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This week is National Child Protection Week 2011 with the theme "Play your Part." Everyone has a role to play in protecting children and young people and making sure that they grow up to be safe and responsible citizens. For more information on the week, visit the Play Your Part website.

We talk a lot about how people misuse technology and the consequent effects on children and young people. In this issue, we're going to look at the flip side: how children and young people can use technology to maximise its benefits. What are the skills which children and young people need to navigate the digital landscape and how can we help them to develop these skills?

Digital literacy is the term often given to the ability for people to safely and responsibly take advantage of the opportunities which technologies such as the Internet offer us. This term is not just about knowing the difference between a bit and a byte, or a troll and a Trojan, but also encompasses the more relational aspects of technology. Let's have a closer look at some elements of digital literacy now.

Assessing credibility

There is an overwhelming amount of information available online, but not all of it is true. Young people need to develop the skills to critically evaluate the information presented to them to determine its credibility. Looking at the domain is a good place to start: websites which end in .edu or .gov have to be of a different standard to those just ending in .com. The date it was also last updated can give you some

Time2Talk

This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their use of technology.

How can you tell a good website from a bad one?

Can you trust what you read online?

Do you communicate differently with people online depending on the context?

What would encourage you to read a privacy policy?

Privacy Management

Another aspect of the responsible use of technology is the ability to control what information you share, as well as understand how your information is collected and used by others. A modern version of the serenity prayer might read "grant me the serenity to accept the privacy policies, courage to use the privacy settings and digital literacy to know the difference."

It is unfortunate that only a minority of children and young people actually read the terms and conditions or privacy policies before signing up to a site. It's not really a surprise, though, when you see the legalistic jargon which populates the policies. It's

indication as to how current the information is. Not every website will clearly state "date published" so you may need to look at the sources quoted to give you an idea of when it was written.

Next, young people need to critically assess the text: why was it written and what techniques are used to grab my attention? It isn't always an easy thing to do, navigating fact from fiction. Take the tree octopus experiment for example!

Perhaps you could try this exercise with your child: have a look at the tree octopus website and see if you can assess its credibility.

Community norms and etiquette

Online interactions are guided by norms and rules in the same way as many offline interactions. You don't yell at someone, just like you don't use all upper case letters in an IM conversation. If someone wishes you a happy birthday, you say thank you. If they write happy birthday on your Facebook wall, you 'like' their post.

The norms will change depending on the community and how well you know the people you are communicating with. What is acceptable in an IM conversation with friends will probably not be appropriate for an email to your teacher. Children and young people need to develop the skills required to identify the appropriate communication norms fro the community or environment they are interacting with.

Maybe you could try this exercise: make a list of different interactions, eg email to a teacher, IM conversation with friends, group chat for a school assignment, and ask your child to write how they would greet someone and ask how they are in the different interactions.

difficult enough for your average adult, let alone a 13 year old! The makers of Farmville, Zynga, have tried to make their policies a little bit clearer by turning them into a game "Privacyville".

Websites and applications which have a large number of young people as users need to make their policies clearer to understand, in the meantime, parents, carers and teachers can help young people to decipher these policies. You may not want to sign up to a site once you read that they take ownership of your content or track your online behaviours to market different goods and services to you.

There are steps which can be taken to control how your information is shared, most commonly found in the privacy settings of the accounts you operate. This puts the responsibility back on the child or young person to, firstly, understand the settings and, secondly, put them to good use. For advice on how to change the privacy settings on a number of social networking sites, check out our how-to guides.

Digital Literacy and the digital divide

It is encouraging to see more and more people gaining access to the Internet, but are they developing the necessary digital literacy skills at the same time? Children are not born with the "digital gene" that allows them to understand technology somewhere between learning to walk and learning to run. They play with technology and learn from trial and error, but they still need their parents, carers and teachers to guide them in this learning process.