

Keeping Myself eSafe

Information for Teachers

File Sharing

File Sharing

For young people in particular, the sharing of digital media such as music, photographs, videos, games and podcasts is one of the most exciting features of the digital age. Uploading and downloading files from the internet and sharing digital content with others is an everyday activity amongst young people.

Peer-to-peer sharing

The transfer of digital files between computers over the internet is referred to as 'file sharing'. The most common method is called 'peer-to-peer' sharing, which describes the process of moving stored digital files from one personal computer to another.

In recent years, software has become widely available that enables a user to browse files on another person's computer and download music, films, games and other media. Users, who install such software, do so in the knowledge that millions of people around the world may access the directories on their hard drives, download files and then share them with other users.

Free trade

One of the best-known examples of peer-to-peer file sharing is Napster – a hugely popular program that enabled people to acquire MP3 music files without having to purchase them. This free trade of music MP3 files led to highly publicised legal action by record companies over the legality of peer-to-peer software.

Although Napster closed down in 2001 after being found guilty of facilitating the transfer of copyrighted material, new file sharing programs like LimeWire, Panthera, Bearshare and Swapper emerged and they all operate in a similar way to the Napster model.

Online stores

In 2003 Apple Computers launched the iTunes online store, which is now one of the most popular methods of downloading music, games, movies and podcasts. This is an example of a legitimate file-sharing service because consumers pay for downloads, and royalties are paid to the artists, record labels and film companies who own the copyright. A growing number of suppliers have since adopted the iTunes model, including Napster who now operates a legitimate online store.

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YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing website where users can upload, view and share video clips, and its phenomenal growth since 2005 demonstrates the growing popularity of video file sharing. While many users post home made videos on YouTube, there is also a wide range of clips from TV programmes, films and music videos.

YouTube has been frequently criticised for failing to ensure that its online content adheres to the law of copyright. Although YouTube users are instructed not to upload any content that may breach copyright legislation, there are still many unauthorised clips from television shows, films and music videos on YouTube. Organizations including Viacom and the English Premier League have issued lawsuits against YouTube, claiming that it has done too little to prevent the uploading of copyrighted material.

Risks

Personal information – File sharing, especially by peer-to-peer software, can make computer files visible to other users. Personal information stored on a computer, like passwords and bank information may be at risk.

Malware – Often the files that are available for download contain viruses, spyware and other invasive bugs that can wreak havoc on a computer and steal personal information that might be used in identity theft.

Inappropriate content – Even searching for children’s television programmes can bring up undesirable and inappropriate content. Young people can easily be exposed to pornography, inflammatory literature (eg, hate/racist websites) or illegal material (eg, instructional videos for making explosive devices).

Copyright infringement – Most young people are unaware that movies, music and images are the property of a person or company, and permission must be granted before they can be used. Peer-to-peer file sharing makes downloading content very easy, but it can also lead to serious legal and financial repercussions. Entertainment corporations are filing more and more lawsuits against people who download copyrighted movies and music, and there have been several recent cases of legal action against children.

Cyber-cheating – The ease of searching for information on the internet makes it an invaluable tool in helping young people to learn. However, some students see this as an opportunity to cut corners by copying other people’s published work, and presenting it as their own. This is sometimes referred to as cyber-cheating. Not only is this unfair to other students, it can hamper the young person’s ability to learn effectively. Many schools and universities are now taking disciplinary action against students who are caught cheating.

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Safety Strategies

- 1) Never download files or content from people or sites that you aren't sure about. Even if the file comes from a friend, you must still be sure what the file is before opening it. Hacking tools and programs (such as Trojan horses) can give someone a backdoor to your computer, all your passwords and personal information.
- 2) Be careful about sharing pictures of yourself, especially if they are the sort that you wouldn't want your parents or teachers to see. Photographs and other images can be downloaded and used in ways that you might find embarrassing or upsetting.
- 3) Don't break intellectual copyright by uploading or sharing images, music or film that is the work of other people. It is against copyright law to do this. You don't have the right to alter someone else's work either.
- 4) Never post or share material that is offensive or illegal.
- 5) Make sure your computer is equipped with virus-protection software. Free versions are often available online.
- 6) Check the firewall protection on your computer. Find out what people sharing your network can and cannot access. Adjust the settings to the most secure. If using a wireless network, make sure you have a password set that only the correct people know.
- 7) Do not use peer-to-peer software to download content if it breaks copyright law. It is important that artists get compensation for their work in the same way that your parents get paid by their employers.
- 8) Never download files containing inappropriate and illegal content. If you find yourself looking at something that makes you feel uncomfortable, upset or threatened, quit the programme and talk to someone about it.
- 9) Do not believe information or views just because they are published on a web site. There is always a possibility that a website can be deliberately false or misleading. Use more than one site in research to get broad, balanced information.
- 10) Learn how to cite the sources of your school work properly. There is nothing wrong with using other people's work as reference for your own, but the proper credit must be given. Make sure your bibliographies are comprehensive and complete.