person may be able to identify yourself or a family member and learn information about you. Social networking sites will have privacy settings which enable you to protect your identity and information.

<https://www.facebook.com/help/325807937506242>

<https://help.instagram.com/196883487377501>

It is also important to be considered about the things that you post. Have these discussions with your household family members, as well as wider family and friends who may be tempted to tag you in a post.

Part of protecting your identity as a Foster Carer is not sharing this information publicly on social media sites. **Carers should equally never post online information or photographs of the children and young people they look after.** Using social media/networking sites as foster carers carries the risk that information about a child or young person, their home, or their location might inadvertently be revealed and, therein, breach the mandatory requirement of maintaining confidentiality; or create serious safeguarding risks.

It is essential that foster carers should never make links with a child or young person's birth parents, or other family members of the child or young person. Talk to your own children about the concept of 'friending' other people and the respective implications. This is particularly relevant in

relation to becoming friends with a looked after child or young person on social media sites (in placement or if they have moved on), because of the far-reaching nature of social networking communities the information that is shared such as photographs and 'tagged' posts. It is essential that fostering households have agreements in place, and clear expectations with all family members about managing these risks.

How can I safely care for a child or young person navigating the on-line space?



Becoming Aware: Knowing the On-Line Risks and Where You Can Go for Support

Understanding the on-line world can feel vast and overwhelming. Foster Carers will each have their own degree of knowledge about these issues, the extent of which will vary from household to household. Some perceived risks may feel entirely obvious, others too far removed. Different things will be relevant to children of different ages, stages, level of comprehension and understanding, and the pace at which things change may also create a sense of uncertainty. You may, at times, feel that children and young people have better skills than you do.

However, with the high level of importance attached to safeguarding the welfare of children and young people in the digital world, there are a range of helpful and informative resources which offer good support, detailed information and safety tips to carers, children and young people alike.

Thinkuknow is the education programme from NCA-Neop, an organisation which protects children both on-line and off-line. The following link takes you to their homepage where you will find six websites for advice about staying safe; categorised by age and individual i.e. parent, carer or child. The website uses an array of animations to engage younger children about the dangers of the digital and on-line world.

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

Note: This is government endorsed website in conjunction with Child Exploitation and Protection Centre and is classed as a formal education programme. It is therefore a highly valid resource and place to go for information.

The UK Safer Internet Centre highlights that the specific and more detailed risks for children and young people can be grouped in to four key categories:-

- **Conduct** – this relates to the principal of 'on-line anonymity' and privacy; the type of information that children and young people share and how much this information reveals

about them; the digital footprint this leaves behind and the impact of this information and how it can be used by others.

- **Content** – *this relates to the suitability and reliability of information that can be available to children and its potentially harmful nature.*
- **Contact** – *this relates to the potential for children to experience bullying or grooming on-line (the added consideration for children looked after relating to contact from birth family members has been referenced earlier) and the importance of reporting.*
- **Commercialism** – *this draws attention to the hidden costs and advertising in apps, games, and websites that children and young people are likely to be unaware of.*

For more detailed information regarding the nature of these categories provided by the UK Safer Internet Centre, and for information specific to Foster Carers, please see the links below:

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/what-are-issues>

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/foster-carers-and-adoptive-parents>

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/resources-parents-and-carers>

The guidance will now look at particular considerations that fall under each of these headings providing an overview of each, with more detailed information through the use of links and signposting. It has been ordered by 'practical application or steps' through to the wider risks that children and young people are likely to be vulnerable to (and advice for management of these risks), particularly without the former practical applications being applied.

Balancing Screen Time



This is the amount of time a child or young person spends on a device. When balancing what is 'healthy' screen time the *Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH)* suggest that the focus here should be upon ensuring that the time spent on devices should not replace sleep, exercise and family time.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/screen-time-boundaries>

As well as more information about the research undertaken by the RCPCH, you will also be able to find useful hints and tips to help children of different ages manage their screen time if you access the link above.

