

## Keeping your child safe online - A checklist for parents and carers

As a parent you'll probably know how important the internet is to children and young people. They use it to learn, play, socialise and express themselves in all types of creative ways. This may be through sharing photos and videos, blogging, gaming, or even developing their own apps. It is a place of amazing opportunities.

The technology children use in their daily lives can seem daunting. You might worry about the risks they can face online, such as bullying, contact from strangers, as well as the possibility of access to inappropriate or illegal content. To help them stay safe, it's important that you understand how your child uses the internet.

**By following this simple checklist, you can start to protect them and decrease the risks they face:**



**I have asked my child to show me sites they use** – By doing so, your child is including you in their online life and social activity. Show an interest and take note of the names of their favourite sites. You can then re-visit these when you are alone. Take your time and explore the space, find out how to set the safety features and learn how to report any issues directly to the site.



**I have asked my child to set their profile settings to private** – Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are used by children to share information, photos and just about everything they do! Encourage your child to set their privacy settings to private. They need to think about the information they post online as it could be copied and pasted anywhere, without their permission. If it got into the wrong hands, somebody may wish to use it against them or worst of all try to locate them in the real world.



**I have asked my child about their online friends** – We know that people lie online about who they are and may create fake identities. It is very important children understand this. Whether they are visiting a social network or a gaming site, the safety messages are the same. Children and young people must never give out personal information and only be "friends" with people they know and trust in the real world.



**I have set appropriate parental controls on my child's computer, mobile and games console** – Filters on computers and mobiles can prevent your child from viewing inappropriate and possibly illegal content. You can activate and change levels depending on your child's age and abilities. You can also set time restrictions for using the internet or games. They can be free and easy to install. Call your service provider who will be happy to assist or visit CEOP's parents' site for further information. Explain to your child why you are setting parental controls when you talk to them about their internet use.



**My child has agreed to tell me if they are worried about something online** – Sometimes children get into situations online where they don't feel comfortable or see something they don't want to see. By opening up the communication channels and talking to your child about the internet, their favourite sites and the risks they may encounter, they are more likely to turn to you if they are concerned about something.



**I know where to get help if I'm concerned about my child** – The CEOP Safety Centre provides access to a range of services. If you are concerned that an adult has made inappropriate contact with your child you can report this directly to CEOP. You can also find help if you think your child is being bullied, or if you've come across something on the internet which you think may be illegal.

Visit the Safety Centre at [www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre](http://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre) or by clicking on this button:



For further help and guidance on all the information mentioned please visit  
[www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents)

## *Children and young people's use of the internet: Advice for adoptive parents*

Many adopted children and young people encounter negative experiences in childhood. These experiences such as loss, grief and disrupted family lives can make them more vulnerable to risk both online and in the real world.

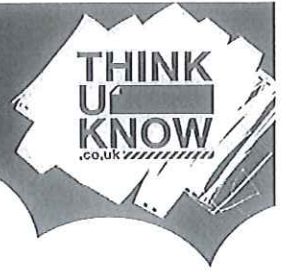
In the online world, they may be additional vulnerable to the range of risks that all children and young people face. Adopted children also face the possibility of contact from their birth family. This can pose additional risks. Sometimes birth families bypass the traditional route of using an adoption agency to find their relatives and instead use online sites such as Facebook to trace and locate them. Some adopted children also actively search for their birth relatives in secret; where they are successful, this can place them in risky situations.

For a child, finding their birth family when using the traditional channels can be emotional and challenging. Offline this would involve preparation and significant support; however the speed of the internet means online contact can be instant, direct and can happen without anyone knowing.

This contact causes additional complexities; what may start well and feel like a 'honeymoon' period, can quickly spiral out of control. The child could find themselves facing demands from additional relatives looking to make contact. These individuals may have varying accounts of the events leading up to the adoption which could leave the child confused and upset.

