

Keeping Myself eSafe

Information for Teachers

**Mobile and Video
Technologies**

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Mobile phone technology has undergone a tremendous change in recent years, and today's phones can do much more than make voice calls. Modern handsets have a wide range of features including:

- internet browsing
- SMS (text messages)
- mp3 music playback
- built in camera and video recording
- email and voice mail
- video messaging
- Bluetooth TM (a technology that enables the transfer of data to other devices).

These features make mobile phones very attractive for young people and statistics show that in the UK:

- more than 75% of children own a mobile phone
- the average age of ownership is reducing every year.

Although mobile technology offers great benefits, there are a number of risks where young people are concerned.

Risks

Inappropriate contact

Online grooming usually involves a predator setting up an abusive situation using technologies such as instant messaging, social networking websites, internet chat rooms and mobile phones.

A sexual predator's aim is usually to isolate the child and progress the conversation into a private domain, and this frequently involves the use of mobile phone, since it facilitates direct and intimate contact with the child. Paedophiles have been known to give their victims mobile phones, so providing a direct route for the 'friendship' to develop from online chat. The rich content capabilities of mobile phones mean that young people may be sent inappropriate images or videos, or be encouraged to send images or videos of themselves by using integrated cameras.

As mobile phones are such private devices, it is difficult for parents to supervise internet access and contacts in the same way as they would a computer in the home. Modern phones, however, offer many of the same online facilities as a PC and therefore all the associated risks to personal safety.

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Inappropriate content

Children and young people using mobile internet services may be exposed to material that is pornographic, hateful or violent in nature or encourages activities that are dangerous or illegal. Again, the personal and private nature of mobile phones make it difficult for parents to supervise access and monitor online browsing in the same way as they would a computer in the home.

Bullying by mobile phone

Bullying by mobile phone has become an unfortunate by-product of the convenience that SMS (short message service) and MMS (multimedia messaging services) offer. The direct and personal nature of mobile phones offers bullies access to victims even at home and, by withholding caller-identity, they are able to remain anonymous. Many pay-as-you-go mobile phones do not require proof of identity, and calls made from these types of mobile phone are virtually untraceable.

The latest mobile phones usually have camera and video technology, which bullies use to record images of their victim. These photographs or videos are then used to cause upset for the victim because:

- The victim has been unaware that photos or videos were taken
- The images present the victim in an unflattering degrading way
- They are shared with a wider audience by mobile, or on social networking sites.

Acts of 'happy slapping' – where an assault on the victim is videoed using a camera phone, then shared between phones or posted online – adds to the misery and ridicule of the victim.

These forms of bullying are an invasion of privacy, and the practice can be extremely distressing for the person involved. Once released into a wider forum, it is impossible to track down and permanently delete the images or videos, so adding to the torment and suffering of the victim.

Additionally, photographs could include clues as to the individuals' location, such as the school name in the background, which if distributed inappropriately, could lead to the risk of contact by strangers.

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Abusive messages

Although text messaging play a key role in enabling young people to stay connected with their friends, this aspect of mobile phone technology can sometimes be abused. Unlike face-to-face contact, messaging another person is an indirect interaction, so it is easy for young people to forget the importance of civility, and this can sometimes give rise to what is referred to as 'flaming'.

Flaming occurs when one person sends an angry or antagonistic message, which can easily escalate into arguments and abusive exchanges – a phenomenon known as 'flame wars' or 'cyber wars'. This behaviour can cause upset and distress for the recipients and, because abusive or threatening messages may be saved and printed, senders may be held accountable for their actions.

Lifestyle

The widespread and round the clock use of mobile phones can adversely affect the lifestyles of some young people. Mobile phone users are typically always contactable which can also mean that they never really 'switch off'. Late-night texting by teenagers, for example, is very common and the resulting sleep impairment can adversely affect levels of concentration, the quality of school work and general wellbeing.

A recent survey found that 80 per cent of UK teenagers have no restrictions placed on their mobile phone use by parents or carers.

Commerce

Research shows that many children are unable to differentiate between what is advertising and what is not.

Young people with ready access to the mobile internet may be easily exposed to chargeable content and premium rate services in the form of games, downloads, ring tones, logos, chat and other services, all of which are particularly attractive to children.

Unsolicited text messages, typically stating that the recipient has won a prize which can be claimed by calling a given number, are becoming more widespread. Such messages are sent indiscriminately, they often do not provide clear pricing information, and the prize may be subject to numerous terms and conditions. A young person may be lured into making an expensive premium rate call to investigate the nature of his or her prize.

Spam by text message is also a growing problem because young people can easily be tricked into revealing personal information. Spam messages and emails may also contain links to pornographic content or attachments that are unsuitable for children to view.