Parental Controls



The aim of parental controls is to protect children from inappropriate content on-line. These can be set up in various ways, a combination of which will offer increased protection.

The options are:-

- Through your internet provider – for any device that is connected to your home WiFi.
- Through your mobile operator – who can enable restrictions for anyone under the age of 18. Many are set up automatically.
- Directly through a device – restrictions can be placed on screen time, in-app purchases, access to websites and to disable location functions. One example is the **Family Sharing** function on apple devices.
- Website and App settings – Many sites will have a parental control feature in the settings function i.e. BBC iPlayer and YouTube, to help restrict access to inappropriate material.

It is important to note that parental controls from your internet provider on your home WiFi will not cover the use of 3G or 4G at home, nor will they offer protection if a child visits another person's home. This is where a combination of parental control functions will come in handy, as well as discussions with a child or young person about the potential risks on-line and relevant rules or expectations in all cases. Talking openly and honestly with a child or young person will help to create trust and safety particularly if a child or young person does encounter something inappropriate and they need to talk with you about it.

More detailed information about parental controls can be found at the following:-

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/parental-controls>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls/>

Knowing how to set these up on each individual device, platform or site might feel complicated and confusing, which has the potential to prohibit people from taking this important step. Internet matters has produced an excellent resource with detailed step by step guides about how to approach this from all angles. Their aim is to help people overcome feelings of uncertainty and break down barriers.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>

[Sites, Apps and In-App Purchases and Premium Rate Content](#)



It is important to monitor what a child or young person is downloading on their devices and what sites they are accessing in order to determine their suitability. Apps are extremely popular with children as they are 'fashionable' to have and 'personalise' their devices with games or topics of interest; or provide a short-cut to things of interest such as social networking sites. They are easy to access through the *Apple Store* or *Google Play*.

Many apps are free to download, and features can be used, or games can be played for free up to a certain point. However, in order to progress further or use additional features payment is very often asked for. Children and young people can easily click on 'pay and continue' without realising the implications.

The following information by Childnet International (in collaboration with UK Safer Internet Centre) looks more at the In-App Purchases and Premium Rate Content and offers tips and advice on how to help children and young people avoid '*clicking before they think*'.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/premium-rate-content-and-in-app-purchases>

The rate at which Apps are generated and grow in popularity is exceptionally fast paced. Knowing their names; and understanding the context and content of the apps that children and young people are accessing is an area that is likely to leave adults feeling de-skilled and lacking knowledge. The NSPCC and O2 have partnered to form **Net Aware** which is a detailed and well recommended guide to social networks, apps and games.

In order to remain current and up to date, it is highly recommended that foster carers become familiar with this site and engage with the information provided.

<https://www.net-aware.org.uk/>

Gaming and Live Streaming (Video apps)

Online gaming is hugely popular with children and young people. Annual research conducted by OFCOM shows that gaming is still one of the top activities enjoyed by 5-16 year olds online, with many of them gaming via mobile devices and going online using their games console.

(UK Safer Internet Centre 2018).

Risks arise within the gaming realm through the chat (public or private) functions, the nature of the content and respective age limit, premium rate content and in app purchases the choices the children and young people make when they are playing a game i.e. cyberbullying, trolling and scamming.

When children and young people live-stream they are broadcasting live video footage of themselves (and/or others) in real time. On some services the footage can be recorded and available to view

after the footage has ended. Children and young people may either watch these or host them. Facebook live, Instagram live, YouTube live and Vimeo are some examples of the platforms that promote this. It appeals to children and young people because it is a way to express themselves creatively and also provides opportunities to connect with friends.

The risks to children and young people however include feeling pressured to be adequate or judged/not 'good enough' and the risk of unkind comments, all of which may impact their self-esteem and need for approval; engaging with people that they do not know, their digital footprint i.e. videos being re-shared; a risk of viewing inappropriate content and a risk of sharing personal or identifiable information.

