

Learning Disabilities, Autism and Internet Safety

A guide for parents

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Working wonders for children with brain conditions

Working wonders for children with brain conditions

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Thank you.

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Introduction

Families of children with disabilities often use the Internet to keep them informed about their legal rights, appropriate treatments and services that might be available for their families. Parents and carers often seek advice and support from online networking groups and forums and these can help us shape our plans for ensuring our children get the support they need.

This guide outlines some suggestions to help parents limit the risk of their child having negative experiences online and understand what action can be taken if they do. This guide also suggests some resources that will help children get the most out of the Internet at home and in the community. The guide will present some case studies of actual experiences people with learning disabilities and autism have had online and learning points that can be taken from these experiences.



Using the Internet

Families of children with disabilities often use the Internet as a key tool to keep them informed about their legal rights, appropriate treatments and services that might be available for their families. Parents often seek advice and support from online networking groups and forums and these can help us shape our plans for ensuring our children get the support they need. 9 out of 10 houses in the UK had access to the internet in 2018[1] and as a society we shop, learn and socialise online.

Increasingly, children and young people are learning and socialising using online resources. Children use the Internet to do their homework, to play games and to socialise with their peers. A recent Ofcom report found that 82% of 5-7 year olds spend around 9 1/2 hours a week online. This figure rises to 99% of 12-15 year olds who spend around 20 1/2 hours a week online.[2]

"My son who is 9 spends almost all of his time online gaming or creating, or lately doing a bit of coding. All self-taught and self-managed. He is home educated and apart from reading, this is his education. He has autism and we want him to learn via his passions and interests. The Internet is his life and offers him fun, friendship, education, challenge and importantly, communication. I regularly thank my lucky stars that he was born in this era. Sometimes it seems the web or certain aspects of it and its constantly evolving games were made for a neurodiverse world. I worry, as he gets older, about what he'll find as his searches widen but there is software I can install that will keep his imagination able to run free but protect him from the darker sides. The education needs to be for parents in how to allow freedom with appropriate protection."

"Wow, how did you know the capital of Scotland was Edinburgh?" I said to my son doing some geography homework. "Because the Chuckle Brothers went there, of course, don't you know anything?" he replied.

Sometimes I just love YouTube. It is amazing how many old episodes featuring the Rotherham duo not to mention, Pink Panther, Scooby Doo and a host of others have informed his education. And where would we be without Annoying Orange?

For someone with such a restricted diet thanks to some unfathomable sensory issues, he is able to name an incredible range of fresh produce and other food he would not normally come into contact with."

Many children with special educational needs are supported to use information technology in schools to allow them to access their education more successfully. Children use the Internet to do their homework, to play games and to socialise with their peers.

There are real benefits to young people with learning disabilities and autism using the Internet to support learning and social interaction.

Increasingly the Internet caters for children and young people with learning disabilities and autism through using accessible design and simplified language, as well as instantly available video clips. For children with complex needs these can provide wonderful opportunities for learning.

"My son is 14 with Asperger's. He socialises online, makes friends across the world, chats directly to them using head phones, exchanges badinage online, plays interactive games... the vast majority of his socialising is online, and here he is a normal, witty, fully accepted member of society.

He learns online and now knows much more about international politics, history, geography and religion than most adults. He learns far more effectively online than he does at school, and he has information far beyond the limited syllabus at school.

The downside is that the online world, although it is a real world, is more alluring than face-to-face interaction with people. It is hard to get him to leave this comfort zone and walk the dogs in the sunshine or talk to his peers. Online he is relaxed and happy. Outside any number of unexpected stressors may appear. It is the very limited, confined nature of the online world and the quiet room which are its attractions. Online is safe.

I have no worries about him being groomed, he has a mind of his own, and there is no chance of him setting up an inappropriate meeting - he wouldn't make it to the meeting point without my help.

The light is a problem, focusing on only one distance for hours at a time cannot be good for his eyes, but also looking into a backlit bright computer screen late at night will be reducing or suppressing the melatonin in his body and making sleep harder. He has melatonin prescribed, but I would like to get him off it earlier at night, and not to watch the television, which has the same effect.

