

# HOME OFFICE TASK FORCE ON CHILD PROTECTION ON THE INTERNET



Home Office

Good practice guidance for the providers of social  
networking and other user interactive services 2008

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## HOME SECRETARY'S FOREWORD



I am delighted to launch this good practice guidance, which has been developed on behalf of the Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet.

The Task Force was established in 2001 and brings together

representatives of the Internet industry, mobile phone companies, law enforcement agencies, children's charities and government, who work together with the shared aim of making the Internet a safer place for children. The Task Force has previously produced good practice guidance for search service providers and for moderation of interactive services.

Internet services have recently taken a leap forward with the development of user interactive services, led by social networking providers and video-sharing websites. The take-up of these services has been extremely rapid. While some of these services have been developed specifically for children, many were aimed at older teenagers and adults but have attracted the attention of children who wish to use the Internet to maintain contact with current friends, make new friends or show their technical expertise in using modern communication tools.

The guidance has been drawn up with considerable input from many of the key industry providers, some of whom are based outside the UK, and I congratulate them for putting aside their commercial interests and working in a collaborative way to produce a series of recommendations which should help make the Internet environment a safer place for all. The development of the guidance has attracted international attention and it has received valuable input and support from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children in the USA and from the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

I also want to offer particular thanks to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) for its input into the guidance. The Government set up CEOP in April 2006 specifically to establish a proactive policing presence on the Internet, and the centre works tirelessly to tackle misuse of Internet services by individuals seeking to contact children for inappropriate reasons. Major children's charities including the NSPCC, NCH and Childnet have also contributed significantly to the recommendations drawn up in the guidance.

In the UK, the Government supports a self-regulatory model for the Internet industry. While the recommendations in this guidance are voluntary, the success of the guidance depends on a wide take-up of these recommendations within the industry. Self-regulation can only be effective when companies take the appropriate steps to help address concerns about child protection arising from the development of new services.

This document represents a tremendous achievement and shows a unique joined-up approach between government, children's charities, law enforcement and industry. I am very grateful to everyone for the time and effort they have put into developing the guidance.

I strongly urge industry providers to consider the recommendations in the guidance. I also recommend that parents and carers take note of the safety tips provided.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Jacqui Smith'.

Rt Hon Jacqui Smith MP  
Home Secretary

## STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Communications  
and Media Authority**

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children would like to applaud you for spearheading the creation of the “Good Practice Guide for the Providers of Social Networking and User Interactive Services.” This guide is an important step in helping to protect our children and teens as they communicate, connect, and share their interests with other users online. Providers of these services, which are increasingly popular among children and teens, will benefit from the recommendations given to empower their users to help avoid victimization.

Education plays a major role in keeping children and teens safer online and empowering them to make safer online choices. This good practice guide gives tips for parents and guardians to help teach their children and teens about the possible dangers and how to avoid them. Parents and guardians must be aware of their children’s online activities and become involved in their child’s online life.

NCMEC is excited to be a part of this collaborative project and we endorse this with our logo and full support. We encourage this guide to be used as resource for providers of social networking sites and user interactive services in helping to protect the children and teens who use their sites.

Thank you for spearheading this initiative,

Ernie Allen

President & Chief Executive Officer  
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

### **ACMA’S SUPPORT FOR THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE FOR THE PROVIDERS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING AND OTHER USER INTERACTIVE SERVICES 2008**

Congratulations on the completion of the *Good Practice Guidance for the Providers of Social Networking and Other User Interactive Services 2007*. We would also like to thank you for the opportunity provided to ACMA to participate in the drafting of the Guidance, through the direct participation of its staff.

It is ACMA’s view that the Guidance provides a sound framework for addressing safety issues associated with the use of social networking and other user interactive services. The Guidance also demonstrates the pleasing outcomes of a cooperative approach across jurisdictions with input from both government and industry interests.

Once again congratulations and thank you.

Yours sincerely

Lyn Maddock  
Acting Chair  
Australian Communications and Media Authority



The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) welcomes the publication of this guidance. This represents a good step forward towards the better online protection of children and young people. As the leading law enforcement unit in the UK with prime responsibility for protecting children online, CEOP looks forward to the full implementation of these guidelines on social networking and user interactive sites being used by children.

After our full participation in this project, CEOP looks forward to working closely with other stakeholders in ensuring that the Internet is an environment where children are protected from potential exploitation.

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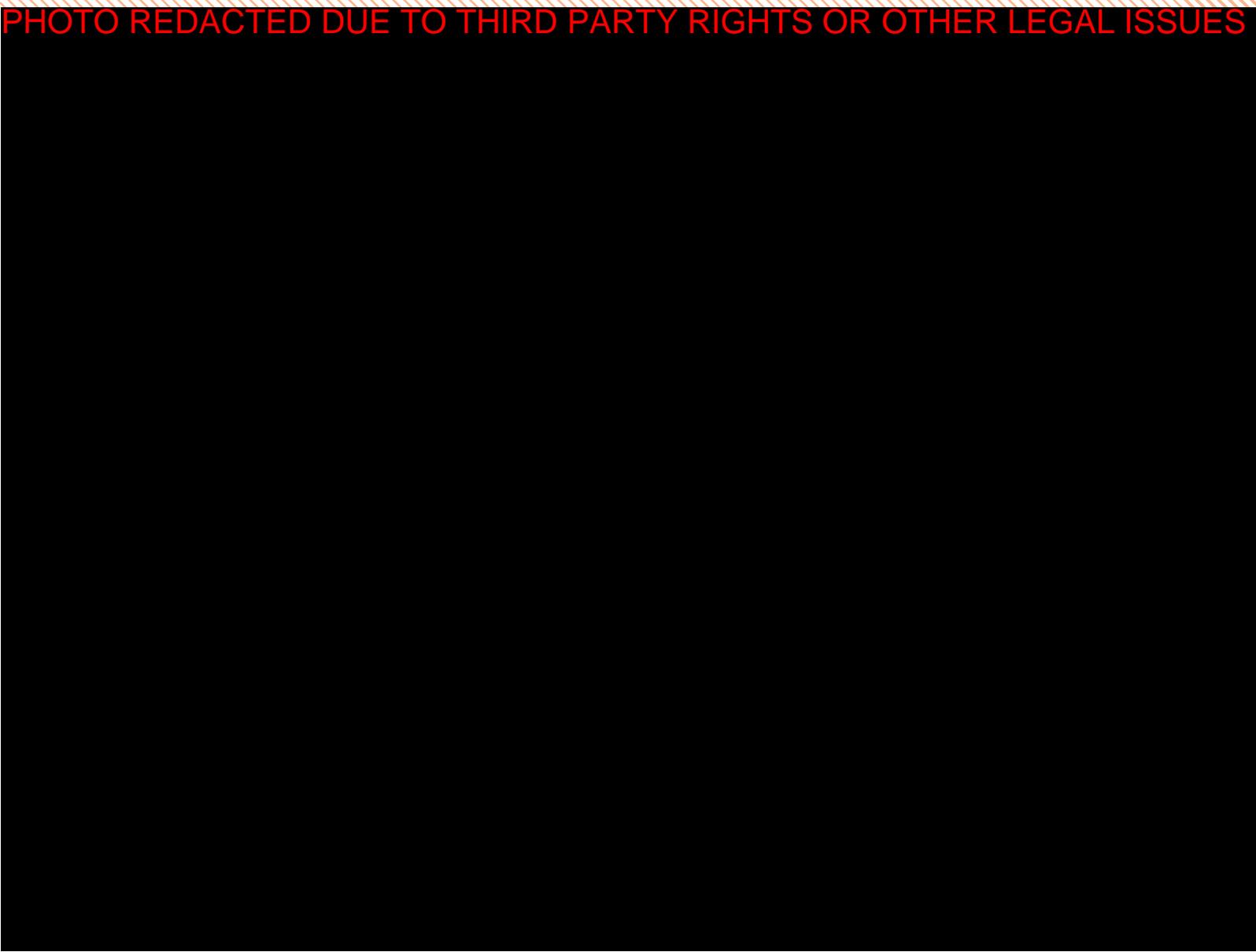
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PART 1

# Social networking and other user interactive services

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDANCE

Social networking and user interactive services offer many positive opportunities for children and young people to communicate, interact, and share content and interests. However, children and young people (under the age of 18) may also be vulnerable to inappropriate or harmful contact through these services. As in the real world, there is no environment that is completely safe. Co-operative efforts between business, government, law enforcement and users can help create a safer, more secure online environment for children and young people. This task begins by making them aware of the possible risks and continues by providing them with tools and safety measures designed to help them manage their online experience and to protect themselves from potential harm.