The NSPCC and Childnet International both provide informative advice about livestreaming and offer suggestions about how to manage the related risks with children and young people.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/livestreaming-online-video-apps/>

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/livestreaming>

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/video-chat-and-webcams>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-games/>

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/gaming>

Location Services



Many devices have an inbuilt geolocation function whereby satellites are used to provide location information to a receiver in a device. The information is now transmitted in a variety of ways and for a range of functions or purposes. Facebook, for example, offers the option to 'check-in' to a location, Snapchat enables its users to pin their location on a map. Google maps will utilise this function in order to provide navigation information.

It is important to talk to children and young people about the risks associated with location settings and the extent to which that information is traceable by other people; and encourage them to consider whether they want that information to be shared. 'Checking-in' not only tells other people where you are, it also tells them whether you are at home or not at home, or the location of your address specifically. People might also be able to build up a profile of information about a child or young person's movements if they share their location on a frequent basis.

For a more detailed understanding of GPS and geolocations services please follow the link below at Childnet International. The guide provides useful information about privacy settings linked to location services, what symbols to look out for; and how to manage these on Android and Apple devices.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/location-services>

Internet Connected Devices

These are devices or toys that are connected to the internet via WiFi, Bluetooth or a physical connection like a USB cable, such as a fitbit or smart watch; smart speakers, smart meters; robots or drones controlled by an app; and toys with voice image recognition such as a Furby. These devices can also be connected to each other.

These devices can be at risk of being hacked or the data infiltrated, especially if they are not set up correctly. Many people are not aware of this. To learn more please see the NSPCC's website on on-line safety.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/internet-connected-devices/>

Social Media



Popular social media sites include Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and TikTok. Most sites have a minimum user age of 13, although there are some designed specifically for younger children such as MuStar, LEGO Life and PopJam.

Please note: It is not appropriate for foster carers to allow looked after children below the minimum age limit to have access to these sites in any circumstance.

Social media is extremely popular and highly current; and can offer a positive opportunity for young people to connect, share ideas, share information, learn from one another and discover aspirational people or interests.

It does however come with a number of risks which link specifically to the *Conduct, Contact and Content* categories identified by UK **Safer Internet Centre above**. These risks can be highly impactful and have far reaching affects for vulnerable children and young people.

NSPCC research has identified that children turning to social media because they are feeling lonely or have poor mental health are more likely to be groomed on-line. (NSPCC.org.uk2020)

Childnet International looks in detail at the three categories of Conduct, Contact and Content, highlighting the risks and providing useful advice about how manage this aspect of on-line safety; including having conversations, encouraging critical thinking, using privacy settings and blocking and reporting. At the link below, you will also find advice and information for children under the age of thirteen, and those over the age of thirteen. There is also a knowledge quiz provided.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/social-media>

With the view that engaging with the digital world, social media/networking sites in particular, can have an impact on a child or young person's emotional 'well-ness' or 'digital well-being', **Young Minds** in partnership with O2 have produced a guide specifically for young people called **Social Media and Mental Health**. The aim of the guide is to offer young people advice and practical tips about how to 'stay positive' on-line and 'clean up' their feed.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/looking-after-yourself/social-media-and-mental-health/>

Childnet International has also produced a series of guides to help parents and carers support children at different ages or life with their digital well-being. These guides may be particularly helpful in supporting your thinking if you are caring for a child who is at a different stage of his or her development emotionally, compared to his or her chronological age. They also provide links to a digital resilience tool-kit and guides on how to manage well-being specific to different, popular sites.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/digital-wellbeing>

It is important to be aware that sites such as Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram all have features, such as 'my story' whereby information can be posted that will eventually disappear. This function on Snapchat can be extremely short. The risk with this is that people may share more risky or exposing information or photographs with the belief that it disappears. This information can however be 'screen shot' or shared with other people even after it expires. Children or young people may be vulnerable to on-line bullying with no evidence to support reporting or challenge with situation if it has disappeared.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/expiring-content>

Cyberbullying

Can be very distressing for children and young people and have a significant impact on their emotional well-being. It can include things such as intentionally excluding someone from a chat or messaging stream, sending unkind messages or 'hacking' into someone's social media feed and posting embarrassing or humiliating information, statuses or photographs. Cyberbullying can be very distressing and result in rumors and untruthful information being circulated. It is hard to challenge a cyber bully if his or her identity is unknown; it can last for long and enduring periods of time and leave someone feeling helpless or powerless.