As an adoptive parent, it is important that you:

- ***Take an interest in your child's online life.***  
Use the internet as a family. Discuss their favourite sites and the "friends" they have in these spaces.
- ***Talk to your child about what they would do if they did hear from a member of their birth family online.***  
If the situation does arise having a plan in place means they will be more likely to come to you for support.
- ***Recognise that your child may be curious about their past and the people in it.***  
Let them know that you understand their curiosity and that it's ok to talk about it with you. Emphasize that you won't be upset or angry.
- ***Ask your child to set privacy settings on the sites they use online.***  
This will ensure that they have more control over their personal information and who can gain access to it. Do the same on the sites you use and be careful what information you and the rest of the family post about your adopted child.
- ***Don't be afraid to seek further support.***  
Contact your child's adoption agency if you have any queries about online contact from birth families and if you are concerned that your child may be in danger - call 999.



## ***Risks children and young people face online: Advice for Foster Carers***

*Looked after children often experience adversity, trauma and disruption in childhood. This can cause physical, emotional and behavioural problems that can make them particularly vulnerable. This is as true online as it is offline.*

*As a carer, it is important you show a positive interest in your child's life online and discuss the risks and issues they may face.*

- ***Show a positive interest in their online life*** – Talk to them about the sites they use and the friends they have online.
- ***Set online boundaries*** – consider limiting the amount of time they spend online and the sites they can visit.
- ***Think about how their information is protected online*** - If they are using social networking sites ensure they have adequate privacy settings - this will make it harder for them to be traced. Be open and frank about the additional security levels needed for them to stay protected.

### ***Contact***

*In the online world it is easier for contact between a child and their birth family to take place unsupervised – whether this is motivated by the child or their birth family. Whilst in some cases this may be appropriate, family members may have been a danger to them in the past, or may be a danger to them now. The use of online technologies means this contact can happen in secret, without your knowledge and the additional support they need.*

- ***Keep communication channels open*** – Your child will be more likely to come to you if you've talked to them about online issues and what they would do if their family were to get in contact.
- ***With your child's social worker establish the permitted level of online contact*** - make sure the reasons for this are known to the child

### ***Pre placement***

*If a looked after child is bringing technology into your home, you need to be aware of any possible risks. If the device is supplied by the local authority it may already have a parental controls package installed, check this with your child's social worker and ensure that the same is done for all of their devices, such as laptop and mobile.*

- ***Ask your child to enable privacy settings for the sites they use.*** They should set these to private and if possible, use a nickname for additional security.

*Do not ban them from going online, unless you have been instructed to do so by the child's social worker, as they may then go online in secret, without your support and advice.*

*Prior to your looked after child's arrival, find out what experiences they are bringing with them – consider what effect this had on their online activities and behaviour. Find out if your looked after child is or has been a victim or perpetrator of any form of online abuse, such as bullying or if they have met up with anyone they first met online.*

- **Before a child comes into your care** - Find out what devices and online experiences they are bringing with them.
- **Keep communication channels open** – They will be more likely to come to you if they have any issues online.

*Things can quickly get out of control online, but the first step in protecting and supporting the child in your care is being aware of how they use technology. Build on the trust that you have gained, as they will be more likely to come to you in times of difficulty.*

*Remember, your looked after child's online activity will change and develop as they grow. If they stay in your care, the boundaries you initially set should be adjusted accordingly. With younger children sit with them and play an active role in their online lives. With older children, who may be more difficult to monitor, let them know that you understand the challenges of growing up online and that you are there to talk to if things get out of control. It is never too late to seek help.*

*Don't forget to ask your fostering agency for internet safety training and learn how to report any incidences that arise with them.*

**For further help and guidance on all the information mentioned please visit  
[www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents)**



## Risks children face online: Accessing inappropriate websites

The Internet is open to anyone to post and create content so sometimes your child may see things they wish they hadn't, or access sites that are inappropriate for their age. Inappropriate can mean different things to different people, from swear words to pornographic images or videos, and what is inappropriate for your child will also change as they grow and develop.

There are a range of things online that might upset children and affect what should be a healthy online experience. It's important to remember that inappropriate content online includes pornographic content, but could also include other content such as race hate, pro eating disorders or gambling sites.

