INTERNET SAFETY

As schools are closed and we are advised to stay home during the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young people are going online more than usual in order to complete school work, keep in touch with friends and to play games.

As parents/carers, you work incredibly hard at putting boundaries in place when it comes to using the internet, but the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the 'normal' routines that your child/young person with ASD is used to, which includes their usual screen time routine.

All families are different. Some families use the Internet more flexibly and other families are strict in their use. During this unprecedented time, it is important to strike a balance between relaxing screen time boundaries, while maintaining a structured daily routine at home.

This is also a useful time to reflect on your routines as a family. What used to be a 'pre-lockdown normal routine' does not necessarily have to be a 'post-lockdown normal routine'. Old routines can be replaced with new and improved routines going forward.

Understanding the benefits and risks of using the internet

The internet has many educational and social benefits for children and young people. It is an important tool for homework as well as for entertainment, to play games and to socialise with friends.

However, there are potential risks to using the internet that you and your child should be aware of, these are:

- Online bullying
- Sharing personal information or images
- Being groomed or exploited by others online
- Coming across disturbing or inappropriate content

Watch **Breck's Last Game,** a film that tells the story of Surrey teenager Breck Bednar, who like many others his age, loved playing computer games, but was groomed online:https://www.surrey.police.uk/police-forces/surrey-police/areas/campaigns/campaigns/2018/brecks-last-game-film/

How parents can help to keep children and young people safe online:

- Talk about staying safe online and the possible risks of using the internet
- Spend time going online with your child when they use the internet to learn about what games and apps they are using
- If your child is talking to someone online, make sure you know who they are
- Check that the content your child is viewing is age appropriate
- Use parental controls and 'SafeSearch' on their devices
- Give them space online while also keeping channels of communication open

Resources & Support

The **National Autistic Society** helpline (0808 800 4104) is currently operating between **10am – 3pm, Monday to Friday** due to COVID-19. The Autism Helpline can also be accessed online: https://www.autism.org.uk/services/helplines.aspx

InternetMatters.org offer information, advice and support to parents to keep children safe online: https://www.internetmatters.org/

Netaware provides parents with advice regarding keeping children and young people safe online. It includes guides to the social networks, apps and games they might use and what they are used for: https://www.net-aware.org.uk/

Thinkuknow is the education programme from NCA-CEOP, a UK organisation which protects children both online and offline. It contains websites for children and young people of different ages, which give advice about staying safe when you're on a phone, tablet or computer: https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/

The **NSPCC** Online Safety page offers information and advice to help keep children safe online: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety

The **BBC Own It app** is free and designed to support, help and advise children, in the moment, when they use their phones to chat and explore the online world: https://www.bbc.com/ownit

COVID-19 online safety notice for parents

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there are unfortunately cybercriminals exploiting the crisis with a huge volume of emails, texts, social media posts and phone calls seeking to commit fraud or identity theft.

If meeting virtually with a clinician you have not previously met with in person before, **please do not hesitate to ask them to show you their NHS ID Badge** to verify their identity.

Managing screen time

Five tips to manage children's screen time from Internet Matters.org:

1. **Set a good example with your own device use**

Children tend to model their behaviours on parent/carer behaviour (e.g. if you start reading a book, they might follow your lead).

2. **Talk together about the time they spend online**

Take time to understand what they're doing & explain any concerns you have.

3. **Agree an appropriate length of time that they can use their device**

Put in place a family agreement to set some boundaries and don't break them.

4. **Get the whole family to unplug and create 'screen free' zones at home**

Put up 'screen free' posters in these zones to serve as visual reminders.

5. **Use technology and apps to help manage screen time**

e.g. The app 'Forest' enables children to grow a forest when they don't use their phone for a set amount of time; set up Guided Access on an iPhone/iPad to limit the amount of time you can access a given app. Instructions can be found here: https://support.apple.com/en-gb/HT202612

Keeping your child/young person with ASD safe online

Some children and young people with ASD will use the internet to research a topic of special interest. For others, the internet itself might be a special interest**.**

Children with ASD can often be more vulnerable to danger on the internet compared to other children. They tend to have literal interpretations of content online which may affect how they respond to others. Due to social naivety, they can be more trusting of strangers than their peers. They are also more vulnerable to cyberbullying, online grooming and exposure to inappropriate content, often without recognising that they are being exploited. They also may not appreciate how their own behaviour might be construed by someone else as bullying.

Having simple and frequent conversations about internet safety can help your child or young person with ASD understand the benefits and risks of using the internet.

Establishing clear rules and limits to internet use can be beneficial in supporting internet safety. This can be communicated using:

- **Visual supports**: create a visual timetable in collaboration with your child, getting them involved in the process of setting simple rules. A checklist of 'internet dos and don'ts' can also be effective.

- **Role playing** different scenarios with your child/young person about internet safety. Have a conversation with them afterwards about why scenarios are safe or unsafe.

- **Social stories** can be read to/with your child/young person with ASD. Please see the next page for a social story that addresses internet safety.

1

'Being safe online'
Social Story

2

I use the internet to learn.

I use the internet to play games.

I use the internet to chat with friends.

3

Sometimes when I chat to friends online, I get angry at messages and I want to type a mean message back to them.

If I type a mean message to a friend, I could hurt their feelings. I do not like it when people hurt my feelings.

I will try to not hurt my friends' feelings.
If I get angry, I should pause and take some deep breaths before I respond.

Pause,   deep breaths,   respond when calm.

4

Some of the people I chat to online are my friends that I see face-to-face, like friends from school. Other people are 'Internet friends' that I have never seen face-to-face because I only talk to them online.

Sometimes Internet friends might ask me to meet face-to-face with them. If this happens, I will tell my parents/carers. I should not meet face-to-face with anyone from the internet.

5

My name, address and phone number are personal information about me.

Not everyone should know my personal information. I should keep this information safe.

Sometimes people on the internet ask for this information. I will always ask my parent/carer before sharing any personal information.

6

Sometimes when I use the internet, I might see something that makes me feel scared or confused.

If I am worried about something I have seen online I should talk to my parent/carer about it. They can help to keep me safe.

7

I must take a break from the internet to move around and do other activities that I enjoy.

I can play outside.

I can do puzzles or play board games with my family.

I can cuddle my pets.

8

I can be safe online by remembering to:

Be kind when I chat to others.

Not share my personal information with people online.

Tell my parents/carers about anything that makes me feel worried or scared.