This document has been produced to provide good practice recommendations for the providers of social networking and other user interactive sites, to enhance the safety of children and young people using their services.

The guidance also seeks to:

- describe the evolution of the Internet in respect of social networking and other user interactive services;
- highlight potential risks and safety concerns; and
- provide industry and others with safety advice and tips for children and young people, and their parents and carers, to use as they wish.

### STATUS OF THE GUIDANCE

Generally speaking, the criminal law applies equally to the Internet as elsewhere and what is illegal offline is illegal online. In addition, the UK Government supports and encourages industry to work within an effective self-regulatory framework, and this good practice model for social networking and interactive services is the latest example of this approach.

It is recognised that the communications and Internet industry is very diverse and ranges from large global providers to small locally run services, so the guidance is not a 'one size fits all' solution. Providers are responsible for how they deliver their services. In determining the actions they should take, providers will need to take into account the particular nature of their services so that they can apply the relevant recommendations of this guidance. It is for them to judge where and how far to apply any specific point in the guidance.

The intention is that service providers, of whatever size, utilise the guidance to enhance the safety of children and young people using their services. This guidance is not intended to be prescriptive or legally binding, but is offered to service providers with a strong recommendation for its use.

## 2. THE INTERNET AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The World Wide Web has evolved to become an increasingly dynamic and interactive medium.

Social networking and user interactive services are now hugely popular and have become a compelling activity for many Internet users. These services are part of a paradigm shift in the evolution of the Internet, which is now frequently referred to as 'Web 2.0'. Simply put, 'Web 1.0' was characterised by static websites, download of content, use of search engines, and surfing from one website to the next. However, Web 2.0 represents a fundamental shift away from this model, towards a more dynamic and interactive Internet, where content is generated by users, uploaded and shared easily with others and within communities.

The convergence of technical and communication platforms is also a significant technological development. For example, users can interact with each other across multiple platforms and devices, such as mobile phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), game consoles and PCs. This means that users can interact with each other and post and download content on many different services and devices.

### 3. WHAT ARE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND USER INTERACTIVE SERVICES?

Social networking sites allow users to create their own content and share it with a vast network of individuals, and potentially with the world. There is now a proliferation of these services, and user-generated content has taken hold in mainstream culture, due to its authentic and original appeal. Some examples of popular services include: Bebo, CyWorld, Facebook, Faceparty, Flickr, Friends Reunited, Hi5, LinkedIn, MySpace, Piczo, Windows Live Spaces, Xanga and Yahoo! 360°. Other services focus on particular features or themes, such as sharing video (e.g. YouTube, Daily Motion, AOL Uncut, Grouper, iFilm, Google Video and SeeMeTV), but have similar characteristics to social networking services, such as having a user profile and the ability to interact with others.

In one sense, social networking is nothing new. These services, for the first time, simply bring together pre-existing interactive technologies on a single service. These technologies and tools can include all or some of the following: search, email, messaging, chat, blogs, gaming, discussion forums, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), photos, music and videos.

There are a vast number of social networking and user interactive services worldwide, and new ones are being launched almost daily, making it difficult to quantify the sector. Wikipedia, for example, currently lists approximately 100 services that operate on a global or local basis.<sup>1</sup> The services vary in terms of audience, features and the range of activities that users can engage in. These services can allow users to:

- create and design a personal website using graphics, colour, music and images to represent the user's unique style and identity;
- interact with friends in real time through instant messaging, message boards and chat rooms that are integrated into the sites;

- meet known friends and make new friends;
- link to friends' personal websites;
- upload and share images of themselves, their family and friends;
- upload and share videos;
- create blogs, journals or diaries about their lives;
- publish and share their own music;
- share thoughts and information on areas of interest;
- play online games;
- receive comments or messages on their personal websites from friends or guests;
- create or join wider communities or interest groups, e.g. football or music; and
- complete or create questionnaires integrated into some social networking sites.

Interactive services have also developed around specific communities of interest that are very popular with children and young people. These share many of the characteristics of social networking and include online gaming communities, such as Runescape and World of Warcraft, and virtual worlds, such as Second Life and Habbo Hotel.

Children and young people are also engaging in auctioning and trading, for example in communities such as Swapits, which has a virtual global currency where young people can earn rewards, trade and shop. All these communities encourage and facilitate social interaction.

### 4. WHY ARE SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICES POPULAR WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

There are many reasons for the appeal of social networking services. One of the key attractions includes the ability to create original and personal content that can be published in the form of a website. Perhaps most importantly are the opportunities for children and young people to express themselves through these services and to connect and communicate easily with others.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_social\\_networking\\_websites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites)

Key activities include:

- keeping in touch with friends and sharing interests;
- experimenting with their identity and opinions;
- having a ‘place’ or ‘space’ where their parents or carers may not be present; and
- demonstrating their technical expertise and skill.

Children and young people use social networking and interactive sites as an extension of their offline lives, and many do not distinguish between the online and offline environments.

## 5. HOW ARE SOCIAL NETWORKING AND USER INTERACTIVE SERVICES STRUCTURED?

### MINIMUM AGE AND THE US LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Many social networking and interactive services available to users in the US, the UK, Australia and other jurisdictions share some common characteristics. In particular, many service providers have set 13 years as the minimum age at which a young person can register as a user of the service. Some services also use a range of technical tools to try and prevent users under the age of 13 years from registering and accessing their service.

It is important to note that in the UK, Australia and elsewhere there is no legal reason why 13 years should be the minimum age. The reason why many service providers operating in the UK and other jurisdictions choose this as their minimum age lies in the fact that many are US-based companies and must comply with several US laws which designate the age of 13 as that which distinguishes children from teenagers and young adults. These laws include the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) 1998<sup>2</sup> for companies that offer services in the US and overseas and knowingly collect personal information from children. COPPA aims to protect children’s personal information, by placing a number of requirements on US commercial providers, including only allowing users over 13 years of age to register for a service without parental consent.

<sup>2</sup> [www.ftc.gov/privacy/coppafaqs.shtm](http://www.ftc.gov/privacy/coppafaqs.shtm)

Service providers may also be required to comply with additional local legal requirements pertaining to children’s privacy, which may affect how the service is operated in any given jurisdiction. In the absence of specific local legal requirements, however, service providers will generally adopt the original US product design in all markets and provide all users with the same protections.

### CHILDREN’S PRIVACY

In the UK, organisations which process information relating to living, identifiable individuals are required to comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. The Act makes no distinctions based on age, and children have the same rights as adults (for example, the right to access personal information and the right to request that information is not processed where processing is likely to cause substantial damage or distress). In practice, there will be occasions when a parent or guardian acts on behalf of a child because the child is not capable of understanding how to exercise their rights but, overall, it should be remembered that children enjoy the same rights and are afforded the same protection as adults.

Indeed, there is a strong argument that service providers need to take extra care when processing information<sup>3</sup> about children, to ensure compliance with the Act. For example, there is a requirement that processing has to be ‘fair’. Fairness often involves explaining to individuals how, why and by whom information about them will be used. Service providers should ensure that the information they provide to children and young people is appropriate for the user age group – what might be within the reasonable expectations of, and fair to, adults, might not be apparent or fair to children. In addition, privacy-friendly options available to children and young people should be well signposted and easy to use for the collection of information to be fair.

<sup>3</sup> [www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data\\_protection/detailed\\_specialist\\_guides/issues\\_paper\\_protecting\\_childrens\\_personal\\_information.pdf](http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/detailed_specialist_guides/issues_paper_protecting_childrens_personal_information.pdf)  
See also: [www.ico.gov.uk/Youth.aspx](http://www.ico.gov.uk/Youth.aspx)

Additionally, to be confident that information is held securely, service providers should consider providing more information to children about the security features available, such as how to choose a suitable password.

## INDUSTRY APPROACH

Service providers already use a number of systems to deny access to users who declare they are under 13 years of age, and they also act against children who misrepresent their age to gain access to a service, for example by:

- placing a ‘cookie’ onto a user’s computer to prevent the user from attempting to re-register with false age details;
- using technical tools such as search algorithms to look for slang words typically used by children and young people and to identify children under 13 years old who may have lied about their age at registration; and
- offering free downloadable parental controls which allow parents to manage their children’s use of the service (see safety tips for parents and carers in Part 3).