*23% of 8 – 11 year olds say they dislike inappropriate content online as do 15% of 12 – 15 year olds.  
Ofcom, Parents views on parental controls 2012*

If your child is using the internet, you should discuss the type of things they might see no matter what age they are.

### Online pornography

Children may stumble across content online or actively search for sexual content which isn't appropriate for their age. It is natural for children to push boundaries and explore, however, it can be risky. Online it is easy to quickly access a wide variety of pornographic content including hardcore and extreme images and videos.

As the researcher Martin Flood noted, *'pornography is a poor, and indeed dangerous, sex educator'*. Pornography rarely presents sex in the context of a loving relationship and there is concern that early exposure to hardcore pornography could give young people unhealthy views about the opposite sex and what they can expect from them.

Though it may be difficult, it is important to talk to children and young people about pornography and how it can provide an unrealistic portrayal of sex and relationships.

### What can you do to reduce the risk of your child coming across inappropriate material online?

The internet is not centrally moderated, but as a parent you can set controls on your child's internet access in the home. Parental controls packages can enable you to block access to adult websites, such as pornographic and gambling sites.

*63% of teens surveyed admit they know how to hide what they do online from their parents  
Norton Online Living Report 2009*

Setting age appropriate controls on the sites they use and your network can help reduce the risk, but remember no filter is 100% accurate. Contact the provider of your internet package, such as Sky, BT or Talk Talk, the majority of service providers now offer free parental control packages. Make sure you do the same on your child's phone and all internet enabled devices.

Setting age appropriate controls is important but ensure that you also have an ongoing conversation with your child about content online. Ask them to tell you if you if they see anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or upset, so you can help and support them.



For further help and guidance on all the information mentioned please visit  
[www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents)

## Risks children face online: Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place via technology. Whether on gaming sites, through a mobile device or via a social networking site, the effects can be devastating for the young people involved.

With online technologies accessible 24 hours a day, cyberbullying can be relentless. It can also intrude on spaces that were previously personal, for example at home; it can feel that there is no escape from it.

*21% of 8 to 11 year olds have been deliberately targeted, threatened or humiliated by an individual or group through the use of mobile phone or the internet and 28% of 11 – to 16 year olds.*

*Beatbullying, Virtual Violence II*

The use of technology can increase the audience of the bullying and multiply the number of bullies involved, as young people re-post, send or 'like' bullying content. Bullies can also attempt to be anonymous which can be extremely distressing for the victim.

As hard as it can be to admit, it is also possible that your child is or has been a bully. They could have set up or joined a malicious profile or 'liked' a mean comment they have seen about someone online. They could be acting in this way due to peer pressure or in retaliation for something that has happened to them. When talking to your child about bullying it is important to let them know how you as a family feel about the act. Talk to them about how it makes others feel and the consequences of their actions.

### What to do if my child is being Cyberbullied



**Offer reassurance and support.** Your child may be in need of emotional support or feel like they have nowhere to turn. It is rare that cyberbullying is only taking place online and is often someone your child knows through school or a group they attend. Their school should have policies and procedures for dealing with cyberbullying.

Your child could visit Cybermentors. This is an online counselling service with a difference; the counsellors are also children and young people. This site has proved very popular and offers practical advice - [www.cybermentors.org.uk](http://www.cybermentors.org.uk)



**Tell your child that if they are being bullied to always keep the evidence.** Whether it's a text message or email, tell them not to reply to the bully or delete the comments. Ask your child if they know the bully or where the messages are coming from. Often it is someone within the school environment and can be dealt with quickly and effectively with assistance from the school.

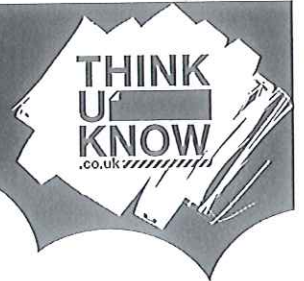


**Block the bullies**  
If someone is bullying your child on a social networking or chat site encourage them to block or delete the individual so that they can't be contacted by them anymore.



