Using the internet safely

Read and follow this advice to help you stay safe when using the internet.

Talk to your parents

Speak to your parents about what you will be doing on the Internet. Agree some rules between you about what sites you are allowed to use, what times of the day you can log on and for how long you are allowed to be online.

Never give out your password

No matter who asks, whether it is a stranger in an email or your best friend, never ever give out your passwords.

Once people have your password they can log into your accounts and post as if it were you. You have no control over what they might say and you are responsible, even if it wasn't you that said it.

Don't give out your contact details

We get emails every day from students who want to add their opinion to the current poll or hot topic.

I am amazed at how many students put their email address, facebook page and even phone number in their message saying 'contact me'. *Note: we remove any personal details before the post is placed in the poll or hot topic.*

You don't know who is reading things that you post on the internet. Don't make it so easy for strangers to find out who you are and get in touch with you.

Don't download any software without permission

Even if that free game is exactly what you have been after for weeks, don't ever download or install software without checking with your parents first.

Most software is fine and won't cause you any problems. But some sites put up games or things that look interesting so that you will download them. Once you install them, they might have a virus or a key logger which can automatically send details of everything you type to somebody.

Respect people's privacy

Just because your camera might be able to take photographs or videos, you don't have the right to post those pictures or videos onto the internet without permission.

Try to imagine how you would feel if you found out that a video showing you doing something very embarrassing was posted onto the internet and you didn't know how many people had watched it. You would feel humiliated and might be scared of facing people afterwards.

This is bullying - don't be the person who humiliates others.

Use a child safe web browser

Many web browsers offer a child friendly version. This means that sites have been checked beforehand to make sure that they are suitable. You would be far less likely to accidentally come across a website with inappropriate content.

Respect copyright

Imagine you have a piece of homework that is due in for tomorrow. You think that there is no need to panic because you know that you can find a website and just copy and paste what they have written.

That is a bad idea. Firstly, your teacher will know, they can tell when something isn't written in your own words. Secondly, you haven't done yourself any favours. Yes, you got your homework in on time, but did you actually learn anything? Thirdly, and more importantly, the work on the internet wasn't yours to copy, it belonged to the person who had written it. So effectively, you have stolen their work.

Don't just copy and paste work from the internet. Research, read, understand and then write in your own words.

Use the internet safely and responsibly

While you are going about your everyday life, you know what is right and wrong, what you should and shouldn't do. Well the same rules apply to the internet.

Don't say mean or untrue things about other people, don't tell lies, don't try to embarrass or trick anyone.

Problems with Chatrooms

The main reason that your parents and teachers worry about you using chatrooms is because you can't always tell who you are talking to.

Most of the time, someone you chat to will be genuine. You can have a conversation with them, have a laugh, tell each other about things and over time build up a real friendship.

But, you do need to be aware that not everyone in a chatroom is really who they say they are.

Because you can't see who you are talking to, the person called pinkbunny might not really be a 13 year old girl. They might be a 45 year old man who gets a kick from chatting to young girls or boys, or perhaps even worse, trying to meet up with them in real life.

We don't want to scare you, but you only need to look at the news stories almost every week to read about a young person who was tricked into meeting someone who wasn't who they said they were.

But, when you use a chatroom, you do need to follow some basic rules to make sure that you stay safe.

Chatrooms can be great places and so long as you use them safely and your parents agree, there is no reason why you shouldn't use them.

Staying safe in Chatrooms

1. Tell your parents

You must tell your parents if you are planning to use chatrooms. They only want to keep you safe and to do this, they need to know what you are doing and what chatrooms you are using. Decide on some rules together about what you should and shouldn't be doing.

2. Use a nickname

When you log into a chatroom you should always make sure to use a nick name or alias, something which can't easily be used to identify you.

You can tell your real friends your nickname so they know who to look out for when they join the chatroom, but it helps keep your real life identity safe from anyone else around.

3. Never give out personal details

The most important of these is to never give out your personal details. This means no telling people your real name, even just your first name. If there is someone unsavoury in the chatroom, they can start to use your name to gain your trust.