It is important to note that service providers work within the limits of current technology. While these solutions help to prevent abuse of social networking services and help to protect children and young people from inappropriate contact and content, they are not foolproof. Determined children and young people can bypass some technical solutions. It is therefore important to continuously improve these tools, as well as supplementing them with user education. We discuss this in more detail in section 14.

## 6. SOCIAL NETWORKING, LOCATION AND GPS SERVICES

At the time of publication of this guidance, a small number of social networking sites are being developed to work with mobile services, using customers’ real-time location. These are being marketed as a service for determining the whereabouts of friends and keeping in touch with them.

Location data can be provided through a variety of technical means: GPS-enabled<sup>4</sup> mobile devices; data supplied by the mobile networks based on cell sites; and, for Wi-Fi-enabled devices, data from a network of Wi-Fi hotspots. Some services can combine data from more than one source.

The processing of location data is covered by legislation such as the E911 Act in the US and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations in the UK.<sup>5</sup> Under section 14 of the latter, location data can only be processed by a service provider with the consent of the person being located. Such consent must also be capable of being withdrawn by the customer at any time. ‘Processing is used to describe any action or series of actions or operations that computer and communication technologies carry out in relation to the data supplied to them.’<sup>6</sup>

UK location service providers that derive data from the mobile networks are also governed by a *Code of Practice* developed by the industry and published in 2004.<sup>7</sup> Among other things, the Code requires: locators to have their identity and address verified; parents to give consent if the person being located is under 16; and regular reminders to be sent to the mobile devices to remind customers that their phone can be located.

Customers are very sensitive about giving away their location. Only those services that carefully respect customers’ rights to protect their privacy will be successful. If social networking sites are to integrate real-time location information, and that service is to be made available to legal minors, the Government will need to consider any potential concerns about the possibility of inappropriate or unauthorised contacts.

<sup>4</sup> Global Positioning System – a GPS-enabled mobile device can determine its position based on timing supplied by a constellation of geo-stationary satellites. Accuracy can be up to a few metres, providing the mobile device is outside and has line of sight to the satellite(s).

<sup>5</sup> The Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003 (SI No 2426).

<sup>6</sup> Walden, I. (2007), *Computer Crimes and Digital Investigations*, Oxford University Press, paragraph 2.16.

<sup>7</sup> [www.mobilebroadbandgroup.com/social.htm](http://www.mobilebroadbandgroup.com/social.htm)

## 7. PREMIUM-RATE SERVICES

Providers of social networking services are reminded that where they use premium rate to charge for any aspect of the service (such as Premium SMS) in the UK, then the service, and its related marketing, will also need to comply with the Code of Practice for phone-charged services which is approved by Ofcom and administered by PhonepayPlus. The Code sets out a number of general rules about the advertising and marketing of services, as well as the actual operation of the service. Providers are particularly reminded that PhonepayPlus has specific rules which apply to services that are aimed at, or would be particularly attractive to, children (defined as those under 16 years old). Among the rules relating to children, PhonepayPlus specifies that children's services should not cost more than £3, or in the case of subscriptions, no more than £3 per month. The PhonepayPlus Code of Practice can be downloaded at [www.phonepayplus.org.uk](http://www.phonepayplus.org.uk). PhonepayPlus offers an online compliance advice service ([compliance@phonepayplus.org.uk](mailto:compliance@phonepayplus.org.uk)) or can be contacted by telephone at 0845 026 1060. Calls to this number cost 4p per minute; network extras apply.

In addition, all advertising of the premium-rate service will need to comply with the British Code of Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing ([www.asa.org.uk/cap/codes/](http://www.asa.org.uk/cap/codes/)) as well as the BCAP radio and TV codes. Marketers should ensure that advertisements for premium-rate services are not misleading by omission and that they make clear the cost of calls. Marketers should also take special care when addressing advertisements for premium-rate services to children.

## 8. CHILDREN'S USE OF THE INTERNET

### BEING ONLINE IS PART OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES – THE EVIDENCE BASE

Sonia Livingstone, Professor of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics and Political

Science,<sup>8</sup> has been conducting leading research in the UK about children and young people's use of the Internet. Her report, *UK Children Go Online*, gives an important insight into children and young people's use of the Internet which is relevant to this guidance.<sup>9</sup> This is important as a context for understanding the risks to children and young people online. A summary of the main findings is available in Appendix B.

While this research pre-dates the mass take-up of social networking services, many of the current dimensions of children and young people's Internet use are still relevant in this new environment. It is nevertheless vital that research continues to enhance our understanding, particularly as use of social networking is now much more commonplace among this age group.

### ADOLESCENT SOCIAL AND SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT AND MATURITY

It is a normal part of adolescence to test boundaries, challenge adult norms, experiment with relationships, play with identities, explore new sexual experiences, keep or break secrets, exclude or be excluded by peers, deceive parents and worry about one's development. All this is to be expected online, as it is offline. But online, such practices may be spread, manipulated or shared in ways that are easier, quicker, and possibly unexpected in their consequences, compared with offline practices.

‘The Internet is just like life, as I see it, but just easier. So if these 13 or 14 year olds want to find stuff, they're going to find it in real life or on the Internet.’<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> [www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/whosWho/soniaLivingstone.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/whosWho/soniaLivingstone.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Following qualitative interviews, observations and focus groups, the main part of this Economic and Social Research Council-funded project consisted of face-to-face, in-home, computer-assisted personal interviews with 1,511 9–19 year olds in spring 2004, plus a written self-completion questionnaire from 906 of the parents of the 9–17 year olds. See [www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net) for methodology, ethical procedures and all project reports.

<sup>10</sup> Lorie, 17, from Essex, interviewed by the UK Children Go Online project (see above).

This quote captures the growing consensus<sup>11</sup> that the activities young people have always engaged in offline they will also do online, and that the convenience, ease and reach of the Internet facilitates these activities, making them more commonplace.<sup>12</sup>

Views on young people's development are often polarised. In one view, children are seen as vulnerable, undergoing a crucial but fragile process of cognitive and social development to which technology poses a risk by introducing potential harms into the social conditions for development and necessitating, in turn, a protectionist regulatory environment. Another view is that children are competent and creative agents in their own right, whose 'media-savvy' skills tend to be underestimated by the adults around them, with the consequence that society may fail to provide a sufficiently rich environment for them. Finding a position that recognises both characteristics is important.

Indeed, most psychologists now consider development to be a lifelong process, with children of different ages showing different degrees and kinds of understanding of personal and social matters as they grow older and test themselves against, and learn from, more complex

experiences.<sup>13</sup> The influence of the peer group grows in importance during adolescence, as the influence of parents declines (although remaining substantial).

## US PERSPECTIVE

According to Dr Sharon Cooper, CEO of Developmental and Forensic Pediatrics, PA – a consulting firm that provides medical care, training, and expert witness experience in child maltreatment cases – the prefrontal part of the brain that controls reason, emotion, common sense and judgement does not mature until nearly the age of 21 years.<sup>14</sup>

Pew Internet and American Life Project is a US research institute that produces reports exploring the impact of the Internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, healthcare, and civic and political life. The project aims to be an authoritative source on the evolution of the Internet through collection of data and analysis of real-world developments as they affect the virtual world.

Pew has produced a number of valuable reports which give critical insights into how children and young people are using the Internet, including some of the difficult issues arising, such as bullying. One 2007 survey found that among the 55% of online American 12–17 year olds who use social networking sites, most are successfully balancing the sharing of personal information with trusted friends, while also revealing enough about themselves to make new friends online.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> As argued by the recent review by End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children (ECPAT) International for the United Nations, which brings together a considerable body of evidence regarding the threats to children from cyberspace. As the review points out, cyberspace provides multiple opportunities for adults to harm children, these risks made greater by the ways in which children (and parents) may fail to recognise the consequences of their actions online. See Muir, D. (2005), *Violence against Children in Cyberspace: A Contribution to the United Nations Study on Violence against Children*. Bangkok, Thailand: ECPAT International.

<sup>12</sup> There are problematic gaps in the evidence that mean some will continue to question this consensus (we lack evidence on how young people tested sexual limits before the Internet, for example). Further, many more will question the assumption that the Internet has introduced, or is solely responsible for changing, behaviour (and risks).

<sup>13</sup> A fair summary of child development is provided in the table on pp.116–17 in Thornburgh, D. and Lin, H. S. (2002), *Youth, Pornography, and the Internet*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. They describe 13–15 year olds as combining an intense curiosity about sexuality, some sexual activity of varying degrees, being impulsive, and an incomplete skill set in terms of decision-making skills.

