

BullGuard[®]

A Parents' Guide to
Protecting Children Online



How do you keep your children safe online?



Simple, straightforward advice to put minds at ease

Parents have a powerful urge to protect their children, but it's one that needs to be balanced against a child's own natural curiosity and desire to learn. In the age of the online playground it's important to know what we need to guard against and where to draw the line when children are left to explore.

Depending on age, the youth of today has an impressive and always improving understanding of computers. For the very young this might simply involve pressing a few buttons or hitting a touch screen, but as they grow older their knowledge grows and may even end up surpassing that of their parents.

Before the arrival of tablets and smartphones it was far easier to be able to control a child's access to computers, but with so many internet-accessible devices around this has become much more difficult. Children will tuck themselves away in their bedroom with a device to play online games, network with friends and do homework, making it difficult to keep track of their activity.

As an amazing place for exploring and learning children take to the internet naturally and readily, but parents are worried that they may not be able to monitor and guide them through the perils of the online world and are voicing their concerns.



Parents speak out

BullGuard customers share their experiences and a survey of 2,000 parents highlights the concerns that many share

There are no definitive roadmaps or manuals for protecting children online; it can feel a bit hit and miss with intuition and instinct often playing a large part.

A BullGuard survey of 2,000 UK parents on the mobile usage of children aged between seven and fourteen reveals that concerns are universal, with stranger danger topping the list. BullGuard customers who are parents also spoke about the measures they take to protect their children.

It's no surprise to discover that most have real concerns about their children's online activities. The unknown nature of the internet means many mothers and fathers view it as a genuine issue, and one that needs to be addressed.

Eight years old and armed with a smartphone

In the UK the average eight year old now has a mobile phone, which in most cases also means internet access on the move, and one in seven parents revealed that they have found inappropriate content on their child's mobile device.

When it comes to addressing this problem 83 percent of parents accept that it's their responsibility to protect their children online and most take a proactive position with 54 percent saying they regularly speak to their children about potential dangers. However, 70 percent accept that a child's natural curiosity makes it difficult for them to stay one step ahead.

Concern over online strangers

Unsurprisingly, the number one parental concern is that their children may end up engaging with complete strangers online who are not who they claim to be. Lyn Baxter, a BullGuard customer, perhaps has more insight into this area than most given her background as a child protection social worker. She says she has been involved in many cases in which children were approached over the internet by adults pretending to be of a similar age. Given a child's natural curiosity, it's clearly something parents should be aware of.

Being open and honest

72 percent of the survey respondents said they would prefer that a child talks to them rather than search online for answers. A rather embarrassed one in ten admitted they would rather their children seek answers online to save them from having to answer awkward questions.

Serious conversations

Nearly half of the survey respondents revealed concerns about search terms found in their child's internet history. When addressing these concerns the study found that a third of mothers and fathers reprimanded their children for searching for inappropriate content, with 22 percent sitting their child down to have a serious conversation about something found on a device.

There's also the concern that children may inadvertently click on a malicious link which may expose them to inappropriate content and could lead to their device becoming infected with viruses or malware. It is common for these sorts of issues to be linked, and important that parents educate their children about malware threats and how to identify them.

Struggling to keep up

Interestingly, 43 percent of parents admit to checking a child's internet history but only 14 percent regularly keep an eye on who their children 'friend' on social networking sites.

The overriding theme from the survey was that most parents are aware of the potential online dangers and do their best to help children avoid threats, but there is a sense that natural curiosity can still lead them to unsavoury content. Many parents are frank and open and speak plainly about potential pitfalls, but it's clear that they also struggle to keep up with these online activities.

What to look out for

Internet dangers can come in many forms. Know how to recognise the main types of threat and how to guard against them

Bullying

Online bullying, or cyber bullying, is a real concern for children in the online age. For victims its effects can be devastating, and with a bully able to hide behind a cloak of anonymity it can be even more difficult to resolve.

Be sure that your children are aware that online bullies exist, that it's not acceptable to post or text harmful and damaging messages themselves and that they can come to you, just as they would in real life, if they feel they need to.

If your child experiences cyber bullying keep a copy of the message and contact the website owners. It pays to educate children about how to protect themselves by not responding to cyber bullies and letting the website administrators know by providing as much information as possible if anything like this occurs.





Stranger danger

The online world offers a perfect cloak of anonymity, making it extremely easy for someone to pretend to be someone else. One of the most bizarre stories we have come across is the plumber who claimed to be an astrophysicist on a young person's online dating site. This illustrates how easy it is to deceive and hide behind fictional personas.

Children need to know that they should never email, chat or text with strangers and should certainly not meet a stranger in the real world.

Exposure to harmful web sites

The internet is littered with inappropriate content and websites that show explicit scenes that would be unsuitable for your child to view. In fact, pornography is widely considered to be the most lucrative 'industry' online – it is claimed that four percent of websites are devoted to it.



Being exposed to this sort of content can be damaging to young developing minds and children have spoken of their shock when encountering it. It can be a difficult subject to broach because of its nature, but website filters and parental controls can be applied to block this type of content automatically.



Texting and 'sexting'

Smartphones have given rise to 'sexting' – when a sexual image or video is sent via a text message. Children need to understand that taking, sending and receiving this sort of content is wrong, and could lead to stalking, abuse or blackmail. The perils of cyber bullying also apply to this area, as perpetrators can often use texts to harass and intimidate.