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Young people should be made aware of the cost implications of using premium rate services such as ring tone and wallpaper downloads and chat services. They should always look for and understand the pricing policy of these services before accessing them, and be aware that charges can mount up very quickly.

Lost or stolen phones

With over 70% of children and young people owning a mobile phone, it is inevitable that a relatively high percentage become lost or stolen. Apart from the financial consequences of losing a mobile (the cost of replacement and any calls made by the thief), there are safety issues to be considered.

If children use their phones for social networking purposes (eg, Bebo and Facebook) websites) it is likely that their phones may contain personal information in the form of a user profile. This can reveal the identity of the phone's owner, together with their address, school, details about friends and contacts, as well as their hobbies and interests. It may even contain a photograph.

The nature of this personal information can expose children to contact from sexual predators.

In recent years, a mobile phone database has been created to block stolen and lost mobile phones so that they will not work on any UK mobile network, therefore making a stolen phone worthless. Each handset has an IMEI number (a unique 15-digit serial number) and this number should be reported to the network operator immediately. When the IMEI number is blocked, the handset will not work. The theft of a phone should always be reported to the police.

Young people must also know not to buy cheap mobile phones from friends or acquaintances. Buying phones in this way encourages the cycle of crime.

Video and webcams

Webcams are video cameras that can display live images on the internet, and they are becoming an increasingly popular way for people to communicate online. Where a webcam and a microphone are used together, it is possible to hear and see the person behind the camera and this facility offers an ideal way of communicating with friends, relatives and colleagues who might live or work far away.

Although some computers are supplied with in-built cameras and microphones, webcams are relatively inexpensive to buy, so it is easy for a young person to set up webcam facilities and communicate with others online, usually from the privacy of their bedrooms.

Webcam technology poses particular e-safety risks because it allows an open window into the activities and lives of children and young people. Sexual predators who meet and form

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relationships with children may attempt to use webcams as a means of direct and intimate communication. Having established a trusting relationship with a child, the predator may persuade the victim to engage in sexual behaviour, sometimes involving transmitting sexually explicit images and videos via web phone or webcam.

There is also a very dangerous webcam-specific virus or worm called W32/Rbot-GR, where a predator can recognise that a child has a webcam attached to the computer, and is able to activate the young person's webcam remotely, without their knowledge or approval.

While most young people are aware of the potential dangers of cyber grooming, many do not recognise the risks associated with inappropriate use of webcam technology with friends or peers. A teenager, for example, may use a webcam to engage in intimate or sexual behaviour with a boyfriend or girlfriend, without considering the possible consequences of transmitting sexually explicit images across the internet, which may be recorded without the participant knowing.

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Strategies

- 1) Never give out your personal details to anyone on the internet. This includes your messenger ID, email address, home address, mobile number and any pictures of you, your family or friends.
- 2) If you do give personal details, keep a record of what information you gave, to whom and when.
- 3) When using social networking sites such as Bebo and Facebook, set your profile to 'private' so that only your friends can view it.
- 4) Never agree to meet someone in real life that you only know through a chatroom.
- 5) Remember the importance of good manners and 'netiquette'. Never send abusive or hurtful messages to anyone and avoid getting involved in arguments where you say things that you might later regret.
- 6) If you receive a message that is either harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, tell a trusted adult. You can also contact your internet service provider or mobile network provider. They will have procedures to deal with unwanted messages, and can advise you on the next step.
- 7) Learn to recognise spam or junk email and phishing scams. Don't believe them, reply to them or use them. Never click links in text or email messages.
- 8) Never reply to texts from strangers offering a chance to claim a 'prize' when you haven't entered a competition.
- 9) Always get permission from your parents before using a premium rate service on your mobile phone or home computer. Find out the costs involved. Premium rate charges can be very expensive.
- 10) If you are being bullied, speak to a parent or another trusted adult - you should not be expected to handle bullying by yourself. If the harassment gets worse you can report it to the police. Remember, bullying is against the law.
- 11) Don't reply to messages from bullies - even though you may want to. This is exactly what bullies are hoping you will do. They want to know that you are worried and upset. Usually the bully grows bored of sending one-way texts and stops.
- 12) Think twice before using a webcam to transmit inappropriate or sexual behaviour to another person. You can never be really sure exactly who is viewing the images and how they may be used.
- 13) Never buy a cheap mobile phone from a friend or acquaintance. Buying phones in this way encourages the cycle of crime.
- 14) If you lose your mobile phone, report its IMEI number to the network operator immediately (you can usually find this number behind the battery so make a note of it). When the IMEI number is blocked, the handset will not work.
- 15) Always report the theft of a mobile phone to the police.