<sup>14</sup> [www.netsmart.org/safety/videos/dr-development.htm](http://www.netsmart.org/safety/videos/dr-development.htm)

<sup>15</sup> Lenhart, A. and Madden, M. (2007), *Social Networking Websites and Teens: An Overview*. Pew Internet and American Life Project Memo, 1 July 2007. Available at: [www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/198/report\\_display.asp](http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/198/report_display.asp). The study notes that: 'For girls, social networking sites are primarily places to reinforce pre-existing friendships; for boys, the networks also provide opportunities for flirting and making new friends'.

Several difficulties can arise from using social networking services:

- responding to contacts from strangers;
- deciding who is a 'friend'; and
- setting the controls so as to manage what is private and what is public.

The Pew survey found that: most (66%) keep their profile wholly or partially private; of the information that is public, most is either non-revealing or false; and only half (49%) claim to make new friends through social networking, most preferring instead to use social networking to contact those who are already friends. Since the number of contacts is considerable – a 2006 US Harris Interactive survey of 1,487 8–18 year olds found that among 13–18 year olds, the average number of social networking 'friends' is 75, with many having hundreds of contacts – the benefits and risks are both sizable.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the Pew survey found that, of the 32% who have been contacted by strangers online, 23% (i.e. 7% of all online teenagers) felt scared or uncomfortable about that encounter. Not all teenagers are the same, however, with boys and younger teenagers being more likely to post false information, while older teenagers – especially girls – are more likely to reveal detailed personal information.

## RISKS TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ONLINE

Most children and young people use the Internet positively but sometimes behave in ways that may place them at risk. Some of these actions to them seem harmless but could expose them to potential harm. In addition, some of these risks do not necessarily arise from the technology itself but result from offline behaviours that are extended into the online space. A young person can be a victim of online abuse through exposure

to harmful content and cyberbullying. Young people may also engage in behaviour that is risky to themselves, including cyberflirting and cybersex. These situations can quickly escalate to a point where the young person may lose control.

Potential risks to children and young people using social networking and other user interactive services can include, but are not limited to:

- bullying by peers and people they consider 'friends';
- exposure to inappropriate and/or harmful content;
- involvement in illegal or inappropriate content;
- posting personal information that can identify and locate a child offline;
- theft of personal information;
- sexual grooming, luring, exploitation and abuse through contact with strangers;
- exposure to information and interaction with others who encourage self-harm;
- exposure to racist or hate material;
- encouragement of violent behaviour, such as 'happy slapping';<sup>17</sup>
- glorifying activities such as drug taking or excessive drinking;
- physical harm to young people in making video content, such as enacting and imitating stunts and risk-taking activities; and
- leaving and running away from home as a result of contacts made online.

It is also important to remember that content posted online can impact on a young person's reputation, both positively and negatively, now or in the future. While social networking services offer great opportunities for children to be creative and express themselves online, they are often unaware that their words or images, although intended for a small audience, can quickly attract a far larger one and may have a lasting impact

<sup>16</sup> Harris Interactive (2006), *Teens Set New Rules of Engagement in the Age of Social Media*, 31 October 2006 (survey conducted by Harris Interactive, summary of findings). Available at: [www.harrisinteractive.com/news/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1114](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/allnewsbydate.asp?NewsID=1114).

<sup>17</sup> 'Happy slapping' is a term which typically describes the filming of violent attacks on mobile phones. Happy slapping has been called a youth craze which began in school playgrounds in which groups of teenagers slap or attack unsuspecting children or passers-by while capturing the attacks on camera or videophones.

on other people's perception of them. Some individuals have become notorious as a result of their online postings, which have had both negative<sup>18</sup> and positive impacts on their lives.

## 9. BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Individual and group disputes are more often than not an extension of arguments and tensions that originate in the offline world. It is therefore no surprise that bullying and harassment are concerns for the children and young people who use social networking and user interactive services. It can manifest itself in the following ways:

- **personal intimidation** – posting personally abusive and threatening comments on the victim's or other people's website, blog or profile;
- **impersonation** – setting up fake webpages that are attributed to the victim of bullying, and may involve the publishing of manipulated pictures and comments;
- **exclusion** – blocking an individual from a popular group or community, deleting them from friendship lists, and/or using 'ignore functions';
- **posting images of bullying incidents** – users sharing and posting images or videos of victims being abused or humiliated offline;
- **stealing a password to take over a user's website** – to post comments and images which are attributed to the original user; and
- **making false reports to the service provider** – reporting other users for a range of behaviours with a view to having the user's account or website deleted.

Bullying in any form is distressing. With the proliferation and use of technology by children and young people, victims may feel they cannot escape and perpetrators may believe, falsely, that they are anonymous.

Bullying via communications technology and victimisation has the potential to be witnessed by a wide audience if it is recorded and shared on the Internet. This may extend the humiliation and

embarrassment of the victim. It is difficult to stop abusive content spreading and reappearing, as it can be easily and widely distributed on the Internet. Some victims may therefore find it difficult to manage or recover from the abuse, particularly if they do not know who the aggressor is.

As well as young people bullying their peers, some adults (particularly teachers) have also found themselves targets of online abuse and harassment. This has caused some concern within schools, not only about the individuals depicted in postings but also the reputation of the school. In some instances, these situations have resulted in investigations being initiated by law enforcement and education authorities. However, students' comments about their teachers' behaviour may not necessarily be abusive, but a form of normal self-expression about their experience in school, both positive and negative.

This emphasises the need for both parents and teachers to communicate to children and young people, and educate them about, the appropriate and responsible use of the Internet. Much work is being undertaken to establish school anti-bullying policies and to provide guidance and support to manage children's and young people's appropriate use of the Internet. In the UK, the newly formed Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Cyber-bullying Taskforce is developing guidance for schools, as part of an information campaign for children and advice for parents.<sup>19</sup>

## 10. SELF-HARM AND DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOURS

There has been longstanding concern about children and young people accessing websites, chat rooms and information forums that promote and/or incite risk-taking or dangerous behaviours, self-harm, suicide and eating disorders.

<sup>18</sup> School pupils can receive disciplinary sanctions for posting images of bullying onto social networking sites.

<sup>19</sup> See DCSF Cyberbullying Taskforce: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/bullying/](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/bullying/).

On social networking and user interactive sites, young people seek opportunities to inform one another and express themselves, and therefore may choose to upload content relating to these behaviours:

- eating disorders;
- dieting and body image;
- depression;
- drug and alcohol misuse;
- isolation and loneliness;
- bullying; and
- self-harm and suicide.

To the extent that it allows them to express their feelings and seek support, this can be a positive experience for young people dealing with life's challenges in this period of social development. They can seek out and create networks of like-minded young people who wish to explore these issues and access information. However, there can be negative or worrying aspects of this exploration and engagement which can manifest themselves in the apparent promotion or encouragement of self-harm, e.g. filming and publishing these activities.

It is important that providers promote opportunities for support and guidance for users related to the issues listed above by having links to helpful information and support organisations. In the event of a clear expression of intent to commit suicide, service providers should consider contacting the emergency services. In the UK, support organisations for children and young people include ChildLine<sup>20</sup> (free telephone helpline – 0800 1111) and the Samaritans (organisation for those with emotional distress, self-harm and suicide issues. See Appendix F).

## **11. SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ONLINE**

There is also concern that the capabilities of social networking services, combined with children's own high-risk behaviour, may increase the potential for sexual exploitation of children and young people by adults, or sometimes by other young people.

This exploitation can include:

- exposure to harmful content, including adult pornography and illegal child sexual abuse images;
- engaging in sexually explicit communications and conversations that may reduce children and young people's inhibitions;
- manipulation and exploitation, which can include being encouraged or paid to pose in sexually provocative ways and pose naked and/or perform sexual acts via webcams; and
- grooming and luring of children to meet offline to sexually exploit them.

### **THE 'GROOMING' PROCESS<sup>21</sup>**

Grooming is a process by which someone makes contact with a child with the motive of preparing them for abuse either online or offline. Abusers can use public online interactive spaces to find and meet children and young people. Indeed, children and young people can be exploited online without actual physical contact taking place in the real world, for example by sending and exchanging sexual images, and/or by persuading children and young people to send explicit images of themselves. Abusers may also record young people performing sexual acts through webcams.