It is possible that he may be building up future repetitive strain injuries from long use of the computer without rest breaks. This is a relatively unknown area, but the continuous tiny movements are likely to be putting a strain on his tendons and muscles. He prefers to squat on his chair while online, which may be an unconscious strategy to help reduce strains.

In the holidays he can be online for hours and it is certainly an addiction. We try to get him to do homework first thing at weekends, because once he is online we have lost him, and he will be irritated if pulled off, and rushing through work so that he can return. However normal boys often display these traits in their concern to get out playing football with their mates. I used to disappear into books for hours in a similarly addicted way as a child, blanking out the world around me, walking into lamp posts on my way to school because I read as I walked."

Young people with autism and other communication disorders often find Internet communication easier than face-to-face communication.

On the Internet people's use of consistent and easily recognisable emoticons replaces the need to decode people's body language, facial expressions and vocal tone that can be problematic in personal communications.

Internet-learning provides opportunities for learning through repetition that supports children who take longer to learn new things and embeds the learning they do in the classroom by undertaking activities as many times as they need to, in order to consolidate their learning.

Alongside the many benefits to children and young people there are also a number of risks. With access to technology comes the potential for cyberbullying, online grooming and risk of exposure to inappropriate content.

This is a risk for all children and young people using the Internet but the risk can be more profound for young people with a learning disability as a result of increased vulnerability, tendencies towards obsessive compulsive behaviour and social naivety. One example of this is that pupils with Special Educational Needs (have a learning difficulty or disability) are 12% more likely to have experienced cyberbullying than those who did not.[3]

"As my main difficulty is verbal communication, the Internet opened up a whole new world for me. I am very articulate when typing so I found it much easier to have conversations online than in real life. I started using chat rooms and online communities in order to share my special interest in a particular TV show. I even created my own website and forum for the show and got emails almost every day from fans all around the world. It made me feel like I was a part of something and that people cared about my opinions. In reality I only had a couple of friends at school and was constantly picked on and ridiculed so the Internet was an escape. I could be myself online. Nobody could see my communication difficulties or my lack of fashion sense.

I left school at 17. Not having many people to talk to I again turned to the online community to find information. I found lots of friendly people, willing to help me understand myself a bit better and interested in what I had to say about my experiences. Without the Internet I would have felt much more alone. As well as online communities and forums, email has been a massive help to me. While in the past I was forced to talk to people in person or on the phone, since my teenage years I have found email a much more accessible form of communication. I can think about what I want to say and have time to process rather than thinking on the spot. Having records of email conversations helps me reflect on what has been said, something I find very hard to do with verbal information. I have managed to communicate better with professionals, such as my college lecturers, GP, counsellor and autism services using email. In the past I would have had to rely on other people to help me communicate. Email gives me more independence.

When I was a teenager social networking sites were just beginning to gain popularity and at school there was a competitive edge to the number of 'friends' everyone had on their online profile. Not having many friends in general I was one of the few who had the least number of online friends. I was often teased about this and although I tried not to let it bother me it still wasn't very nice. It was almost like a permanent reminder that I wasn't popular and couldn't make friends easily."

Making your home Internet safe

The Internet contains a wealth of images, video and information. Much of it is positive, but there is also content that is not appropriate for children to see. There are a number of things parents can do on home networks to make it as safe as possible.

Keep computers in family rooms

Most Internet safety guidance suggests that one of the most effective ways of ensuring that the content your child views is appropriate is to place the computer in a family room with the screen facing into the room.

Install Internet filters

Internet filters are software which are designed to control what content a user can see. It is used to restrict material delivered over the web.

Install child-friendly browsers

Child-friendly browsers automatically filter results that are adult in content.

Protect against viruses

Computer viruses are a small piece of software that can damage your computer. Anti-virus software should be installed.

Install parental guidance locks on popular sites

Most browsers and video playback sites have the capacity to lock adult content and prevent it from being viewed through the use of a pin code.

Prevent postural problems

Set up your computer area in a way that encourages your child to sit in a beneficial position, and demonstrate how you expect them to sit.

Resources to make your home Internet safe

The following sites provide advice and guidance:

Internet filters

UK Safer Internet Centre

http://www.saferinternet.org.uk

This site contains advice on how to use the Internet and new technologies safely and responsibly as well as a range of practical resources, news and events focusing on the safe and responsible use of the Internet and new technologies.