Malware

Malware on the internet is common. Millions of viruses exist with new strains appearing all the time and many people fall victim to their effects, which could involve devices becoming unstable and personal details being stolen. Children need to be educated about the perils of malware on both computers and smartphones. Protection, such as antivirus software, can and should be used on all devices.



Introducing children to the basics of security

Abiding by some basic rules can help ensure children and young teens remain safe in the online world:



Cyber bullying and sending hurtful messages is not ok



Always have strong passwords in place



Be wary of strangers online and avoid engaging with them



Always use antivirus and a firewall



Don't click on links in emails or instant messages – they can be loaded with malware



Be aware that there are people out there who want to take advantage of children

A child's grasp of the online world

Children's grasp of the online world will improve as they grow, but a push in the right direction will help get them off to a good start.

- Children should understand that just because they are online and can't be seen doesn't mean they are protected. They shouldn't do anything online that they wouldn't do in real life
- Everything done online constitutes a digital footprint and is never erased from the internet, be this messages, photos or videos
- Talk to children about the importance of not chatting with strangers or sending information or photos to people they don't know.
- Not everyone online is who they claim to be
- Pay attention to age limits for websites, such as 13 for Facebook. These limits exist for a reason
- Inform children about malware and explain how it can be spread, such as by clicking on unknown links or downloading unknown content



- Explain the importance of not accepting 'friend' requests on social networking sites from people they don't know
- Understand privacy and security settings, show children how to use them and get them to show you that they have understood
- Ask whether they have ever received bullying or abusive messages and how they dealt with them. Ask them about their friends and whether they have received similar messages
- Find out whether children are aware that it's not ok to meet with people in the real world when they have only chatted with them online. Get them to tell you what the dangers are
- Talk to them about taking pictures and posting them online to get a sense of how much awareness they have
- Show a diplomatic interest in their online activities to get an understanding of how they use the internet to help better protect them





Advice for parents

Understand how important online social networking is to children

Many online games, activities and popular websites now have a social networking element and older children may use these elements to engage directly with their friends. By showing an interest in their online lives children are more likely to come to you if they experience something unpleasant or disturbing. The golden rule is to apply the same care and attention that you do in the real world.

By getting to know their surfing habits, favourite web sites, social networking and how they converse online you gain a good understanding of how important the internet is to them. You simply want to safeguard them against the perils in the online world, so don't be afraid of broaching the sorts of topics described above.

Software that offers parental controls allows you to discretely monitor online activity and helps to identify potential predators. It may also be useful to speak to your child's school, as most have some level of online awareness education designed to help children successfully navigate the web. This can also be valuable for gaining tips and advice as well as discovering what things other parents are doing.

Further information

Further help and useful links

Parental controls

BullGuard develops easy-to-use products that meet real and pressing needs, such as helping parents protect children online.

For example, BullGuard Internet Security and BullGuard Premium Protection both provide powerful yet discrete parental controls for kids using laptops and desktop computers.

These controls help protect children from inappropriate content and dubious sites, limit their time on the internet, monitor their online behaviour and help them keep their personal details safe.

Content monitoring, filtering and blocking is based on age group profiles 3-7, 8-12 and 13-17. These check and block certain types of online content including adult and intolerance web sites, illegal drugs and software, bad taste, violence and weapons.

Facebook protection is also provided, enabling you to discretely monitor activity such as strangers trying to 'friend' your child as well as identifying abusive and bullying behaviour. Information is logged so you can view it at a time that suits you.

Mobile protection

With one billion mobile devices running Android, the world's most popular smart-phone operating system, security for mobile devices has never been as relevant or more necessary as it is today.

BullGuard Mobile Security offers comprehensive protection and comes with modern parental controls advanced enough to allow parents to choose what sites are safe to visit, view a child's activity and receive alerts if inappropriate content is detected.

This is a really useful tool and helps you keep a discreet eye on your child's online activities from mobile devices, as well as offering significant peace of mind and a helping hand in staying one step ahead of the potential dangers.

Get Safe Online

Get Safe Online is a unique resource that provides practical advice on how to protect yourself, your computers and mobile devices against fraud, identity theft, viruses and many other problems encountered online.

It features a useful and informative section on protecting children and has a blog section that regularly updates with useful tips and advice.

Get Safe Online also organises national events such as Get Safe Online week. It's jointly funded by several UK government departments and private sector businesses and is a very useful resource.

Child Online Exploitation Protection

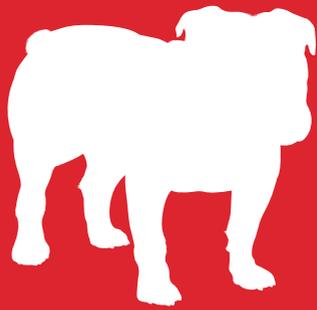
CEOP is part of the UK's National Crime Agency. CEOP is dedicated to child protection and works with partners across the UK and overseas to identify the main threats to children. It aims to protect children from harm online and offline.

CEOP draws on an impressive depth of expertise and in the recent past has prosecuted child abusers by using the encryption cracking skills of GCHQ, the UK government intelligence agency.

If you encounter predatory behaviour or suspicious behaviour CEOP provides a contact channel on its web site to report it.

BullGuard blog

The BullGuard blog offers a wealth of practical tips and information on all aspects of cyber protection. It's written in an easy to understand style, free of jargon, and is worth following for the insights, pointers and help it provides.



www.bullguard.com