There have been a number of cases where adults have used social networking services as a means of contacting and grooming children and young people for sexual exploitation. In some cases, this has resulted in actual contact abuse. Abusers use a range of techniques to make contact and establish relationships with children and young people, including:

- gathering personal details, such as age, name, address, mobile number, name of school and photographs;
- offering opportunities for modelling, particularly to young girls;
- promising meetings with pop idols or celebrities, or offers of merchandise;
- offering cheap tickets to sporting or music events;

<sup>21</sup> See NSPCC information and advice to parents: [www.nspcc.org.uk/helpandadvice/publications/leaflets/protecting\\_children\\_pdf\\_wdf36296.pdf](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/helpandadvice/publications/leaflets/protecting_children_pdf_wdf36296.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [www.childline.org.uk/pdfs/info-self-harm.pdf](http://www.childline.org.uk/pdfs/info-self-harm.pdf)

- offering material gifts, including electronic games, music or software;
- offering virtual gifts, such as rewards, passwords and gaming cheats;
- suggesting quick and easy ways to make money;
- paying young people to appear naked and perform sexual acts via webcams;
- gaining a child's confidence by offering positive attention and encouraging the child to share or talk about any difficulties or problems at home, and providing a sympathetic and supportive response;
- bullying and intimidating behaviour, such as threatening to expose the child by contacting their parents to inform them of their child's communications or postings on a social networking site, and/or saying they know where the child lives or goes to school;
- using webcams to spy and take photographs and movies of victims;
- asking sexually themed questions, such as 'Do you have a boyfriend?' or 'Are you a virgin?';
- asking children and young people to meet offline;
- sending sexually themed images to a child, depicting adult content or the abuse of other children;
- masquerading as a minor or assuming a false identity to deceive a child; and
- using school or hobby sites to gather information about a child's interests, likes and dislikes.

Having made contact with a child or young person, abusers may also use that young person as a means to contact and get to know their friends by using the links to their 'friends' in user profiles.

Whatever its guise, the grooming process can result in many young victims feeling guilty and responsible for inappropriate interactions, exploitation and actual abuse. They can find it extremely difficult to seek help or disclose their abuse because of their sense of personal responsibility, feelings of guilt or shame, and fear that they may not be believed or may be 'blamed' and lose access to the Internet. In some cases they may not identify the experience itself as abuse.

Often the child's feelings may be manipulated, so they genuinely believe they are 'in love' with the abuser.<sup>22</sup>

## 12. THE USE OF WEBCAMS AND OTHER TECHNOLOGIES TO SEXUALLY EXPLOIT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Children's and young people's use of webcams is a new and growing concern. Webcams raise two main challenges for the safety of young Internet users:

- they may be intimidated or manipulated into recording explicit images of themselves using webcams and sending them to individuals they first meet online. This allows these individuals to build libraries of images and videos of young people who might then be coerced into further contact by threats that the material may be published or revealed to their family and friends; and
- they may use the Internet to explore their sexuality and engage in cyberflirting or cybersex with their online 'friends'. However, they often do not understand the potential implications of sharing or publishing personal images or videos on the Internet. Explicit or suggestive images of a child or young person may be classified as an illegal image of child abuse, even if it is posted by the participants.

The risks posed by the technologies highlighted above are not yet well understood and further research is required. Recent research conducted in Holland by the My Child Online Foundation in 2006, involving 10,900 participants between the ages of 13 and 19, reveals that 47% of girls who responded to the survey, said they had received unwanted requests to do something sexual in front of a webcam – although only 2% actually did so.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ybarra, M. L., Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D. and Wolak, J. (2007), Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 40, 116–26 (CV135). Available at: [www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV138.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV138.pdf).

[www.netcaucus.org/events/2007/youth/resources.shtml](http://www.netcaucus.org/events/2007/youth/resources.shtml)  
[www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV138.pdf](http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV138.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <http://mijnkindonline.web-log.nl/mijnkindonline/2007/03/index.html> (report is not available in English).

In a small number of cases of sexual exploitation of children and young people, hacking technologies, such as trojans, malware and viruses, have been used to engineer greater control over victims. This may involve gaining remote access to computers, accessing personal data and controlling webcams.<sup>24</sup>

It is essential that Internet safety and education programmes include appropriate warnings and advice about the potential misuse of webcams and other technologies to manipulate and abuse children and young people.

### 13. THE CRIMINAL LAW AFFECTING PERSONAL INTERACTIONS IN INTERACTIVE SERVICES

It is important to note the general principle that an action that is illegal if it is committed offline is also illegal if it is committed online. This applies both to issues such as distributing illegal material and also to harmful behaviour, if it amounts to a course of harassment, or grooming. Inciting someone to commit an offence is also no less an offence simply because it is done through a computer or mobile phone. No-one using an interactive service should be under the illusion that the criminal law does not apply to what they do online. While the UK considers anyone under the age of 18 to be a 'child', some aspects of the criminal law, particularly with regard to behaviour such as grooming towards young people, will only apply to those under the age of consent, which is 16. More detail on the criminal law and its application to behaviours on social networking sites is available at Appendix A.

### 14. THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION AND MEDIA LITERACY IN KEEPING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SAFER ONLINE

Education and media literacy form a critical part of keeping children and young people safer online and empowering them to manage their online experience. Responsible Internet use and online safety are considered essential life skills for children and young people. Research shows<sup>25</sup> that children and young people receive information about Internet safety from a range of sources. Younger children, for example, tend to have rules set for their Internet use in the home by their parents, and parental control tools are more likely to be installed on the home computer. Parents are, however, less likely to set rules for teenagers. The influence of a young person's peer group therefore becomes more important in influencing their behaviour and attitudes to online services.

Public bodies also play an important role. In the UK, for example, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) has launched a national campaign 'Think U Know'.<sup>26</sup> This campaign provides young people with advice and guidance on how to have fun, stay in control of their personal information and report any problems they may encounter in the online environment.

In the US, NetSmartz,<sup>27</sup> a programme of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, gives parents, guardians, educators and law enforcement a variety of resources for learning and teaching the possible dangers of the Internet, and how to avoid them, to children and teenagers.

It is vital that parents and carers become involved in children's and young people's use of the Internet, including social networking and other user interactive services. It is critical that they have

<sup>24</sup> See, for example: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/derbyshire/6133360.stm>.

<sup>25</sup> See Ofcom's *Media Literacy Audit: Report on media literacy amongst children* at: [www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media\\_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/children/](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/children/).

<sup>26</sup> [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)

<sup>27</sup> [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)

direct conversations, particularly with teenagers, on a regular basis about what they are doing online, who they are communicating with and their experiences. A key focus for parents and carers must be how to understand not only what their children are viewing and downloading, but what information they are publishing online about themselves and others, including any text, photos or video.

This document provides important advice and guidance that should be shared with young people and their parents and carers. (Part 3 outlines some basic safety tips for parents, carers and young people.)

There is also a wide range of information and advice available both from service providers and from other organisations such as educational bodies and child welfare charities. We recommend the following key sites for information and advice:

[www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk) (UK)  
[www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org) (US)  
[www.netaert.net.au](http://www.netaert.net.au) (Australia)  
[www.internetsafetyzone.co.uk](http://www.internetsafetyzone.co.uk)  
[www.childnet-int.org/blogsafety](http://www.childnet-int.org/blogsafety)  
[www.blogsafety.com](http://www.blogsafety.com)  
[www.getnetwise.org](http://www.getnetwise.org)  
[www.nch.org.uk/information/index.php?i=135](http://www.nch.org.uk/information/index.php?i=135)  
[www.nspcc.org.uk/helpandadvice/parentsandcarers/safesurfing/safesurfing\\_wda35959.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/helpandadvice/parentsandcarers/safesurfing/safesurfing_wda35959.html)  
[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)  
[www.bbc.co.uk/chatguide/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/chatguide/)  
[www.wiredsafety.org](http://www.wiredsafety.org) (US)

## 15. AGE-VERIFICATION AND IDENTITY AUTHENTICATION

The ability to obtain a verifiable identity, and therefore an age, for a user can be a useful tool in providing a safer and more secure environment for

children and young people on social networking sites and the Internet. However, there are significant challenges to the development of a comprehensive and reliable age-verification system arising from issues around data (e.g. a lack of a complete database of all Internet users) and technical and legal issues (e.g. data protection and privacy laws). If an effective age-verification mechanism were to be developed, it could serve several purposes, for example to segregate people registered as being under 18 years of age from adult users and to restrict access by those aged under 18 to adult or other age-inappropriate content services.

Notwithstanding the challenges mentioned above, there are a number of solutions and strategies being developed or evaluated to verify the age of adults using online services. These rely on checking registration information in real time against different data sources (usually more than one), such as the electoral register and data held by credit rating agencies. Developing similar approaches to age-verify under-18s, however, presents even greater challenges, as there are limited data sources on children available to industry that can be checked remotely and in real time. Some suggested solutions would rely heavily on an element of offline verification by parents, schools or another trusted party. This two-part approach poses both the challenge of authentication of the parent, school or trusted party and legal hurdles in some countries.