Child-friendly browsers

Safe Search for Kids

http://www.safesearchkids.com/

Safe Search for Kids is a child-friendly search engine powered by Google. The website has a safe browsing feature which overrides your computer search settings to remove potentially explicit material when searching Google.

Google Family Safety Centre

http://www.google.co.uk/familysafety

Google Family Safety Centre provides parents and teachers with practical tools to help them choose what content their children see online. Look out for the video tips on how to set up safe searching on Google and YouTube.

Yahoo Search Safety Guide

https://safety.yahoo.com/UK/SafetyGuides/Search/index.htm

Similar to Google Family Safety Centre, Yahoo Search Safety Guide provides parents with information on how to choose the content their children view online, as well as practical tips for keeping children safe online.

Protection against viruses

Get Safe Online

https://www.getsafeonline.org/protecting-your-computer/

Provides information on how to protect your computer from viruses and spyware. It also gives advice on how to safeguard your computer against theft or loss.

Install parental guidance locks on popular sights

Websites designed for a range of age groups that contain adult or disturbing content should have a capacity for blocking certain content using a pin. Normally this capacity can be found by entering the help/guidance/support/safety centre pages from the home page.

Online television locks

The following links will take you to the parental locks pages of terrestrial English channels:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidance/

https://help.itv.com/hc/en-us/articles/115000564933-Does-the-ITV-Hub-offer-Parental-Controls-

https://www.channel4.com/programmes/resources/parentalContent.html

https://help.channel5.com/hc/en-gb/sections/200185031-Parental-controls

Advice on setting up your computer and minimising risk of postural and vision problems

http://www.kidsandcomputers.co.uk/computer-use-your-childs-posture.html

http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/workplacehealth/Pages/laptophealth.aspx

http://www.allaboutvision.com/parents/children-computer-vision-syndrome.htm



Making mobile Internet safe

These days the Internet isn't only available at home or in school but also through Internet enabled devices such as phones, tablets and gaming devices.

According to Ofcom, around six in ten 5-15 year olds use a tablet or laptop to go online, while half use a mobile phone.[2]

The following sites provide advice and guidance:

The UK Safer Internet Centre

http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/parents-and-carers/parents-guide-to-technology

The UK Safer Internet Centre has a guide for parents around how to set safeguards on these devices.

Get Safe Online

https://www.getsafeonline.org/smartphones-tablets/

Provides practical advice on how to protect your mobile device and reduce the potential risks.

Vodafone Parent's Guide

https://www.vodafone.co.uk/mobile/digital-parenting/parental-controls

Provides information about how to apply Internet safety strategies to mobile phones and handheld devices and how to manage excessive use of the new technologies. This includes information around GPS tracking systems and their advantages and risks and how to manage these.

N.B Each of the mobile networks have their own Internet safety pages. You can find these through your search engine.

Ofcom

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/advice-for-consumers/television/protecting-children/advice-guides-for-parents/parental-controls-for-mobile-phones

Information about online access on mobile devices.

Childnet

http://www.kidsmart.org.uk/downloads/mobilesQ.pdf

Provides a guide around what questions to ask when buying a mobile phone with Internet access for your child.

Preparing your child to use the Internet

There is a great deal of guidance available on how to support your child to use the Internet safely. Common guidance includes:

- Establish ground rules with your child about how they can use the Internet, when and for how long.
- Talk to your child about the kind of things it is ok to look at. A basic rule could be if I won't let you watch it on television, it's not ok to search for it online.
- Ensure your child knows to come to you or another trusted adult if they see something that upsets them.
- Talk to your child about what it is and isn't ok to tell people about themselves online.
- Encourage your child to use an online nickname and avatar and to tell you if anyone requests their real name, photos or information about where they live or go to school.
- Agree that if your child receives an email with an attachment that they will talk to you before they open it.
- Talk to your child about rules for being polite. These are equally important in online communication as in person.

Resources to support your child to use the Internet safely

There are a lot of resources online that are intended to support parents to help their children to use the Internet safely. The resources below are divided into resources for parents and children and young people. All the resources listed for children are moderately accessible but are rated according to the age range the site is aimed at and how easy the site is to use.

