



**Vodafone
Ireland
Foundation**



Recommendations for parents to keep children safer online

The **ISPCC Childline** and **Vodafone Ireland Foundation** have teamed up together to create recommendations for parents on how to keep their children safer online.

**ISPCC
Childline**



Intro

The ISPCC is Ireland's national child protection charity. In 2016, it commenced a major five year partnership with Vodafone which aims to keep children safe by keeping them connected. A key aspect of this work is to shape national law, policy and practice in the field of child protection online.

→ In December 2016, ISPCC Childline and Vodafone hosted a Cyber Safety Conference in Dublin. The aim of this conference was to invite policy makers, industry practitioners, academics and others involved in child protection and online safety to discuss worrying trends in how online activity could be putting children and young people at risk.

→ The invitation-only conference included a working group, bringing together representatives from major technology companies and leading experts with the purpose of developing a framework to advise parents on how to help keep their children safer online.

→ The output of this framework is a set of 'Recommendations for Parents' outlined below in detail. This framework is aimed at parents and aims to help them put better practices into place with their children.



Vodafone and Childline

Working to keep children safe by keeping them connected.

B

uild trust with your child to understand their online activity

One symptom of the knowledge gap between parents and children is the fact that there are no agreed ground rules in place around online activities – parents don't know what they don't know, and are therefore reluctant to put rules in place.

There are several things you can implement straight away to ensure that your child can be safer online. These include:

→ **Installing parental controls and passwords** on your home broadband, and on all devices that your children have access to. Your service and device providers will be able to advise you on how to do this. However, no one approach is entirely fail-safe. Do remember that your child will have access to the online world through Wi-Fi in friends' houses and in the community. They need to know that if they come to you when concerned online that you will listen to and support them rather than immediately imposing a discipline.

→ **Agreeing a set of household rules for internet usage** including when and for how long your child can be online, keeping personal information private – in particular the simple

message what goes online stays online! Children and young people need to be aware that each interaction online is building their digital footprint which records all of their online activity.

→ **Prevent 24 hour online access:** It is important that your child gets enough sleep. One way of ensuring that your child is not woken up through the night getting notifications etc is to remove all devices from bedrooms .

→ **Browser history:** If you are genuinely concerned about what your child is doing online, a quick check of your family devices' browser history will give you a comprehensive list of the sites your child has been visiting. Googling your child's name will also give an indication of what social media platforms they are active on.

Educate yourself and your child to the online world

Parents do not have to be completely tech savvy to educate themselves on the various platforms their children are using to communicate online. Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are among the most popular, but by doing a simple google search on 'social media platforms being used by children' you can find the latest platforms.

This, combined with open and honest discussion with your children, will go a long way to keeping you educated on their online activities. Other actions you can take include:

→ **Privacy and data:** Both parents and children need to be conscious of potential dangers around sharing personal information online. Establish with your child what constitutes personal information (full name, address, email, telephone number etc.) and make sure your child does not give this out without your approval.

→ **Online reputation:** Children and young teens may not grasp the permanency of what they say or do online, and how this may affect their reputation now or in the future. A good perspective on this is to tell your children not to post or share anything online that they would not be happy with you (or their granny!) seeing.

→ **Cyberbullying** is a hugely important topic to keep abreast of, in order to prevent it from happening to your child and to prevent your child from partaking in online bullying. Make sure your child understands that the same rules that apply 'in real life' also apply online, and if they see anything to report it – both to parents/teachers and to the site administrators.

→ **Lead by example:** If your children notices you on your phone or device all the time, they are likely to think this is the 'norm' and acceptable behaviour. Being fully present when you're with your children can help to encourage them to do the same with you. Many children have also reported to Childline that they have seen their parents being aggressive online – which again can set behaviours for children who can follow by example.

C**ommunication is** **key – establish an open** **dialogue with your child**

There can be a knowledge gap between what parents are aware of regarding their children's online activities, and what their child is actually doing online. Spend time with your child exploring their online activities.