The challenge of protecting children and young people on social networking and other online services has stimulated research into solutions specifically designed to age-verify under-18s. Whether or not these solutions could be deployed by a particular service provider depends on a range of factors, including:

- ease of use by children and young people;
- level of ‘false positives’;
- length of time that verification takes;
- scalability for very large numbers of users;

- ability to deploy a single solution over multiple markets;
- technical compatibility with the provider's network; and
- the ability of ill-intentioned people/criminals to manipulate the systems.

Individual service providers are engaging in trials to test the effectiveness of age-verification/identity-authentication mechanisms, but in the meantime, service providers continue to use a range of existing methods to safeguard children and young people using their service. These include

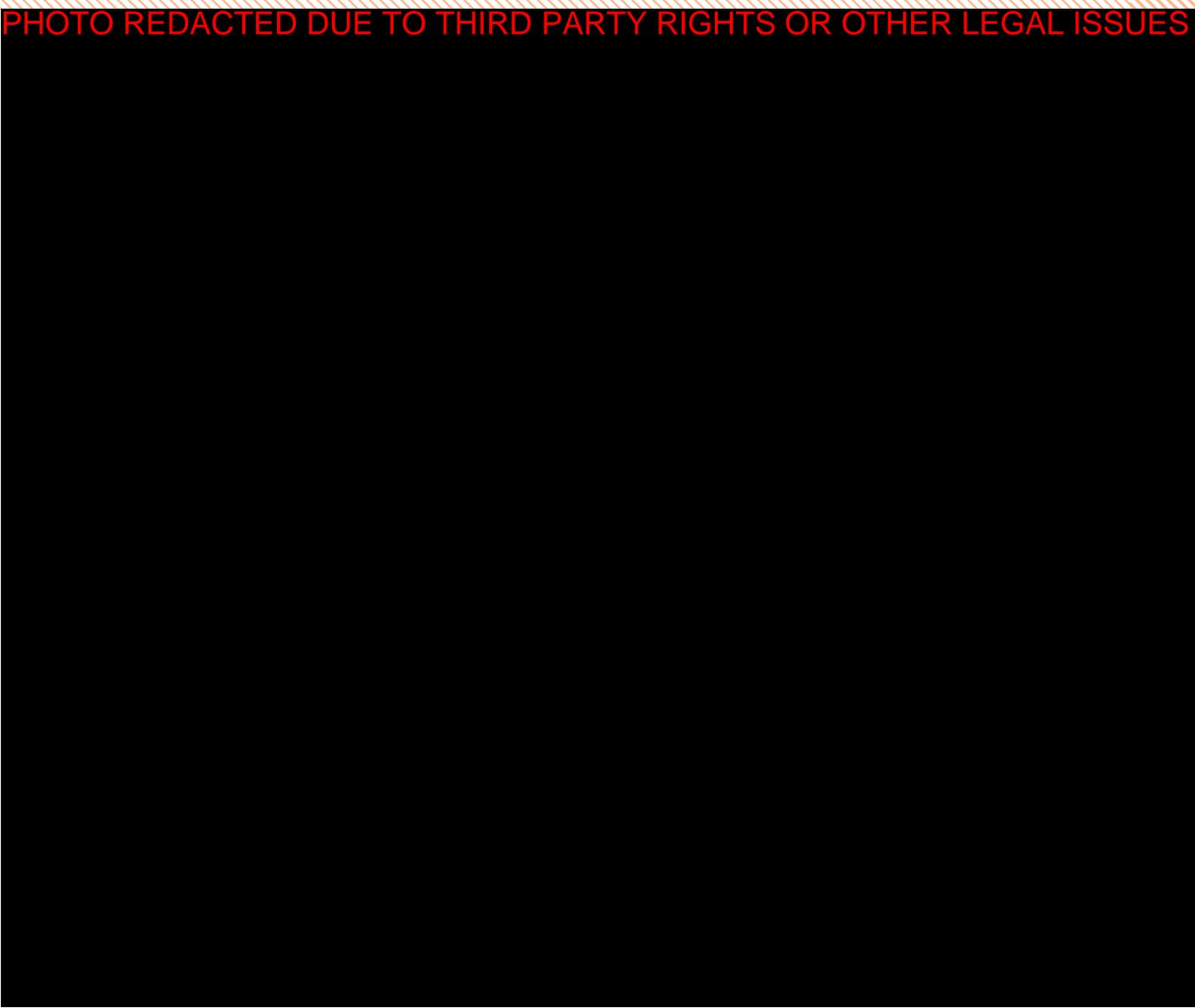
- promotion of confirmed affiliation with real-world communities, e.g. schools;
- user self-declaration;
- PIN protections;
- proof of account ownership;
- parental monitoring software; and
- verifiable parental consent.

These vary in their robustness, but in combination with other technical tools or human moderation they can enhance the protection of younger users of these services.

## PART 2

# Recommendations for good practice

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



The following recommendations provide good practice guidance to service providers to support a safer environment for young users.

## 1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 These recommendations apply to all platforms, fixed and mobile, while recognising that the different characteristics of each platform (for example, the different screen sizes and methods of navigation) may require modified or alternative approaches to safety.
- 1.2 Each of the recommendations below should be included as part of a larger focus on user protection by responsible online sites. None of them should be viewed as a panacea.
- 1.3 Language and terminology should be accessible, clear and relevant for all users, including children, young people, parents and carers, especially in relation to the site's terms and conditions, privacy policy, safety information and reporting mechanisms.
- 1.4 When developing new services, providers should consider existing good practice guidance produced by the UK Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet for *Chat, Instant Messaging, Web Based Services, Moderation and Safe Search*.<sup>28</sup>

## 2. SAFETY INFORMATION, AWARENESS AND EDUCATION BY SERVICE PROVIDERS

### GENERAL

Online social networking and interactive services can provide extensive benefits to their users. However, the provision of safety advice by service providers for users of social networking and interactive services is critical. While children and young people will want to make the most of these services, they also need to understand the importance of protecting themselves, their online identities and their reputations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 2.1 Make safety information for users, parents and carers, prominent, easily accessible and clear (see Part 3).
- 2.2 Offer links to relevant online resources that provide users with additional information about online safety and security.
- 2.3 Address personal safety issues but also individual responsibilities to respect and protect the wider online community, such as how to behave responsibly when posting images and comments.
- 2.4 Provide information which is:
  - specific to the service being provided;
  - updated to reflect service development; and
  - effective and relevant for users.
- 2.5 Make safety information available during the registration process, prominent from the homepage and in appropriate places within the service (e.g. in a welcome email/message).
- 2.6 Include instructions for tools which can help protect the user to maintain their privacy and prevent unwanted contact or communication, such as:
  - 'Ignore' functions;
  - removing people from their 'friends' or contact list; and
  - how to review and remove unwanted comments on their site.
- 2.7 Include instructions on how to make a report or complaint to the service provider, or elsewhere as appropriate.
- 2.8 Have in place robust procedures for handling complaints. In particular, complaints about harassment and inappropriate content must be assessed promptly, and, if appropriate, the offending content must be removed within a reasonable time.

<sup>28</sup> [www.police.homeoffice.gov.uk/operational-policing/crime-disorder/child-protection-taskforce](http://www.police.homeoffice.gov.uk/operational-policing/crime-disorder/child-protection-taskforce)

- 2.9 Include instructions on how users can cancel their account and remove their unwanted profile.

