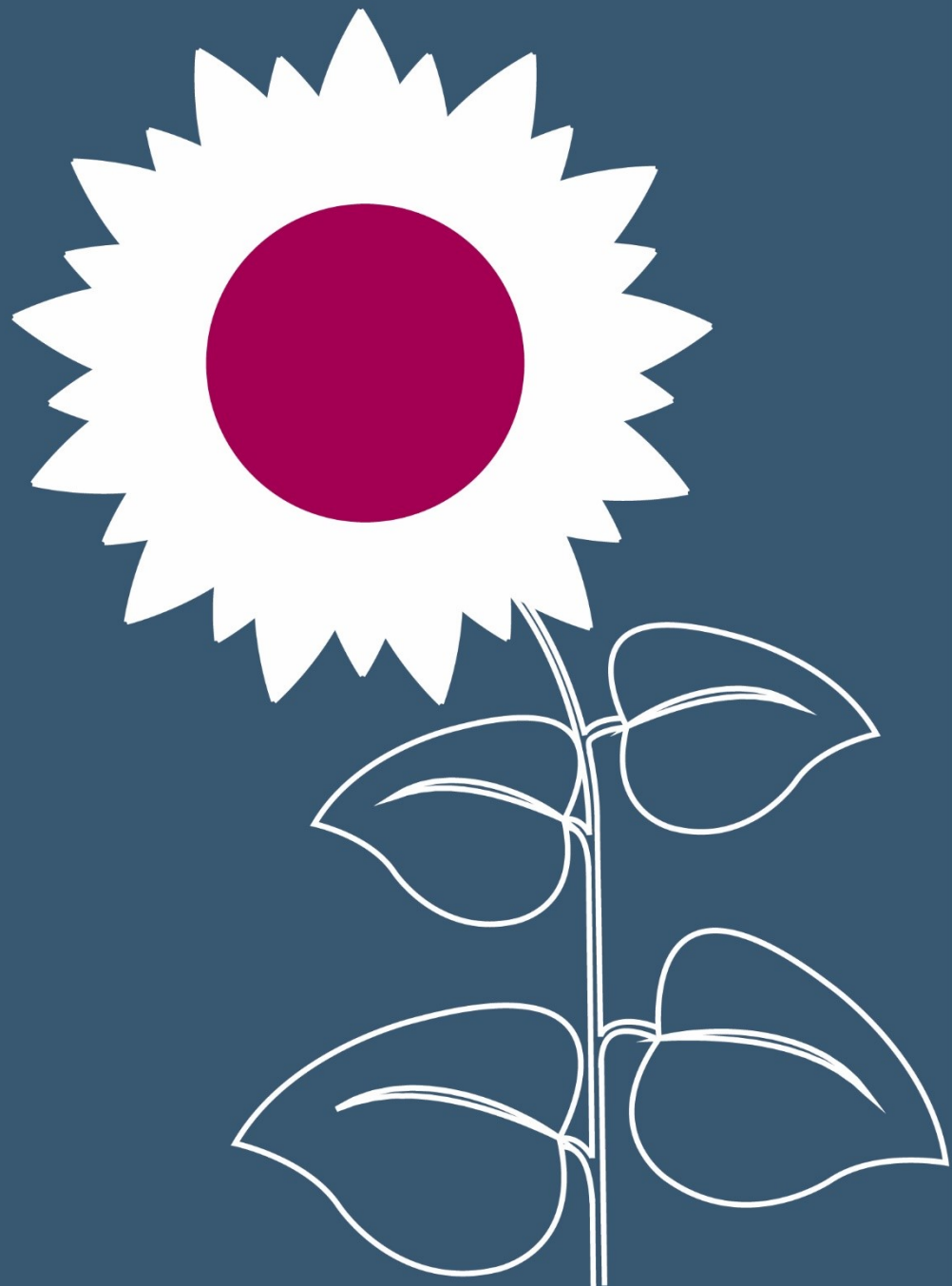# Use of Computer and the Internet

Tri x   5_4_11 (July 2024)

Review July 2025

INFORMATION SHEET

Service area	Childrens Social Care
Date effective from	Dec 2013
Responsible officer(s)	Strategic Manager Children in Care
Date of review(s)	Dec 2014 April 2021 July 2022 July 2023 July 2024
Status: • **Mandatory (all named staff must adhere to guidance)** • **Optional (procedures and practice can vary between teams)**	Mandatory
Target audience	Residential Staff
Date of committee/SMT decision	
Related document(s)	
Superseded document(s)	July 2024
File reference	5_4_10

Contents

1   Introduction

On-line technology has changed the way children/young people live their lives in many positive ways. It has also brought with it safety issues that require knowledge and awareness among those responsible for their welfare. These procedures set out the arrangements for safely managing children/young peoples' access to computers and use of the internet whilst looked after by the Local Authority or under the supervision of carers. Key to this is engaging with parents/carers to make them aware of internet safety issues.

2   Aim of the Policy

To enable children/young people to have access to computer technology and all the benefits of this to help them to achieve their potential in a safe manner.

3   Legislative Context

Children Act 1989 and 2004; Care Standards 2000; National Minimum Standards; Children's Homes Regulations 2001.

