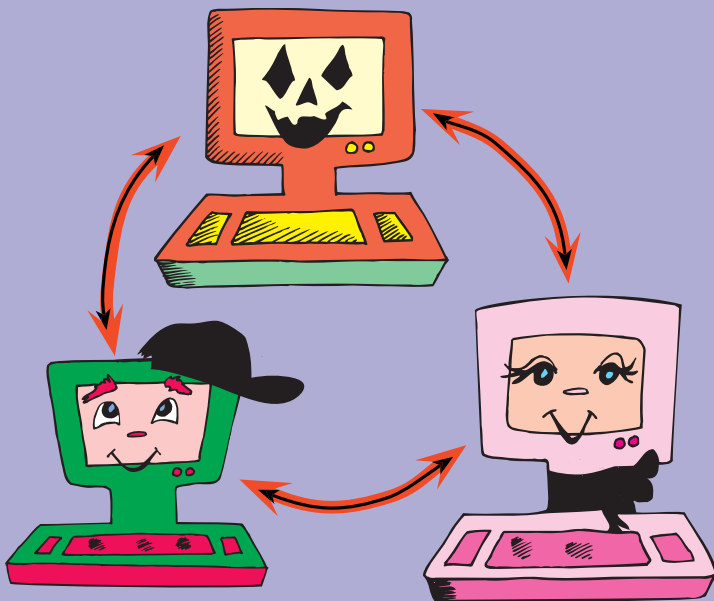


A Guide to Internet Chatrooms



AVON AND SOMERSET
CONSTABULARY

Guidance for parents and guardians

As responsible parents or guardians you would never leave a child alone in a strange area, let them visit a city unsupervised, let them enter adult-only shops or meet a total stranger.

Unfortunately, every time a child in your care logs on to the web without supervision they face the same potential dangers as they do in all the situations above.

The opportunities offered by the web can be exploited. It can allow those who target children to enter your home and interact with your children.

The internet continues to grow in its importance to our society and possibly has even more significance in our children's lives. Parents and carers of all kinds need to be familiar with both the opportunities and the dangers of the web.

By following the suggestions below it is possible to use the internet to its full potential without encountering any of the pitfalls.

As well as following the advice in this leaflet, you may also want to contact your local computer retailer to find out about protective software packages that you can install on your machine.

How you can reduce the risk

Try to site computers in an area where it is easy to monitor what your child is doing. If possible have it in a family room like the living room.

Establish reasonable guidelines for their use of the internet or chatline. Talk about the six tips for chatroom use with them, place them in a visible place near the computer.

Become familiar with the internet and the services or sites your child uses.

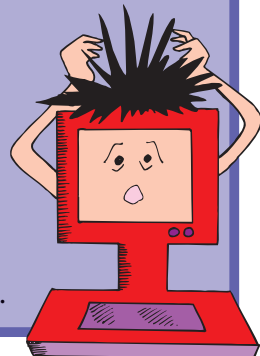
Get to know their on-line friends in the same way you would with their other friends.

Discourage your child from meeting anyone they have met on line.

Encourage them to come to you if they see or read anything on the internet which upsets them.

If in doubt, contact the police.

If you think your teenager is too savvy or streetwise to get themselves into danger, it is worth noting that a survey found around one in 20 children aged between 7 and 16 admitted seeing something on the web that upset or embarrassed them.



Guidance for young users

You may well pride yourself on being savvy and streetwise.

But how web-wise are you?

It is easy to remain anonymous on the web and this can encourage some people to make things up about themselves, even passing off someone else's face as their own.

Sometimes people will give a false impression of themselves, either by exaggerating the truth or lying. A lot of

the time you will instinctively know what another person is saying is odd or not quite right. This is your instinct, which acts as a self-defence, telling you something is wrong. It is important to trust these instincts and let your parent or carer know when you think something is wrong.

This instinct works best when you can see or hear a person, but obviously when talking to someone on the web it is not possible to do this so it is important to be even more alert.

The following six points should help you to prevent this happening.

Six tips which will help you become web-wise:

- 1** Don't give out personal details, photographs or any other information that could be used to identify you, such as information about your family, your telephone number where you live or the school you go to. The same goes for information about your friends.
- 2** Don't take other people at face value – they may not be what they seem.
- 3** Never arrange to meet someone you've only ever previously met on the internet without first telling your parents, getting their permission and taking a responsible adult with you. The first meeting should always be in a public place.
- 4** Always stay in public areas of chat and where there are other people around.
- 5** Don't open an attachment or download a file unless you know and trust the person who has sent it. If you are posting, don't include anything that would identify you offline.
- 6** Never respond directly to anything you find disturbing – save or print it, log off and tell an adult.



FAQ

Is it safe to use chatrooms?

Most of the time 'yes', but remember, some people who use chat rooms can be a danger to you!

As long as you use common sense and use the internet safely you should not be at risk. Remember, don't give out any information that can identify you and don't believe everything you read.

I'm smart enough to know when someone's pulling my leg – surely I'm not at risk?

The people who abuse chatrooms can be quite convincing, tricking adults as well as teenagers. Without seeing a person we can never be sure they are what they say they

are. This is why you should never arrange to meet someone you have chatted to on the internet without telling your parents, getting their permission and taking a responsible adult with you. Even then, your first meeting should always be in a public place.

What should I do if I see or read something I don't like?

This is very difficult to judge, especially as you cannot see the person. This is why it is better to be cautious and not give too much away about yourself. Think about it, if a perfect stranger came up to you in the street and started chatting to you would you tell them where you live, which school you go to or where you hang out with your friends?

Useful links

Childnet International

Telephone: 020 7639 6967
www.childnet-int.org
www.chatanger.com
Email: info@childnet-int.org

Childline

Telephone: 0800 1111
www.childline.org.uk

Internet Watch Foundation

If you think it's illegal
www.iwf.org.uk

Kidscape

Telephone: 020 7730 3300
www.kidscape.org.uk

NSPCC

Telephone: 0808 800 5000
www.nspcc.org.uk
Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Child-Safe

Telephone: 01275 816131/6133
www.child-safe.org.uk