



Communication and Interaction Team

Autism and Online Safety

Online access and presence amongst young people offers significant potential and opportunities to support their communication, social interaction and learning and this access continues to increase and expand, with the introduction of new apps, websites and platforms. However, alongside these positive elements come difficulties and risks – for all young people, but in particular for young people with additional needs, such as Autism.

Social cues can be even harder to read/pick up on from behind a screen.

Potential additional difficulties for young people with Autism:

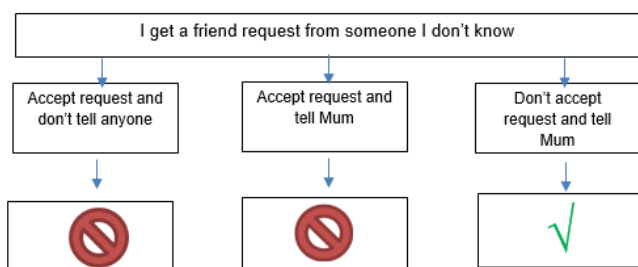
- Increased vulnerability linked to difficulties understanding safe and positive relationships
- Difficulty with 'Theory of mind' – understanding other people's beliefs and intentions, which becomes even more of a challenge in an 'online world'
- Difficulties differentiating between fantasy/reality
- Social isolation which may lead to an increased/excessive online use
- Difficulty in accessing whole school teaching around online safety
- Difficulty in communicating if/when something has happened online that they are not comfortable with
- There are no definitive rules for every online situation which means that each potential situation needs an individual decision making process, which can be challenging

Strategies

- Any whole school/class teaching may need to be regularly reiterated/differentiated to ensure understanding – parents and schools should liaise closely around delivery and content where possible
- Ideally keep a computer in a family room where access can be supervised
- Ensure that internet filters are in place and have appropriate restrictions – make sure these are applied to mobile internet too such as mobile phones and/or tablets
- Establish family ground rules which you are comfortable with and meet your child's needs – use visuals and social stories to support this process where appropriate
- Use role play to 'practice' situations with your child that might arise
- Support children to search and find out about their special interests using well know and established sites, rather than random Google searches – for example National Geographic site; agree on a list of sites that can be used independently (supported by visuals)
- Adults should make themselves aware of the different sites that young people use and the common acronyms used during internet talk
- The use of 'scripts' that can be used in different situations so that the young person is clear around what steps they need to take.
- Develop a non-verbal strategy with your child for them to identify if something has gone wrong online for them as expressing this verbally may be too tricky for them. E.g. A printed picture of a laptop that they can put on their parent's bed if they need to talk. The adult can then start the conversation.



- The use of flow charts to provide steps to take for different situations e.g. friend request from someone unknown, displayed near where the internet is used. E.g.



Useful resources, links and further reading:

- 'Mencap – Learning Disabilities, Autism and Internet Safety (cerebra.org.uk)
- Commonsense.org – provides parental guides for YouTube and other programmes
- Friendlywifi.com – this government initiated guide explains where open Wi-Fi services meet a minimum filtering standard (useful when out and about if children want to log onto an open Wi-Fi network)
- Internetmatters.org – provides guidance around safer internet use, including terminology that young people may use that parents may not be aware of
- www.childnet.com have provided guides for parents and carers to support around children's 'digital well-being' – there are guides split into age ranges from 7-18 years, along with the STAR SEN toolkit
- National Autistic Society's publication 'Safeguarding Young People on the Autism Spectrum' includes sections around online safety
- Connectsafely.org provides parent guides to help with understanding some of the most popular sites/apps such as Instagram and Tictoc
- <https://www.wizcase.com/blog/internet-safety-guide-for-people-with-autism-spectrum-disorders/> an external blog