Resources for parents

UK Safer Internet Centre

http://www.saferinternet.org.uk

This site contains advice on how to use the Internet and new technologies safely and responsibly as well as a range of practical resources, news and events focusing on the safe and responsible use of the Internet and new technologies.

Internet Matters

https://www.internetmatters.org/

Provides practical information and advice for parents on a range of topics and issues.

Childnet International

https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers

A non-profit organisation working with others to help make the Internet a great and safe place for children.

Digizen

http://www.digizen.org/

A site about recognising and dealing with online hazards, setting up safe profiles on social networking sites and understanding how to manage personal information.

Netsmartz

https://www.missingkids.org/NetSmartz

Interactive, educational programme of the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. Offers a wide range of advice and practical resources for parents, teachers and law enforcement.

Get Safe Online

https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/

Provides information and advice for parents and carers, including simple checklists to help keep children safe online according to their age.

Resources for children

Thinkuknow

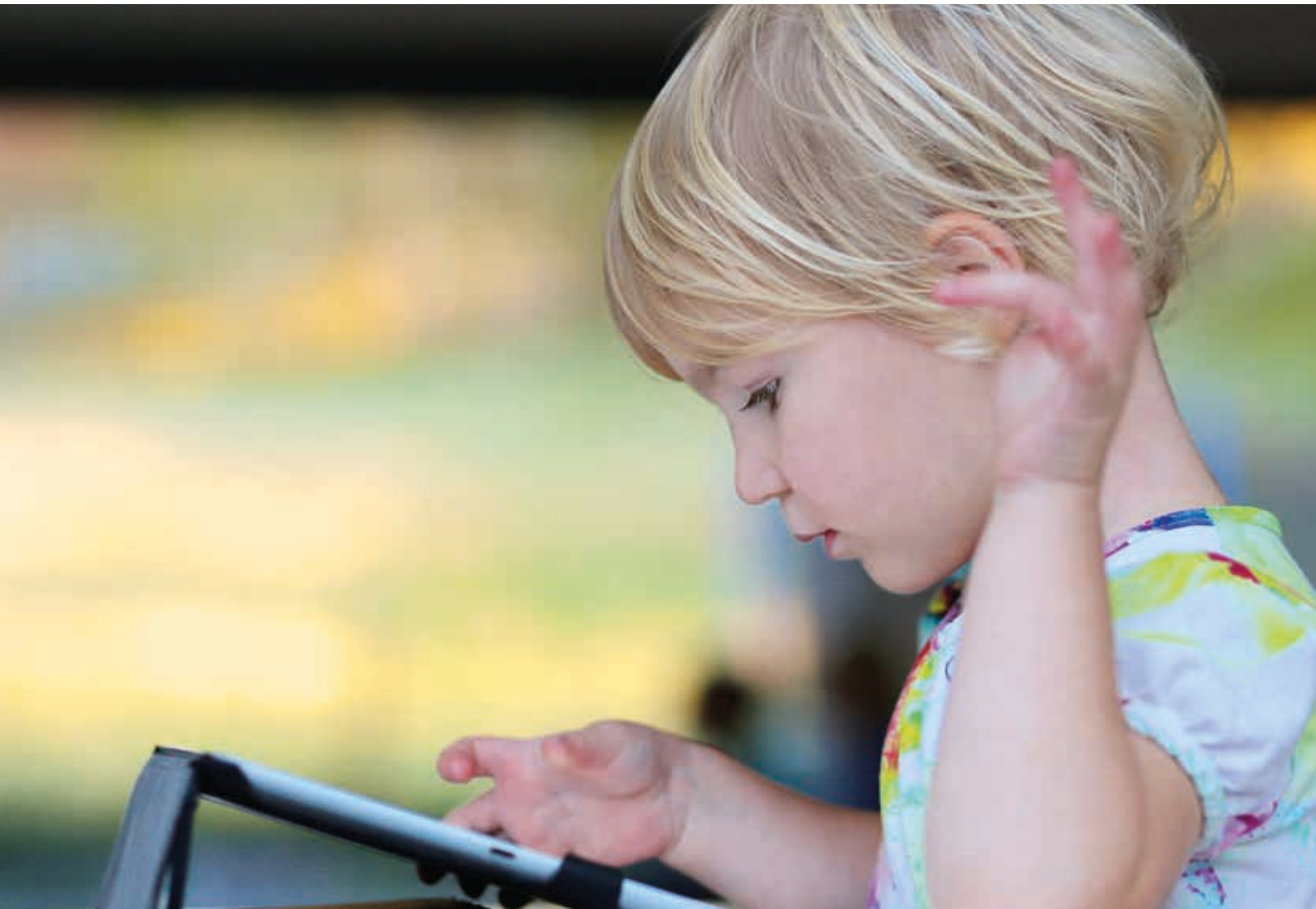
https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/

