

Internet safety

While the internet is an enormously important resource for many home educators and gives children access to some wonderful, interactive resources, no parent can fail to be aware that it is also a route into our homes through which unwelcome intruders can gain access to children.

The government and child protection charities have run a number of campaigns to raise awareness and promote safety on the internet and a number of new laws have been passed. Yet despite all this activity there is a continuing flow of news about a very few young children and teens being abducted.

At the forefront of these Child Exploitation and CEOP seems convinced against exploitative adults authorities become more perpetrators spread their Currently the concern social network sites like

However there are educated children, the nature of home distances young people another, they often networks like MSN and These informal networks young person inviting know into the "circle" of

CEOP online safety tips for parents

- Know what your children are doing online
- Get them to show you how to do things
- Help them understand not to give any personal information to online friends
- Teach them to ignore spam
- Teach them to ignore files sent by people they don't know
- Teach them some people lie online
- Tell them to keep online friends online
- Keep talking so they know they can always tell you if something makes them feel uncomfortable
- Show children how to block people online and how to report them

campaigns is CEOP, the Online Protection Centre. that as the online fight develops and the adept at spotting them the nets more widely. appears to be focusing on Face Book.

particular issues for home especially teens. Due to education and the often live from one communicate using windows messenger. of contacts rely upon each other young people they friends.

If someone gains access to such a circle then they can become trusted by all, thus compromising the whole group.

These groups are mostly run by the young people themselves, developing organically one contact to another into quite large informal online communities, unmonitored by adults and relying entirely on the children's own skills. It's up to us as parents to ensure that they have these skills.

Unless we live in a family with religious or moral objections to internet technology, it's pointless to suggest that we shouldn't allow our children access to the internet with IT fast becoming regarded as a basic skill along side the three Rs. What we need then are strategies for safety.

A method used by unsavoury adults trying to lure children is to create questionnaires for children to answer. The basic question is known as "ALS" of some variant on it. This stands for Age, Location Sex and is an attempt to get some basic information about someone with whom you are communicating. Answers come back in the form of 35, UK, M meaning I'm a 35 year old male living in the UK.

But recently more detailed questions have appeared where young people are asked to disclose all kinds of information. For example one that I encountered, cleverly mixed probing questions with other relatively innocuous questions, asked for hobbies, school, city, girlfriend/ boyfriend, sports and mobile phone number.

If a child answers this they may at some point be asked for a photograph and later still for their name and home street. This gives someone the name of the school, a picture of the child, location of their home and a mobile phone number, as well as a list of personal interests. Using this information a child could easily be tracked down.

It is easy to become paranoid over the internet, which in reality is no more dangerous than any social setting. The real danger is in not realising that although you are sat in your bedroom you are in fact communicating with the outside world just as you might in a park or street. This creates a false sense of security and may lead young people to make unwary disclosures of personal data that can lead them to be identified in real life.

Knowing ahead how to protect such data is obviously the key.

www.ceop.gov.uk/get_advice.asp