The NSPCC offers a detailed insight into Cyberbullying, its impact and who is at risk. There is also an informative section for parents and carers in relation to support that can be offered to a child or young person in how to cope with this challenging experience including talking to a child or young person, reporting, saving evidence, blocking people and refraining from responding.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/#cyberbullying>

Information from Childnet International can also be found below. Again, you will find useful advice and tips on how to support a child, including feedback from a child's perspective. There is also access to an award-winning film for 11-14-year olds "Let's fight it together" which tackles the subject of cyber bullying.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/cyberbullying>

For information that 'speaks' to young people directly Coram Legal Centre has produced the website 'Lawstuff'. This is aimed directly at young people and written in language that they would directly connect with. It is an excellent resource which covers Cyberbullying, as well as areas such as Sexting, On-line Grooming, Pornography and Information Safety.

<https://lawstuff.org.uk/online-safety/cyber-bullying/>

Inappropriate or Explicit Content and Sexting

Children and young people may accidentally come across inappropriate or explicit content as they begin to explore the internet, which may feel distressing or unsettling. Examples of this might include images with a sexual content, acts of terror, cruelty and unkindness towards humans or animals or other impressionable content such as eating disorders.

Young people might also be encouraged to engage in taking and/or sharing explicit images, or they might receive these. Sexting involves sharing a sexual message, naked or semi-naked image, video or text message with another person. It doesn't have to be a nude image and could be an image of someone else.

It is illegal to create, share, have or show explicit or indecent image of anyone under the age of 18, even if they have given their permission.

The NSPCC on-line safety website provides a comprehensive overview of this subject area and ideas about how carers can compassionately support children and young people in these instances, as well as reporting and the use of parent controls.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/sexting-sending-nudes/>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/inappropriate-explicit-content/>

Childnet International presents this along with statistics, FAQs and relevant guides for children of different ages.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/sexting>

Lawstuff speaks 'directly' and openly to young people on this topic, offering advice in this context. If you are supporting a young person to access the information on this site directly, it is important that

you review the content first to determine its suitability for the individual child that you are looking after.

<https://lawstuff.org.uk/sex-health-drugs/sexting/>

As a foster carer it is important that you approach any discussions relating to the issue of sexting with sensitivity and awareness, particularly if a child or young person has experienced sexual abuse. Inform the child's social worker at the earliest possible moment and, where possible, discuss how you are going to approach a conversation with the child or young person first. Make effective use of your diary recordings and discuss the situation with your supervising social worker. It is equally important to ensure that the child or young person feels comfortable to talk to you and able to share their experiences in an open and honest way.

On-Line Grooming

On-line grooming involves someone befriending a child or young person on-line and building up their trust with the intention of exploiting them. Exploitation of a child or young person may involve sexual exploitation, both in person and on-line, or obtaining sexually explicit images or videos; it may also involve radicalisation processes or exploiting a person for money. People that groom children for sexual exploitation purposes may use fake accounts, pretend that they are the same age as the child and connect via interests and hobbies. People that groom children or young people for radicalisation purposes will create a sense of belonging and shared identity. They convince the child or young person to communicate through false or covert sites that are less rigorously monitored.

Vulnerable children such as children looked after, or children with special educational needs are likely to be at increased risk of grooming due to their level of understanding and comprehension, potential sense of isolation or loneliness (feeling different) and need to feel love, validation and approval.

CEOP (Child Exploitation and On-line Protection Command) is the official mechanism for reporting on-line sexual abuse and exploitation. Carers can access their website to make a report to a Child Protection Advisor; they offer advice and guidance about how to do this. They also offer a range of age-related guides about how to keep children safe from child sexual exploitation.