This site by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) provides the latest information on the sites young people like to visit, mobiles and new technology. Resources are targeted for different age groups; 5-7 years, 8-10 years and 11-16 years. There is also a 'parent/carer' and 'teacher/trainer' section. Resources include sing-along safety video, Hectors World Safety button to report worrying images and a wide variety of activities and resources.

UK Safer Internet Centre

https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/young-people

Provides information and advice for children and young adults in the form of games, quizzes and films. Resources are organised under two age categories; 3-11 years and 11-19 years.



Risks: Dealing with cyberbullying

"Online I think it is much easier for people to be nasty, because they can't see the consequences... The things that they write – if it was in a letter it would be hate mail, but because it's an email it doesn't seem to count. A lot of people see it just as an inevitable part of being on the Internet."[4]
'The Internet has had many positives effects on my life, especially on my teenage years and one particular positive was that it helped my social awareness. The main positives were through research and finding supportive information about what Asperger's was and how it affects people's lives, as support was limited for teenagers about their diagnosis so the Internet was my only means. I was still very wary and the school librarian helped me find safe websites to enter.

As for social communities or online discussion boards, I read many but never joined in a lot of them until I found them to be safe. The first autism friendly sites I found were those linked to local support groups, e.g. PHAD a local support group for people with high-functioning autism. Although I spoke to the lady once or twice in person, I found their online resources less socially awkward. As I grew confident with this site I joined a few chat communities that I was told about through sites linked to the National Autistic Society and a local college. The main positives were those secure sites specifically designed for those with special needs.

Although I had many positives with the Internet, it didn't start this way and with every positive came a negative. Although I was able to gain some supportive information from autism specific sites and communities, which were meant to be safe for all, were not so friendly for me. For the first four to five years of using email my inbox, both home and school, were full of hate mail and death threats. The only way I could use these safely was through logging on as someone else e.g. the school librarian. It got so bad that I never did anything online that wasn't research or autism related and my parent worried that everything I did online was about with people with autism.

My older sister created many social community pages for me which I rarely entered because when I did I had threats from those who didn't know me. I didn't want to ever try these again but knew I had to try and improve my social awkwardness. At 18 I reset my Facebook and started . Any negative comments or bullying got deleted and reported and eventually they stopped. Once again people started to see me as me and I was able to gain courage to post stuff about myself and photos without fear. As for autism and special needs communities, those sites that have been created safely with monitoring and rules have been so helpful in building my confidence but a few do still let in some negative cyber bullies. Now I just read those sites without posting anything."

In 2014 approximately 18% of children aged 9-16 who used a smartphone or a tablet said they had experienced some form of cyberbullying .[5] In addition pupils with Special Educational Needs, (have a learning difficulty or disability) are 12% more likely to experience cyberbullying than those who did not.[3]

A 'cyberbullying code',produced by the Government, gives advice to parents on how to respond if your child is being bullied online or through other technology. [6]

Keep the evidence

Keeping the evidence of cyberbullying is helpful when reporting an incident and may help in identifying the bully. This means keeping copies of offending emails, text messages or online conversations.

Reporting cyberbullying

There are a number of organisations that can help you if you need to report incidents of cyberbullying:

- **The school**: If the incident involves a pupil or pupils at your child's school, then it is important to let the school know. All schools have a legal duty to have measures in place to support the person being bullied and to apply disciplinary sanctions to the pupil doing the bullying. Schools are increasingly updating these policies to include cyberbullying.
- **The provider of the service:** Most service providers have complaints and abuse policies and it is important to report the incident to the provider of the service – i.e. the mobile phone operator (e.g. 02 or Vodafone), the instant messenger provider (e.g. Whats App or Facebook Messenger), or the social networking service (e.g. Instagram or Snapchat). Most responsible service providers will have a 'Report Abuse' or a nuisance call bureau, and these can provide information and advice on how to help your child.
- **The police:** If the cyberbullying is serious and a potential criminal offence has been committed you should consider contacting the police. Relevant criminal offences here include harassment and stalking, threats of harm or violence to a person or property, any evidence of sexual exploitation, for example grooming, distribution of sexual images or inappropriate sexual contact or behaviour.