Here are a few tips on how parents can get this conversation started, which include the following:

→ **Introducing your child to the Internet** and what it has to offer – for young children, you should be the one to introduce them to the internet. This will create an openness with your child about discussing their online behaviours and experiences, both positive and negative. If your child is more knowledgeable about the online world than you, ask them to show you how it works. This in turn builds a relationship.

→ **Visiting the sites your child is using** and taking time to sit with your child to go through all the apps and online services they use together asking why they like each individual

one will open up the communication channels as well as ensuring you are fully aware of what your child does online and familiarise yourself with how they work.

→ **Location services** is a key one to look for because if children allow people to see where they are, strangers can easily find a child's identity in an open space through their social media platform.

→ **Age ratings:** Additionally, check the age ratings of the social media or online gaming platforms they are using to ascertain whether they are suitable for your child. The PEGI rating is a useful one to go by <http://www.pegi.info/ie/>



Utilise safety features already in place

There are safety features installed on all devices and it is a good idea to put these on before giving a child a device for the first time.

Websites and social media platforms used can be quite different. It is a good idea to educate yourself and your child on the following for each one being used:

→ How to adjust the security and privacy settings

→ How to block or unfriend someone

→ What and where the reporting functions are

→ How to delete your profile or account

You can also adjust the safety settings on your internet browser, to ensure your children are not coming across inappropriate or dangerous content. There is a huge amount of monitoring software available to aid with this, as well as browsers specifically for children. By registering on the 'how to be' (H2B) safety centre website, you will be able to get access to videos, prompt cards and other resources and practical advice on how to report, block and configure your settings across the most popular apps and games – www.h2bsafetycentre.ie

T echnology – embrace the benefits

Of course, the aim of these rules is to educate parents around online safety, what the dangers are, and how they can keep their kids safer online. All too often however, fear and panic about online dangers can cause parents to become too wary of the internet, and portray it in a negative light – which in turn will make children reluctant to share what they do online.

Also, try not to overact if you discover your child has been on the ‘wrong’ sites or has been bullied, by staying calm and listening to the problem, your child is more likely to stay open to conversations. You can teach them the Stop, Block and Tell technique which will help teach them on what steps to follow if they feel that they are being cyberbullied.

→ **STOP!** Don’t do anything. Take 5 mins to calm down

→ **Block!** Block the cyberbully or limit all communications to those on your contacts list

→ **and Tell!** Tell a trusted adult (or speak to you) and reassure them that they don’t have to face this alone

Children’s use of the internet presents great potential benefits– for everything from education and schoolwork to entertainment and socialising with friends. However, access should be age-appropriate and like every aspect of parenting, will require lots of your time to manage. It is important that parents embrace this, and explore the internet alongside their children. Not only will parents educate themselves this way, but they will encourage their children to explore the internet safely and to its full potential.

Eyes open – keep an eye out for any changes in your child’s behaviour

While it is important to remember that the positives of the internet outweigh the negatives, it is crucial that parents understand the dangers that exist online. These include cyberbullying, online grooming, sextortion, online scams/phishing, and accessing inappropriate content.

Parents need to be able to understand and recognise the warning signs that indicate their child may be at risk online. Warning signs vary widely, and can include:

- Becoming withdrawn or moody, and refusing to talk about what they do online
- Spending more time online, or refusing to go online at all
- Cutting ties with friends, and showing a reluctance to go to school or extracurricular activities
- Being exhausted – if your child has access to their device at night this could be a reason

Again, if you feel that your child is at risk online, you need to have that conversation with them. Assure your child that you will not get angry or overreact, and that you are just looking out for their safety. You should also report any suspicious or potentially abusive activity to the relevant authority, whether it’s the site administrator, your child’s school, or the police.



Vodafone and Childline

Working to keep children safe
by keeping them connected.

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