You also shouldn't tell anyone how old or even your gender. That might sound a bit odd, but if there is an adult in the chatroom who is trying to target young girls or boys, you are giving them the information they need.

Other information that you absolutely mustn't give out are any details about where you live, you shouldn't be telling people your actual address or even which town you're from as that gives them the chance to say they live near you and try to gain your trust.

You also shouldn't tell them which school you go to. It wouldn't take a genius to track down a school. They only need a bit more information about you gleaned from your conversations in the chatroom for them to be able to identify you at school.

No matter what reasons or excuses people give, don't ever tell them your phone number. They might make out that they really like you and they want to chat to you in person. Don't be fooled, keep your phone number a secret.

Keep your email address a secret. You might think that it can't do any harm to let someone have your email. But they might start sending you pictures that make you feel scared or uncomfortable. They could even send you a computer virus in the email.

4. Don't send your picture to anyone

Never ever send anyone your picture. It doesn't matter how much they ask or promise to send you one in return, don't let them see what you look like.

5. Don't open attachments from anyone

This shouldn't be a problem because you won't give anyone your email address, will you? But, if for some reason you did give it out and you find someone is sending you emails with mean or rude pictures, don't open them and tell your parents immediately.

6. Stay in the public chatroom

Always stay in the public chatrooms. If someone you don't know suggests going into a private chatroom so you can talk in private, don't agree. The public chatrooms have people in them. They might notice if there is something wrong. If you are in a private chatroom alone with someone, there is no one to help you out.

Even if you are in the public chatroom and someone says anything which makes you feel uncomfortable, don't respond back. Log off and tell your parents.

7. Don't meet up in real life on your own

Don't ever agree to meet someone in real life that you have met in a chatroom without first discussing it with your parents. If you do ever decide to meet someone, make sure that it is in a public place and make sure that your parents go with you. If someone suggests that you go alone, it should set alarm bells ringing.

Make sure that you follow all of these rules and you should be able to enjoy using chatrooms and stay safe in them.

Cyber Bullying

You might have heard the term 'cyber bullying' but not be sure what it means.

Cyber bullying means to try to hurt someone's feelings by using technology such as the internet, email, chatrooms and texting.

As many as one third of teenagers have been victims of cyber bullying. This has included things like having a private email you sent to someone forwarded to other people so they could read it, or having a rumour or an embarrassing photograph posted about you online, without your permission.

In the past, bullying took place in school or on the way to school. Things would be whispered, shouted or passed around. Now, with a few clicks, a photo, video or a conversation can be shared with hundreds via e-mail or millions through a website, online profile or blog posting.

Some people think that it's ok to do these things. They think that because its online and not being said in person, it doesn't count or it won't hurt anyone. They might feel like they are anonymous because of the Internet and that they can post whatever they like because they won't get found out.

Don't be a person who bullies others using technology. It is cruel and mean. It does hurt others. It does humiliate them. It does make them feel bad about themselves.

How to deal with cyber bullying

Unfortunately, cyber bullying seems to be happening more often as time goes on. We can only give you some tips on how to try to protect yourself.

Personal information

Don't give out personal information in chatrooms, social websites, blogs, etc.

Passwords

Don't tell anyone, even your best friends, your passwords. They might be your best friend now, but what if you have an argument. They might log into your account and post really mean things and make it look like it was you.

Don't respond

If you receive any mean or threatening messages in the chatroom, text or email, don't ever respond. You might be tempted to delete the message but don't. Save it and show an adult - you might need the message to use as evidence against the person who sent it.

Contact the website

If you find mean things have been said about you on a website, for example, MySpace or Facebook, you can ask to have the comments removed. The same is true if you find out that photographs or videos have been posted without your permission.

Tell someone

Don't suffer in silence. If you are being bullied, then tell your parents. If you don't feel that you can talk to them then tell a teacher or an adult that you trust. You mustn't keep it to yourself because if you do, the bully has got exactly what they want.