



Bournemouth Parenting Practitioners Tip Sheet

Internet Safety

The internet can be very useful, and a way for children to learn and have fun. Sadly, the dark side of the internet is that it has become a tool for people wanting to exploit children. Internet chat rooms can be used by paedophiles forging deceptive friendships with children. They 'groom' children, convincing them that they are the same age and want to be friends, and then abuse them either psychologically via the internet or by arranging to meet them in person.

Children who are exposed to internet pornography are likely to be psychologically disturbed by what they see. Worse still is that some exploitative adults will go to extreme lengths to coerce vulnerable children into getting involved in pornography against their will.

Despite the dangers of the internet, there are ways in which you can protect your child when they go online so that you know they are having fun and staying safe. Ask your Internet Service Provider to

install parental controls which will allow you to put a block on access to explicit websites. Also, be sure to warn your child of the dangers of the internet and set ground rules regarding the amount of time they spend online. Try to be present when your child uses the internet, and make sure that they know never to arrange meeting anyone from the internet. Look out for possible signs of exploitation. Watch for changes in your child's behaviour or mood. Other warning signs of abuse include problems at school, sleep difficulties, and your child asking about sexual experiences or using sexual terminology.

If your child does experience some form of exploitation, reassure them that it is not their fault and that you are there to help them. Remember that local police and social services have specialist teams trained to deal with internet abuse. They are there to help and offer support and advice to parents and children.





Warnings

Long periods of time online in private, changes in mood and behaviour, using sexual terminology and inappropriate sexual behaviour could all indicate that your child is accessing explicit content on the internet.



What to do

If you suspect internet abuse, encourage your child to talk openly to you. Reassure them that you will help them. Contact child protection organisations for advice and support.



What to say

Let your child know that you will protect them from further harm. Create a sense of confidence, so that your child feels comfortable talking to you about what has happened.



Prevention

Teach your child that they have the right to say 'no' to what they think is wrong. Be familiar with their friends and know where your child is and what he or she is doing.

Useful Contacts

For more information, advice or support, contact:

- Dorset Police, telephone: 01202 552099
- Internet Watch Hotline, telephone: 0845 600 8844
- NSPCC, telephone: 0808 800 5000
- Bournemouth Parenting Practitioners, telephone: 01202 453965