**Report any bullying content to the website it's hosted on.** If content has been posted, for example a video or image, which is upsetting your child you should report it to the website, for example, Facebook. Learn how you would report content on sites like Facebook and YouTube; every site is different. Contacting the website is the only way to get the offensive content removed, unless it is illegal. In cases of illegal content for example indecent images or videos of young people under 18, contact your local police or report it to [www.clickceop.police.uk](http://www.clickceop.police.uk).





## Risks children face online: Online grooming

### What is online grooming?

Grooming is a process used to prepare a child for sexual abuse. An offender's aim when grooming will be to gain access to a child and build a relationship with that child. Grooming can take many different forms, from one off contact which may include sexual advances, to a series of events over time. It may start with an adult scanning websites to identify a vulnerable child or befriending a child, perhaps by pretending to have common hobbies or interests or using flattery to trick a child into trusting them.

Online it is easier for an offender to lie and gain one to one contact with a child, for example through a social networking or gaming site. They can share images or videos relating to their claimed common interests and build a 'relationship' away from any adult supervision.

Once a relationship is established an offender may then introduce sexual themes to the conversation, for example, asking the child about their sexual experiences, sharing pornography with them or asking them for sexual pictures of themselves. Different offenders will have different approaches so whereas this process may be very quick it can also take days, weeks or even months. Often an offender will attempt to get a child to meet them in the real world in order to abuse them. Increasingly some offenders are also persuading children to perform sexual acts on webcam.

### Signs of grooming

Look out for an unhealthy or heightened level of internet usage. Has your child become more secretive about who they are talking to and where they conduct their online conversations?

To your knowledge has your child engaged in any sexual behaviour online or via text, chat or webcam? Have they got any new electronic devices or gifts that they may not have been able to obtain for themselves?

Talk to your child about meeting their online friend's offline. If they intend to meet any of these online friends you need to set clear boundaries, tell them why you are concerned for their safety and that they must take you or a trusted adult with them to the meeting.

### What can parents and carers do to protect their child online?

Parents and carers need to be mindful that part of the fun of being online is communicating and often sites are designed for you to do so with people you don't know. It is important to talk to your child about who they are friends with and how to manage these online relationships.

#### Not sure where to start? Talk to your child about:

- \* What sites they use
- \* The friends they have and how they know them
- \* How they communicate with these friends
- \* The type of information they can share

## Risks children face online: Online grooming

### Top tips



**Talk to your child about online grooming.** Explain how easy it can be to lie online and the reasons why an adult may wish to contact them.

\* **For primary age children** talk to them about the topic in the context of stranger danger. Strangers are people you or they don't know. In the online world there are strangers too and they must not talk privately with them or give out any personal information online.

\* **For older children**, the conversation might be a little more difficult. They may have built quite an online network over the years, and might feel you're intruding into their private matters. Why not use one of the Thinkuknow resources to open a conversation. Our age appropriate education films are available through the parents and carers website ([www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents)) or CEOP YouTube channel ([www.youtube.co.uk/ceop](http://www.youtube.co.uk/ceop))



**Talk about their online friends.** Ask them to think carefully about who they chat and share information with. If they don't know them in the real world they need to delete or limit what they share with them, for example not sharing their photos, videos or their locations.



**Let your child know that you are always there for support.** Let them know that you understand how easy it can be to get into difficulties online. Get them to talk to you if anyone makes inappropriate/ sexual comments and ensure they know that, no matter what's happened, you are there to help.



**Learn how to report any inappropriate contact made to your child online.** This can be done via the ClickCEOP button at [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)

### The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)

CEOP is a police led, child protection agency which specialises in tackling sexual abuse on and offline. Through its education programme, Thinkuknow, CEOP offers a range of safety information for children, young people, practitioners and parents/carers. For more information visit [www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents).

### Reporting to CEOP

If someone has acted inappropriately towards your child, it may be sexual chat, being asked to do something that makes them feel uncomfortable or someone being insistent on meeting up, you must report it to ClickCEOP at [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk).