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

Childnet International and Thinkuknow also provide comprehensive advice on the matter of on-line grooming, with each providing information tailored to children of specific ages. Childnet International also signposts people to a number of agencies who offer support.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/online-grooming>

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

Lawstuff by Coram Legal Centre also addresses this issue for young people directly.

<https://lawstuff.org.uk/online-safety/online-grooming/>

On-Line Pornography

This is a prevalent consideration for young people, who may choose to access pornography in order to learn more about sex and sexual relationships. They might also do this out of curiosity, because of peer pressure, for arousal and pleasure purposes and as part of testing out boundaries.

By 15, children were more likely than not to have seen online pornography (65% of 15-16 year olds report seeing pornography); Children were as likely to stumble across pornography via a 'pop up' as to search for it deliberately or be shown it by other people.

[NSPCC and Children's Commissioner's survey of young people -Childnet.com 2018.](#)

Access to pornography can however influence young people's perceived view of sex and relationships (unrealistic) and might leave them confused, embarrassed and worried. It also has the potential to impact their view of themselves and their body image.

The NSPCC and Childnet International both explore the importance of talking to children about their experiences in order to promote critical thinking; and equally promote the use of parental controls and adjustments to browser settings in order to safeguard children and young people against access wherever possible.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/online-pornography>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-porn/>

Where it is appropriate for children and young people to do their own learning, or if they are not ready to talk to you directly as their carer but you know they would benefit from accessing information, Lawstuff again openly encourages young people to consider the impact of the use of on-line pornography.

<https://lawstuff.org.uk/online-safety/online-pornography/>

On-line Safety for Children with Special Educational Needs

A child or young person with learning difficulties will have additional vulnerabilities that need careful consideration. There is a host of information available offering advice and support if you are a foster carer looking after a child with these additional needs.

<https://www.childnet.com/resources/star-sen-toolkit>

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/bullying/bullying-online>

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/bullying/stay-safe>

On-line Safety for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Due to the nature of their arrival and unknown risks relating to trafficking and exploitations, asylum seeking and refugee children are usually placed on very specific and tight safety plans, particularly during the initial weeks after they have arrived in placement. Where there is a known risk of trafficking tight safety plans may be implemented for a longer period of time. This will include very restricted use of the internet and access to internet connected devices. It is important that you work in close liaison with the child or young person's social worker who will support you with this specific aspect of safety planning and safer care.

The general on-line safety issues also apply to asylum-seeking children in the way that they would with any other child. In order to safeguard these children effectively careful consideration will also need to be given to language barriers and clarity of understanding.

The importance of conversation: connecting and gaining trust

All the advice related to on-line safety emphasizes the importance of talking to children and young people and having compassionate, open and honest conversations with them. There are many tips and toolkits provided relevant to each age and stage of development about how to approach this.

Children and young people need to feel heard and not judged for exploring or becoming involved in something that might cause them risk or harm. This is imperative in order to effectively keep children and young people safe in the on-line space and safeguard their welfare. It will at times feel as overwhelming to them whilst they learn and navigate the digital world, as it can to us as adults. They may unintentionally become involved with a distressing or undesirable situation or they might make a mistake. Either way, their sense of trust in you as foster carers to be approachable and non-judgmental will be fundamental to overcoming these situations and finding safe solutions. Give the child or young person the message that you will not hold them responsible.

Being able to engage children and young people in an open dialogue about their internet and on-line use will enable a better understanding of their 'world'. It is important to seek their views and understanding and learn their perspectives about their experiences. Developing a curiosity about their games and their apps will enable you to connect with them. This will also provide the opportunity to encourage critical thinking to help a child or young person sift through the validity of the content they are experiencing, stop, pause and determine its reliability.

Childnet International provides some very useful information on this area of critical thinking, giving consideration to the types of 'false information' that children and young people might come across; and also providing guidance about what critical thinking looks like for children of different ages.