4   Use of the Internet and email

Ref: Access to Computers and Internet Safety

4.1   Each child should have access to a computer and the Internet. There are clear rules regarding how these should be used to ensure that each child is protected from the dangers of technology.

4.2   Carers need to be vigilant when children are using the computer and any use of the internet needs to be supervised to ensure safe usage. Appropriate communication between children and their parents should be encouraged but safe working practice needs to be adopted for all communication whether by letter, telephone, text message or email. Any concerns over a child using the Internet should be reported to a Manager.

4.3   It is necessary to obtain parents' permission for the child/young person to take part in any on-line activity organised or promoted by the authority.

4.4   Children/young people's use of computers is often different from adults. Many engage in a variety of Internet activities, quickly switching from one to another as their attention moves from one activity to another. These would include but are not limited to:

- Research to help with homework, projects and course work.

- Getting in touch with each other via Emails, Instant Messaging (IM), chat-rooms, discussion groups or to swap files, music.

- Playing online games that can be downloaded from a website or they may play with others who are online (friends or strangers).

- Listening to music downloaded from the internet or files from friends.

- Buying online; there are thousands of companies, organisations and individuals with something to sell.

5 Safe Use of Computers and the Internet

5.1 The main risks of on-line activities are:

Personal:

- Meeting someone online. "Luring" is the term for online behaviour that leads to these meetings and is illegal. The vast majority of reported cases relate to children/young people over 15 years and female.

- Loss of privacy. Disclosing name, address, telephone number to a stranger can put the child/young person in danger.

- Getting into on-line fights; communication with text or in writing can easily escalate into emotional disputes as it is difficult to know the intensity of feelings.

- On-line bullying; this is a common problem and the most common techniques are that children/young people are harassed or harass others via text messaging, internet chat rooms and emails.

- Making threats/law breaking; this can range from being rude and obnoxious to committing crimes online. It can also include putting someone else in jeopardy by publishing names, addresses or phone numbers of someone they know.

- Accessing inappropriate material; many websites include material that is sexual, violent or hateful, or which advocate the use of weapons or harmful substances such as alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs. It is possible to inadvertently come across these sites when typing an address in a web browser or when using search engines. Usually because a word is mis typed or an imprecise key word is used. Unsafe links may also appear on safe sites tempting a child/young person to search for material that he might not otherwise come across.

- Increased vulnerability; it is possible for children/young people to set up their own Web sites (at no cost). Anything posted can be seen by anyone visiting the site.

Technological

- File-sharing and downloads creates a risk that viruses or other malignant code could be spread to the computer over the network. It is also possible for others to track online activities and send that information to third parties.

- Computer viruses; or even people hacking into the computer (someone gaining unauthorised access) can cause serious damage. Some viruses can hand over control of the computer to someone who may be far away but who can use it for their own purposes, for example send email to others. Playing online games is a time when the computer is particularly vulnerable to a virus.

5.2 The following is recommended to promote the safe use of the Internet:

- **Location**: keep the computer with internet connection in the kitchen area, family room, or other areas where the child/young person is 'independent' but not alone.

- **Control**: install filtering software. Parental control software can be used to:
    - ✓ control content
    - ✓ control contacts
    - ✓ control shopping and privacy
    - ✓ help with time management
    - ✓ improve general security
    - ✓ monitor and record activity, including who the child/young person sends emails to and blocking access to all or some chat-rooms.

    Filtering software should, however, not replace discussions about safety issues and ground rules as children/young people can gain access to the Internet in other places (friends' homes, internet cafes etc.).

- **Install Anti-virus & Firewall software** and subscribe to regular upgrades as this will help minimise the risks from viruses and hackers.

- **Check**: ask the child/young person on a regular basis to show you the places they go to on the internet and be familiar with their patterns of use and time spent online. This will help detect any changes in behaviour that may be of concern.

- **Monitor**: On-line relationships; find out who they are sending emails to and who they are receiving them from. You should know if they visit chat-rooms or subscribe to news groups and you should understand what they do when they visit these places.

- **Review Accessibility**: It is important to have rules about the sorts of websites and materials it is acceptable for the child/young person to access.

- **Discuss**: Talk about what they do online: Having an open relationship with the child/young person is the key to being able to discuss with them the kinds of material, people or situations they may inadvertently or deliberately come across on the internet.

- **Be open and honest**: It is vital to openly discuss with the child/young person the possibility of them seeing or being sent sexually explicit or other worrying material. Children/young people may otherwise feel they may have done something wrong, and perhaps be fearful of telling you in case they get into trouble and/or have sanctions applied to them. It is precisely at this stage that children/young people can feel most isolated and vulnerable to the control of sexual or other kinds of predators.

- **Manage and limit time**: there are no hard and fast rules about what is excessive use of the Internet as it will vary from child to child. Internet use for school and College should be encouraged whilst at the same time recognising that this may also need monitoring as some children/young people may play on-line games, chat or email each other under the pretext of doing homework.

- **Instil caution and care**: children/young people need to know that unless and until they are absolutely certain of the identity of someone they are communicating with, they should proceed with caution and not necessarily accept everything a person says online at face value.

- **Keep yourself informed**; children/young people may be exposed to risks because adults looking after them are unaware of the dangers they are confronted with.