### 3. EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Many providers of social networking services exercise some editorial control over certain content on their site. For example, some providers edit a homepage where they feature new user profiles or highlight a particularly good site. These recommendations aim to provide guidance on editing responsibly.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 3.1 Exercise care and judgement in how prominently they feature sites created by children and young people, such as their profiles being featured on the homepage and encouraging other users to visit.
- 3.2 Be particularly sensitive to the context in which younger users' sites are presented and avoid inappropriate juxtaposition. For example, a profile of a user under the age of 18 appearing next to another with an adult theme.
- 3.3 Ensure that advertising displayed on social networking services should be appropriate for the likely audience, to the extent known. If a service is aimed at, or likely to attract, users under the age of 18, providers must follow relevant local guidelines or codes for advertising to minors. In the case of the UK, this is the British Code of Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> [www.cap.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/A44808F1-1573-482A-A0E5-D8045943DA57/0/The\\_CAP\\_Code\\_Ed11\\_20061205.pdf](http://www.cap.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/A44808F1-1573-482A-A0E5-D8045943DA57/0/The_CAP_Code_Ed11_20061205.pdf)

In Australia, it is the Australian Association of National Advertisers Code for Advertising to Children.<sup>30</sup>

- 3.4 Ensure that advertising displayed on social networking services within the European Union is compliant with the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive. ([www.berr.gov.uk/consumers/buying-selling/ucp/index.html](http://www.berr.gov.uk/consumers/buying-selling/ucp/index.html))

### 4. REGISTRATION

Registration is an important first step for authenticating user identification and promoting responsible behaviour online. During the registration process, users are asked to provide a certain amount of personal data and agree to the terms and conditions.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 4.1 Provide clear information about how details collected in registration will be used, including what information will appear on their profile, what will be public, and what will be private. Users should then be given the opportunity to hide, limit availability to, or edit this information.
- 4.2 Meet their legal obligations in respect of the amount of personal information collected from minors at registration, including obtaining informed consent.<sup>31</sup>
- 4.3 Carefully consider the implications of automatically mapping across personal information disclosed during registration to the user's profile. In this instance users should be informed of this process to

<sup>30</sup> Australian Association of National Advertisers Code for Advertising to Children: [www.aana.com.au/pdfs/A2CCode.pdf](http://www.aana.com.au/pdfs/A2CCode.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> In the UK – Information Commissioner's Office: [www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data\\_protection/detailed\\_specialist\\_guides/issues\\_paper\\_protecting\\_childrens\\_personal\\_information.pdf](http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/detailed_specialist_guides/issues_paper_protecting_childrens_personal_information.pdf)

afford them the opportunity to hide, limit availability to, or edit their personal information.

- 4.4 Consider emphasising, in accessible and easily understood language, **‘what behaviour is and is not acceptable on the service’**, particularly for young users and for their parents and carers. It is suggested that this information should be provided elsewhere in addition to its inclusion in the terms and conditions.
- 4.5 Emphasise to users that if they breach the terms and conditions of the service, the provider will take action, including co-operation with law enforcement agencies and other authorities if necessary. By highlighting that users’ activity is traceable, it may be possible to counteract the common misconception that they are anonymous or untraceable online and remind them that online actions may have offline consequences.
- 4.6 Where possible and appropriate, request and validate personal information from users, e.g. full name, date of birth and/or a valid email address. This is important, to minimise the risk of impersonation and enable service providers to protect younger users.
- 4.7 Capture an IP address or MSISDN or unique identifier (for mobile devices) with a date and time stamp at registration, regularly refreshed with repeated use of the service, including at each log-in, with a date and time stamp. This measure can improve the traceability of both registered and unregistered users (e.g. those leaving comments in a user’s guest book).
- 4.8 Consider placing a ‘cookie’ onto a user’s computer or capturing the MSISDN or unique identifier of a mobile device to identify a user who has tried to register as being below the minimum age, thus preventing them from attempting to re-register using a false age.
- 4.9 Set the default for full profiles to ‘private’ or to the user’s approved contact list for those registering under the age of 18.<sup>32</sup> This may be difficult for services that have already been developed around the legal age of consent, e.g. 16 years. However, future services should strongly consider using 18 years. A setting to private should ensure that the full profile cannot be viewed or the user contacted except by ‘friends’ on their contact list unless they actively choose to change their settings to public or equivalent. Some service providers set the profile default as ‘private’ for all users.
- 4.10 The private default setting above may not be necessary where:
  - services are pre-moderated<sup>33</sup> by a trained moderator;<sup>34</sup> and
  - personal information in profiles is very limited, i.e. nickname used in place of actual name, general location, and personal interests only listed.
- 4.11 Prompt the user and require their consent before integrating or ‘scraping’ one or more existing address books, contact lists or ‘friends’ list (e.g. email or instant messaging). This should remain under user control, as a user may not necessarily wish for ‘friends’ approved in one service to also be ‘friends’ in a social networking service.
- 4.12 Consider reminding users to review their contact lists on a regular basis to ensure that their ‘profile’ is shared as they wish.

<sup>32</sup> In the UK the age of consent is 16 and establishing contact with younger children (online or offline) in order to meet them at a later date for the purposes of engaging in sexual activity is an offence under section 15 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Pre-moderation enables service providers to ensure that inappropriate or contact information is not contained in user profiles, reducing the risk of unwanted contact.

<sup>34</sup> <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/operational-policing/crime-disorder/child-protection-taskforce>

## 5. USER PROFILE AND CONTROLS

### GENERAL

A profile is an easy-to-create webpage, where users can post personal information, including their name, email address, images and videos of themselves, friends and family, as well as interests and hobbies or other information that is relevant to them. It is therefore important that users fully understand what they are publishing for other users to view and how they can protect their privacy and personal data.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 5.1 Inform users in a prominent place what information they submit to their profile will be made public and what will be private. Users should be supported to understand the implications of the profile settings. For example, inclusion of a symbol (such as a lock or a key) may enable users to quickly identify the status of their personal details.
- 5.2 Inform users of the available options for how their profile or webpage can be searched by others either on the site or through search engines. The option of a public profile on the site which is not searchable via search engines should be offered to all users.
- 5.3 Provide warnings to users about uploading photos to their profile, for example: 'Photos may not contain nudity, violent or offensive material, or copyrighted images. If you violate these terms, your account may be deleted.'
- 5.4 Be careful not to encourage users, especially those under the age of consent, to disclose excessive personal data. Consider carefully what data fields are appropriate.
- 5.5 Provide advice to users about the implications of posting certain information – both from a safety and responsible use perspective. For example, the implications of posting or using:
  - personal data which may identify their home address, especially in open profiles;
  - images which contain location information, especially in open profiles;
  - images of other people without first obtaining their permission; and
  - inappropriate user names and images.
- 5.6 Inform users and make it as clear as possible what options users have to adjust privacy settings and to manage 'who sees what' and whom they interact with. For example, these settings could include features which allow users to select who can leave comments or post content on their pages. Consider making privacy settings available for all aspects of the service for such things as journals, blog entries, image galleries and guest books.
- 5.7 Ensure that, where communication tools such as email, chat and instant messaging are integrated into a service, the online presence or status matches the selected privacy setting. For example, if a profile is set to 'private', only accepted 'friends' or 'buddies' should be able to view the user's online presence or availability.
- 5.8 Consider screening or reviewing user profile photos, especially for users under the age of 18, using human and/or technical moderation, and removing inappropriate images or videos posted by users, but particularly if they are sexually provocative.
- 5.9 Have links in place, such as mechanisms to report abuse or flag profiles that may be inappropriate or that place the child or young person at risk.

## 6. SEARCH

Search applications can be powerful tools in finding users of social networking services. It is important that service providers consider the risks associated with providing such tools to identify users who are under the age of 18.<sup>35</sup>

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 6.1 Take steps to ensure that private profiles of users under the age of 18 are not searchable (unless the user actively consents for their profile to be searchable), either on the service or via search engines.<sup>36</sup> This may be difficult for services that have already been developed around the legal age of consent, i.e. 16 years of age. However, future services should strongly consider using 18 years.
- 6.2 Social networking or interactive services with an integrated site search should not allow users to search public profiles of users under the age of 18 using sensitive personal data fields, such as age, sex and location, or school.

## 7. CONTENT SCREENING AND MODERATION

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 7.1 Provide clear information (or Frequently Asked Questions – FAQs) on the various ways that users can reduce the risk of harassment or abuse. This information would include instructions on how to:
  - remove or block individuals;
  - prevent and remove the posting of anonymous comments; and
  - receive comments only from friends.

<sup>35</sup> <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/search-and-advice-public.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> In the UK the age of consent is 16 and establishing contact with younger children (online or offline) in order to meet them at a later date for the purposes of engaging in sexual activity is an offence under section 15 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

- 7.2 Consider offering users an option to approve or pre-moderate comments which may be displayed on their individual site or to restrict the posting of comments only to ‘confirmed friends’. Ensure that this option is available for all aspects of the service (where technically feasible), for example for journals, blog entries, image galleries, videos and guest books.

- 7.3 Where site moderation is used, consider adopting the Home Office *Good Practice Guidance for the Moderation of Interactive Services for Children*.<sup>37</sup>

## 8. IDENTITY AUTHENTICATION AND AGE VERIFICATION

In light of the current challenges concerned with identity authentication and age verification, service providers should continue to evaluate the effectiveness of technologies that identify and verify the age of customers. The goal should be to implement a suitable solution appropriate to their individual service, to the extent that the solution is legally and technically feasible, and most importantly creates a safer, more secure Internet environment for children and younger users.