Cyberbullying advice and resources for parents

Anti-Bullying Alliance

http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

The Alliance brings together over 60 organisations into one network with the aim of reducing bullying. Their website has a parent section with links to recommended organisations who can help with bullying issues. The anti-bullying alliance includes several disabled children's charities, and has a history of providing inclusive support and guidance.

Family Lives

http://familylives.org.uk

Family Lives has a specialist advice sheet on cyberbullying and children with special needs, plus a number of briefings available on podcast and video. They also have a parent helpline: 0808 800 2222.

National Autistic Society (NAS)

http://www.autism.org.uk/bullying

The NAS has information on its website to support parents of children who are being bullied. They also have a helpline for parents: 0808 800 4104.

Respect Me

http://respectme.org.uk/

Respect Me has a useful checklist for parents and carers of children who are being bullied online in Scotland.

Bullies Out

http://www.bulliesout.com

Web-based information and practical advice for children, young people and adults in Wales.

Education Support for Northern Ireland

https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/dealing-bullying

Web-based information for parents, students and teachers about bullying and other issues.

Kidscape

https://www.kidscape.org.uk/

Provides advice and support to parents of children who are being bullied. The website also contains the government's guidance to schools on how to prevent cyberbullying amongst their pupils.

Cyberbullying support for children

ChildLine

http://www.childline.org.uk

ChildLine is a confidential counselling service for children and young people. They can contact ChildLine about anything - no problem is too big or too small. You can phone ChildLine on 0800 1111, send them an email, have a 1-2-1 chat or send a message to Ask Sam. You can also post messages to the ChildLine message boards or text them.

Digizen

http://old.digizen.org/cyberbullying/

Outlines three major areas of the advice, (understanding, preventing and responding)and provided links to current resources. .



Risks: Privacy and preventing grooming

"My son doesn't use the Internet to chat or use Facebook etc because he doesn't have the capacity to make judgements about sharing inappropriate information and as he can be (and has been) quite easily manipulated by boys in school I've made the decision to avoid problems by not allowing him on any chat or Facebook sites."

Protecting children's privacy online is key to avoid receiving inappropriate images, requests and content from people they meet online. 16% of children aged 8-11 who go online have seen something that they found worrying or nasty. 12-15 year olds are nearly twice as likely to have experienced this.[2]

Some of the greatest concerns for parents of 5-15 year olds are companies collecting information on what their child is doing online; the child damaging their reputatation; the pressure to spend money and the possibility of the child being radicalised online.[2]

Protecting privacy and online safeguarding advice and resources for parents

Connect Safely

http://www.connectsafely.org/

Provides online advice for parents about technology and how to use it safely. Particularly useful is the downloadable parent's guide to Facebook. There is also a forum for parents to share experiences, knowledge and tips around protecting children online.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre

http://www.ceop.police.uk

The CEOP Centre is the UK's national police agency set up to tackle online child sexual abuse. If you are worried about someone's behaviour towards a child, online or offline, you can report this.

Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT)

http://www.virtualglobaltaskforce.com

The Virtual Global Taskforce is made up of police forces around the world working together to fight online child abuse. The objectives of the VGT are: to make the Internet a safer place; to identify, locate and help children at risk; and to hold perpetrators appropriately to account. This site provides advice, information and support to both adults and children to protect themselves against child sexual abusers. It also provides information on how to report inappropriate or illegal activity with or towards a child online.

Internet Matters

https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/

Internet Matters have created a number of advice hubs to help parents learn more about the online issues children may face and how to deal with them.

Internal Watch Foundation (IWF)

http://www.iwf.org.uk

The IWF was established in 1996 by the Internet industry to provide the UK Internet hotline for the public and IT professionals to report criminal online content in a secure and confidential way.

