



ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter - September 2015

Last week we recognised National Child Protection Week for 2015. The week aims to encourage all Australians to 'play their part' in promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. When we think about the threats to children's safety online, we often conjure up images of strangers preying on vulnerable young people, but what about unwanted approaches and communications from people that are known to the child? In this e-Newsletter, we will look at the challenges in responding to unwanted communications and provide some advice for overcoming such challenges.

Unwanted sexual solicitations

In our ThinkUKnow presentations, we talk about online grooming – when an adult makes online contact with someone under the age of 16 with the intention of facilitating a sexual relationship. There is some evidence to suggest, however, that young people may be receiving unwanted sexual solicitations or approaches from other young people, who may even be known to them. This can create dilemmas for young people who have to not only deal with the unwanted contact, but also how to manage the relationship moving forward.

Blocking and reporting the person who sent the unwanted communication can be difficult for a young person, as they may feel as though it would hurt the person's feelings or get them into trouble. Young people may need some guidance in developing management techniques to overcome this type of behaviour.

Time2Talk

In this section we look at ways to start talking with children and young people about their use of technology.

Who do you think is more likely to upset you online, someone you know or a complete stranger?

How would you respond if a friend of a friend asked you a really inappropriate question online?

What would you do if you accidentally came across explicit content online?

Who are five people you could talk to if something upset you or made you feel uncomfortable online?

This might involve preparing some responses about why they don't want to engage in that type of conversation (or deflecting the comment with humour or changing the topic) and, if that doesn't work, blocking the person (which doesn't always have to be permanent, it can be reversed). Talking with your child about safe and respectful relationships can help them draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable communications and the actions they can take to keep safe.

Exposure to pornography

Children and young people might even be exposed to pornography through their friends or acquaintances. The harm or distress caused by this exposure may vary depending on the child's age and the actual content of the pornography. It's a difficult topic to talk about, but children and young people need to know that if they see something which distresses them, they can talk to you (or another nominated trusted adult) about what they've seen, without them being punished. Developing strategies to respond to their friends about why they don't want to see this kind of material can also help them to self-manage any exposure and avoid future communications of that nature.

Accidental or unwanted exposure to pornography can be quite distressing, so it's a good idea to reinforce safe searching and digital literacy skills such as not clicking on links and only visiting reputable websites with your child. Another concern may be that children and young people are deliberately seeking pornography online as a form of sex education. Directing your child to ethical sources of information around sexual health and sexuality is a more appropriate means of exploring the topic and helps to avoid some of the damaging themes and attitudes portrayed in some forms of pornography.

Talking with your child

There may be occasions when a child is embarrassed to disclose an incident to their parent, they may feel as though they have contributed to the incident or don't feel it is serious enough to warrant telling a parent. It's important to have ongoing discussions with your child about safe and respectful relationships, as well as sexual health and ethics, in a manner which is appropriate for your child's age and development. These discussions should avoid any judgements and allow your child to openly raise issues and concerns in a non-confrontational environment. Knowing that you are open to talking about these topics will make it easier for your child to confide in you if something does upset them.

Children and young people are likely to confide in a friend first, so equipping your child to assist their friends with any concerns online is also a useful approach. Encouraging your child to show empathy to their friends and take any reports seriously is a crucial first step in creating an environment in which sharing concerns is not only accepted, but encouraged. Workshop ideas with your child that could be used to overcome challenges online, but always ensure they know that they can come to you, or another trusted adult, if they need further support and advice.

ThinkUKnow Corporate Report

The ThinkUKnow Corporate Report for 2014-15 was released last week by the Justice Minister Michael Keenan. This report highlights the key outcomes of the initiative in 2014-15 and acknowledges the outstanding efforts of our volunteers from law enforcement and industry. You can [download a full copy of the report on our website](#).