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/critical-thinking>

A Family Agreement

When it comes to your family/household's technology use, creating a [family agreement](#) is a helpful place to start and allows you to have conversations about setting boundaries. It's important that you involve yourself in your child's online world, so as a simple starting point you could ask them what their favourite websites / games are, and why they like them. The filtering options that you put in place may also change over time, as your children get older and more independent, and their technology use changes too. If appropriate, these could be reviewed as a fostering family/household, and form part of your agreement.

An example of a Family Agreement could include the following:

- **No one is allowed to visit pornographic, racist or any hate-motivated or inappropriate websites. If a Child or Young Person accidentally stumbles upon any, they should tell the Foster Carer immediately so they can delete it from the 'history' folder.**
- **Abusive or threatening language is not allowed in chat or any other online communication.**
- **No one should engage in private messaging or visit the private areas of chat-rooms.**
- **Agree time limits for online usage (this can be extended according to age and responsibility).**
- **Children and Young People should not download unknown files from the Internet without the agreement of their Foster Carer. It is advisable to never download unknown files at all.**
- **No one is allowed to download, burn to CD and pass on any music, images or movies downloaded from the Internet without agreement.**
- **Children and Young People should only use child-friendly search engines.**

Remember that there is no 'one size fits all' family code. Just ensure you cover all the areas to maximise the safety of a child or young Person.

Reporting Sexual Exploitation or Grooming Concerns

If you are at all concerned by the way someone is behaving towards a child online, particularly if you suspect this person to be an adult, it is important to report it straight away. Reports can be made to the CEOP command, who are part of the National Crime Agency.

<https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>

Further support for parents and carers of children who have been or are at risk of sexual exploitation can be found at [PACE](#) – 0113 240 5226.

Child sexual abuse content found online should be reported to the [Internet Watch Foundation](#) (IWF).

Some Children and Young People could find it hard to open up to their foster carers. Talk to the Child or Young Person about the CEOP report button, which appears on many websites and which they can add to their own Facebook profile to help them stay in control online. The button has been

developed for children and young people and is offered as a potentially less intimidating method of reporting known or suspected child sexual exploitation or child sexual abuse directly to CEOP.

Other Sources of Helpful Information

West Sussex County Council has produced its own guides to on-line safety for both parents and carers, and young people.

The parent-carer **Guide to Keeping Your Child Safe On-Line** provides a helpful overview of the key issues for consideration that have been referred to throughout this guidance. The guide also provides information for key agencies such as Netaware, CEOP, Sussex Police and WSCC's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. (MASH)

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/12312/parent-carer-guide.pdf>

The child and young people's **Your Space Guide Staying Safe On-Line** addresses issues relating to a digital footprint, sexting and staying in control, grooming, reliability of sites, staying safe online *with links to privacy settings on the various social media sites*, reporting and on-line sources of support. It also includes a video that young people can watch.

There are a number of extremely useful links to child-line that provide good advice and support for children and young people directly.

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space/support/personal-safety/staying-safe-online/>

Safer Internet UK has a very useful support page including ideas for a family agreement

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers/resources-parents-and-carers>

Internet Matters also has an array of useful information including videos for children and adults.

Appendix 1

Some key safety tips for Children and Young People

- **Remind Children and Young People never to give out personal information online.**
- **Remind them to keep their passwords safe and never give their name, email address, address or mobile phone number to anyone outside their immediate circle of friends.**
- **Remind Children and Young People to be careful what they upload to the Internet as well as what they download. Once something is on the Internet, you can never take it back.**

Below is advice given by the Government for helping Children and Young People to stay safe online.

Zip It

When you're online, always keep your personal stuff private and think about what you say and do.

Remember that people online may not be who they say they are. Online friends are still strangers even if you have been talking to them for a long time.

Don't share personal information online. This includes:

- Your full name
- Photos
- Addresses
- School information
- Telephone numbers
- Places you like to spend time

Make sure you have your privacy settings to restrict access to personal information.

When you use chat-rooms or instant messaging, use a nickname instead of your real name.

To stop people accessing your online accounts, always keep your passwords secret and change them regularly.

Review / Contacts / References	
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