Risks: Antisocial behaviour and criminal activity

"I'm worried that my son will see things I don't think he's ready for. I don't want him being exposed to pornography and for me to have to explain to him what it is, and the difference between that and real life. He is so easily influenced, he copies things he sees on TV and on the Internet, it's really difficult to know how to make sure he only sees things that are age-appropriate. I remember the 'Happy Slapping' thing a few years back and I can imagine him doing that, if he thought it was normal and ok."

In recent years some larger news stories have been about people with learning disabilities and autism or social communication disorders using the Internet to take part in illegal activity.

In 2009 newspaper headlines were dominated by Gary Mckinnon's appeal against extradition to the US for hacking into 97 US government computers, including those of Nasa and the Pentagon, during 2001 and 2002, on the grounds of his autism. McKinnon states he was not intending to do any criminal damage but instead was researching his special interest, alien sightings.

In the August riots of 2011, two-thirds of the young people who were arrested and charged were classed as having some form of special educational need.[7] Communication and coordination of rioting activity took place using social networking sites and Instant Messaging services.

True Vision

http://www.report-it.org.uk/home

True Vision is is a police-funded web site designed to provide you with information about hate crime or incidents and advice on how to report it.

Resources to support responsible use of the Internet and technologies

The resources outlined in making your home Internet safe will allow you to set limits around times your child can use the Internet and sites they can access. These resources also provide information on tracking your child's Internet use. In response to parent's feedback around concerns about use of BBM (BlackBerry Messaging) in the 2011 riots we have included information about removing BBM from your child's phone.

That's not cool

http://www.thatsnotcool.com

This gives the tools to help young people think about what is, or is not, okay in their digital relationships. This website is aimed at young people 11+.

e-how

http://www.ehow.co.uk/how_8545824_delete-bbm-account.html

This site talks you through how to remove Blackberry Messenger from your child's phone.

"Watching my daughter watch the riots on television was terrifying, she thought it looked so exciting. We are lucky because we don't live in the city – but it made me really aware that if she got an invitation to go to something like that locally, online or on her phone- she would try to go. She is very easily led and so anxious to please her friends I worry she'd get into real trouble."

Risks: Spending money online

"He cannot use it without my setting everything up first currently. But he can accidentally spend money on subscription services that come up in ads on a tablet computer. I have had to restrict him to using the laptop so he can't do that whilst gaming. A tool to block those kinds of adverts would be helpful. Or better instructions on how to password protect payments that are made directly to your bill."

Ofcom found that 41% of parents of 5-15 year olds were concerned about the pressure on their child to spend money online. The resources listed in the section 'Making your home Internet safe' explain how to set up guest profiles on your computer so that your child doesn't get access to your online payment accounts.

The resources below address how to limit risk of unauthorised spending on particular systems and sites:

Apple iOS (e.g. iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch):

http://support.apple.com/kb/HT4213

Understanding restrictions.

Another option is to disable the in-app purchases function on your Apple device. To do this, go to 'Settings', select 'General', tap 'Restrictions' and select 'Enable Restrictions'. Here you must create a unique four-digit passcode, then scroll down to 'Allowed Content' and turn off 'In-app Purchases'.

iOS Android/Windows Phone devices:

http://ccm.net/faq/31824-android-how-to-disable-in-app-purchases

How to Disable In-App Purchases.

Xbox:

http://support.xbox.com/en-GB/xbox-360/security/xbox-live-parental-control

Xbox 360 console parental controls.

Playstation:

http://manuals.playstation.net/document/gb/ps4/settings/restrict.html

Using the parental control settings.

Nintendo:

https://en-americas-support.nintendo.com/app/categories/detail/p/989/c/1184

Nintendo Switch - Settings - Parental Controls.

Benefits: Exploring special interests and learning tools

Safe places to search for your special interest

Hopefully if you have made your home Internet safe your child will be able to explore their particular interest safely. However, for younger children it may be worth pointing them towards these browsers:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/search
http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/search

Both these BBC sites support children to find age-appropriate games and information, as well as teaching them about the pitfalls of the Internet in a fun way using cartoons, quizzes and games.

"My son is able to research any new fascinations. His latest one is sheep. He has decided to be a shepherd and has found out all about medicines, farming, different type of sheep and wool, geography etc. Anything that gets him reading and talking is great."

