

# Parent Guide to Online Safety 11-14

Whether we like it or not, technology and the Internet are firmly fixed in our children's lives. Use of the Internet can be a wonderful thing, opening up new worlds and supporting children's learning and development in many ways, as well as being a fun way to relax and keep in touch with friends. However, there are pitfalls and dangers in the online community. Since most of the current generation of parents grew up in the days before smartphones, we can feel a little clueless as to how best to protect our children. Presented here are some ideas which will support your child's safety and wellbeing online as they move to high school.

This time in children's lives can be tricky for parents and offers more challenges than the primary school years. Children at this age are becoming more independent and developing their personalities and interests. They are likely to show more interest in socialising and exploring online, and will probably be more protective of their privacy. They are approaching and entering puberty and may be developing feelings for others. Studies show that young people at this age may start to:

- use social networking sites and online messaging;
- use the Internet whilst alone and in private;
- start looking for inappropriate content online;
- be in contact with others via text or messaging at odd times of the day;
- gossip and discuss family issues with friends online.



Children need to be aware at this age that all these activities can pose a risk. 11-14 year olds are typically becoming more emotionally mature, and wanting to make their own decisions, but are still unable to think through the potential consequences of their actions, especially with regard to things they may say, see or do online. Should something happen which exposes them to teasing, ridicule or cyberbullying, they also don't tend to have well enough developed self-esteem and confidence to recover easily.

So what can parents do to help their 11-14 year old to develop socially and stay in touch whilst also protecting them from online dangers? Here are some ideas you could use:



- Set up appropriate parental controls on your home broadband and all Internet-enabled devices your child has access to.
- Password-protect all accounts and talk to your child about the importance of security.
- Be aware that many social networking sites have age restrictions - discuss why this is with your child.
- Talk about the importance of not sharing personal information online. Children at this age can be vulnerable to online grooming by adults pretending to be someone they are not - remind your child that if they have not met a person they have no idea if they are who they say they are.
- Insist that your child shares their online account information and passwords with you, and occasionally check in to see what they are up to online.
- Talk to your child about the sites they are using on their account.

- Pay close attention to the age ratings on games, apps and films to make sure they are suitable for your child. If you would not allow your child to watch a 15 certificate film, you should not let them play a game with the same rating.
- Allow your child to use their devices privately, but insist that bedroom doors are kept open.
- Talk to your child about what they should do if they access something online that is not appropriate. The best guideline is for them to close the screen down immediately and tell you or another responsible adult.
- Set rules for screen time and stick to them. Have a family policy that devices are put away at mealtimes and at bedtime. Set a good example yourself in your use of devices.
- Sometimes children find themselves bullying or being bullied online (also known as 'cyberbullying'). Issues can also arise between friendship groups at school or elsewhere when hurtful comments are carelessly posted on social media. Talk to your child about how our words still hurt even if we are not there to see a person's reaction to them.
- Talk regularly about the importance of online safety, and about what your child is getting up to online. Keeping those lines of communication open is a powerful way of letting your child know that you trust them but expect them to be honest. A good starting point for discussion is the website [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk) which is part of the government Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). This site also offers support and advice should problems arise.