"My son showed no interest in learning to read but about a year ago he suddenly started to read fluently. The only thing I can think of is using the laptop suddenly gave him a reason to learn and he has a reading age of about 10yrs now!

He still has very strong obsessions...currently Harry Potter, I use the laptop as an incentive to behave, never as a punishment so he has a set time and earns more time according to behaviour... just 1 minute so it takes a lot to earn half an hour.

The Internet is the most powerful tool I have, never-ending!"

"For my teenage autistic son, the interactive online gaming phenomenon Minecraft allows players to build and create textured cubes in a 3D virtual world. Minecraft enables my son to have complete control of his environment and to engage in his special interests: time travel and Doctor Who. There is nothing he loves more than jumping in and out of his tardis, exploring new dimensions. Minecraft has helped to nurture his conceptual thinking, so that he has become more adept at problem solving. For example, he has worked out how to operate the tardis without any instruction. Whilst my son gets confused and distressed by others' attempts to join him in his gaming, some young people with autism benefit from Minecraft's multiplayer mode, which can help develop their communication and social skills, as well as enhance their creativity."

Autcraft:

https://www.autcraft.com/

Autcraft is a Minecraft server created for children with autism and their families. It allows players to enjoy the game without the fear of being bullied or discriminated against.

Benefits: Extended social networks and access to peer support

"Our son, who has Asperger's Syndrome, has found great benefits from the Internet. He can spend happy 'down-time' researching his special interest, which brings him enormous comfort, pleasure and relief from the stresses of living with Asperger's. More recently, as an adolescent, he has begun to use social networking as a means of developing and maintaining friendships which he would find very hard to do in a full-on, face-to-face way. This has led to him going out and socialising!"

Online networks

Talk about Autism

https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/talk-about-autism

An online community for parents, carers, professionals and adults with autism.

Wrong Planet

http://www.wrongplanet.net

US-based web community for people with autism, including discussion forum, blogging function and access to articles.

Hectors World

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/5_7hectorsworld/

A site designed for 5 to 7 year olds. It is a safe virtual world where children can interact with each other online. It also has a number of cartoons which teach younger children how to use their computers safely.

Resources to ensure safe use of social networking sites

Internet Matters

https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/social-networking/

Information for parents on the risks of social networking as well as information to ensure your child stays safe.

UK Safer Internet Centre

https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/social-media-guides

Provides useful information about the safety features available on popular social networks.

Benefits: Communication tools

"Helps him to learn and understand. He needs repetitive visual and audio information to absorb and understand everything. So, we help him find web pages, YouTube clips, and educational games that he can watch/do over and over again until he eventually remembers it. We have used it for literacy, numeracy, science, history, geography and general knowledge. If he wants to know something...we say "Ooooh! Let's go and ask Google! It's a useful tool and enables him to find and learn about stuff he's interested in. Also has definitely helped with his hand/eye coordination, confidence and self esteem."

Ability Net provides a number of factsheets (http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/athome_factsheets) about assistive technology. Topics include:

- Voice recognition
- Customising your computer
- Autism and computing
- Free accessibility resources
- Funding for adapted technology
- Keyboard and mouse alternatives
- Specific adaptations for people with learning disabilities



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Information about the project team

Elizabeth Archer joined Mencap as the National Children and Young People's Programme Manager in November 2010 after 12 years working across the disabled children's sector. Mencap is the UK's leading learning disability charity. Mencap work in partnership with people with a learning disability, and all their services support people to live life as they choose. Their work includes providing high-quality, flexible services that allow people to live as independently as possible in a place they choose, providing advice through help lines and websites, and campaigning for the changes that people with a learning disability want.

Ambitious about Autism is a national charity dedicated to improving opportunities for people with autism. Originally established in 1997 as the TreeHouse Trust, the charity was founded by a group of parents whose children had been diagnosed with severe autism. Ambitious about Autism works to improve the services available for children and young people with autism and increase awareness and understanding of the condition. Ambitious about Autism are also committed to campaigning for change to ensure the needs of people with autism are met.

Elizabeth is currently the Interim Policy & Campaigns Director at Ambitious about Autism.

The findings of this report are those of the author, not necessarily those of Cerebra.

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Working wonders for children with brain conditions

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