### DENYING ACCESS TO UNDER-AGE USERS

Service providers use a number of systems to deny access to users who declare that they are under 13 years of age. They also act against children who misrepresent their age to gain access to a service. For example, by:

- placing a ‘cookie’ onto a user’s computer to prevent the user from attempting to re-register with false age details;
- using technical tools such as search algorithms to look for words typically used by children and young people and identify children under 13 years old who may have lied about their age at registration; and

<sup>37</sup> <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/moderation.pdf>

- offering free downloadable parental controls which help parents to manage their children's use of the service.

## ADULT AND AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some service providers allow users to post content with adult themes. It is important that, where this is permitted, service providers take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of children and young people from accessing this content.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 8.1 Make tools available which minimise the risk of users under the age of 18 accessing adult or other age-inappropriate content. Options may include:
  - allowing users to tag or label content as being 'adult' in nature or otherwise age-inappropriate;
  - providing labelling or tagging of users' content; and
  - technical means of protection, e.g. filtering.
- 8.2 Ensure that where specific services aimed at adults (e.g. sexual content, and dating or flirting sites) are offered, these areas are not accessible to users registered as under the age of 18.
- 8.3 Consider using available age-verification systems to verify that users accessing dedicated adult content or services, for example pornography or gambling, are aged 18 or over, such as:
  - a credit card check;<sup>38</sup>
  - PIN numbers; and
  - proof of account ownership.

## 9. RESPONSIBLE USE AND MANAGING BULLYING AND OTHER FORMS OF ABUSE VIA COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Service providers employ various approaches to limit the ability of users to bully and harass other users, or to post content that breaches the terms and conditions of the service in other ways. As mentioned above, services often have features to enable users to protect themselves online. Some providers moderate services and others provide technical solutions to protect users of their service, or a combination of both.

A number of service providers have developed technical solutions that have shown promise in detecting and preventing bullying or misuse of their services, to the benefit of their users. For example, algorithms have been written that search for language indicative of threatening behaviour or for derogatory terms. However, these solutions are still in the early stages of development and they are not a panacea for all the safety challenges that users of social networking and interactive services face. And some sites have implemented blocking of individual users.

Some of the following recommendations appear under other sections in this guidance, but are repeated here because of their direct relevance to managing bullying via communications technology and encouraging responsible use.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 9.1 Give clear and prominent messages to users about:
  - the importance of behaving responsibly online;
  - their role in contributing to a positive and respectful community; and
  - the right of service providers to remove inappropriate content.

<sup>38</sup> Service providers should be aware that some pre-paid credit or payment cards are also used by people under the age of 18 and these may not be suitable for age verification.

9.2 Consider placement of relevant information within community guidelines, advice and help sections, and in prominent and appropriate locations throughout the site.

9.3 Inform users how to:

- block individuals entirely or remove people from their ‘friends’ list;
- use ‘ignore’ functions or similar tools;
- use moderation tools which allow users to pre-screen comments and limit other users’ access to specific content, e.g. photo album; and
- remove unwanted comments or content from their personal pages and, where possible, remove comments they have posted to other people’s pages.

9.4 Make users aware that their online activities are not anonymous and reports of bullying and harassment will be taken seriously. Users should be made aware that reports of abuse may result in action by the service provider, including termination of their account and that, in serious cases, the provider or a victim or their representative may initiate civil or criminal legal proceedings.

9.5 Ensure that the ‘report abuse’ system is easily accessible and easy to use, to report any bullying or abusive behaviour.

9.6 Enable visitors to social networking sites to report bullying and abuse, regardless of whether or not they are registered for the service. Information should be available on how to do this. For example, a dedicated email address could be supplied for making complaints to the service provider.

9.7 Encourage complainants to provide details to facilitate effective handling of the report by the provider. This may include:

- reason for complaint, e.g. threatening or abusive comments, fake profiles, inappropriate images, etc.;

- location of the content, e.g. URL of the webpage;
- type of content or communication, e.g. comment, photo or video, posting in blog;
- date the content was viewed or posted (where possible);
- screenshot/grab of the ‘offensive content’;
- encouraging mobile users to save any communications, including texts, multimedia messages or downloads and any associated mobile numbers or email addresses; and
- any other relevant additional information.

## 10. REPORTING CONCERNS, ABUSE AND ILLEGAL BEHAVIOUR

### GENERAL

Service providers and law enforcement agencies have achieved a great deal of success in co-operating effectively to combat illegal activities online using well-established protocols and procedures. The emergence of national agencies, such as the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (Appendix C) in the UK, and global bodies such as the Virtual Global Taskforce, offers scope to build on this co-operation.

Users of social networking services need to be able to access straightforward mechanisms to report matters that concern them. These matters could range from offensive communications or other behaviours, which breach providers’ terms and conditions, to potentially illegal activities, including but not limited to:<sup>39</sup>

- posting images depicting child sexual abuse or exploitation;
- suspicious behaviour towards children and young people, including behaviour indicative of grooming;
- bullying and harassment;

<sup>39</sup> This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Reporting mechanisms can also be used to report other types of abuse such as copyright infringements, suspected fraud and spam/viruses.

- posting of inappropriate content, such as information promoting or encouraging self-harm, suicide or eating disorders;
- incorrectly tagged adult or age-inappropriate content; and
- other potentially illegal or criminal behaviour.

It is for each service provider to make an assessment of how their services are used, which behaviours are likely to occur and how concerns can be addressed. Law enforcement can also have a role in advising providers how their services are being misused.

It is important to direct users to sources of expert help and advice, both online and offline, by providing links to relevant organisations, such as child welfare charities and confidential helplines or support services. This would be particularly helpful in cases where victims of abuse or those with concerns may be reluctant to identify themselves or report directly to the service provider or law enforcement agency.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Service providers should:

- 10.1 Have in place clear and straightforward reporting mechanisms for users (in particular for children and young people) to report suspected abuse.
- 10.2 Consider placing relevant advice and links to these reporting options in prominent and relevant parts of the service where users are interacting with other users, such as instant messaging, chat areas, picture galleries, user profiles, message boards, guest book areas and blogs.
- 10.3 Continue to research, develop and test measures designed to detect suspicious behaviour towards children.
- 10.4 Consider establishing a general page with information and/or links where users can choose the appropriate agency or organisation to contact about making a report. This could include:
  - the service provider;
  - law enforcement agencies;
  - emergency services where there is an immediate threat to safety of life, or where a child or children are at immediate risk of harm, for example by phoning 999 (UK), 911(US) or 000 (Australia);
  - child welfare organisations such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) or ChildLine; and
  - other confidential helplines/support services (e.g. hotlines<sup>40</sup> and support agencies).
- 10.5 Consider acknowledging each report received, confirming that it will be managed and an indication of the timescale, if appropriate.
- 10.6 Explore providing reporting mechanisms which automatically capture essential information and relevant evidence, such as a ‘screen capture’ of abusive, offensive or inappropriate content or communications, the online ID of the abuser and the date and time of the incident being reported.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Service providers should continue to report illegal images to the Internet Watch Foundation (UK), National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) (USA) or Australian Communications and Media Authority (Australia).

<sup>41</sup> See previous Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet good practice models and guidance on chat services and instant messaging. [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/ho\\_model.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/ho_model.pdf)

- 10.7 It is essential that users, particularly children and young people, of social networking and user interactive services are able to report to law enforcement agencies in a way that is user friendly and with minimum delay. In the UK, users should be able to report directly<sup>42</sup> to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)/Virtual Global Taskforce (VGT) (e.g. via report abuse button or hyperlink) for matters concerning suspected, attempted or actual online sexual abuse, including grooming.
- 10.8 It is recognised that some media platforms (e.g. mobile or PDA devices) currently have limitations that may make some direct reporting solutions difficult. It is important to keep developments under review.

## **11. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SERVICE PROVIDERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Service providers and law enforcement should:

- 11.1 Consistent with applicable laws, make arrangements to share reports of potentially illegal incidents and suspicious behaviour relating to the protection of children. These arrangements, depending on local jurisdiction and applicable laws, may include:
- guidelines or protocols on what content and supporting information service providers should preserve as evidence;
  - protocols for disclosure which are compliant with relevant data protection and privacy legislation; and
  - feedback mechanisms between industry and law enforcement agencies.
- 11.2 Continue to research, develop and test ways of detecting potentially illegal and/or suspicious behaviour towards children online.

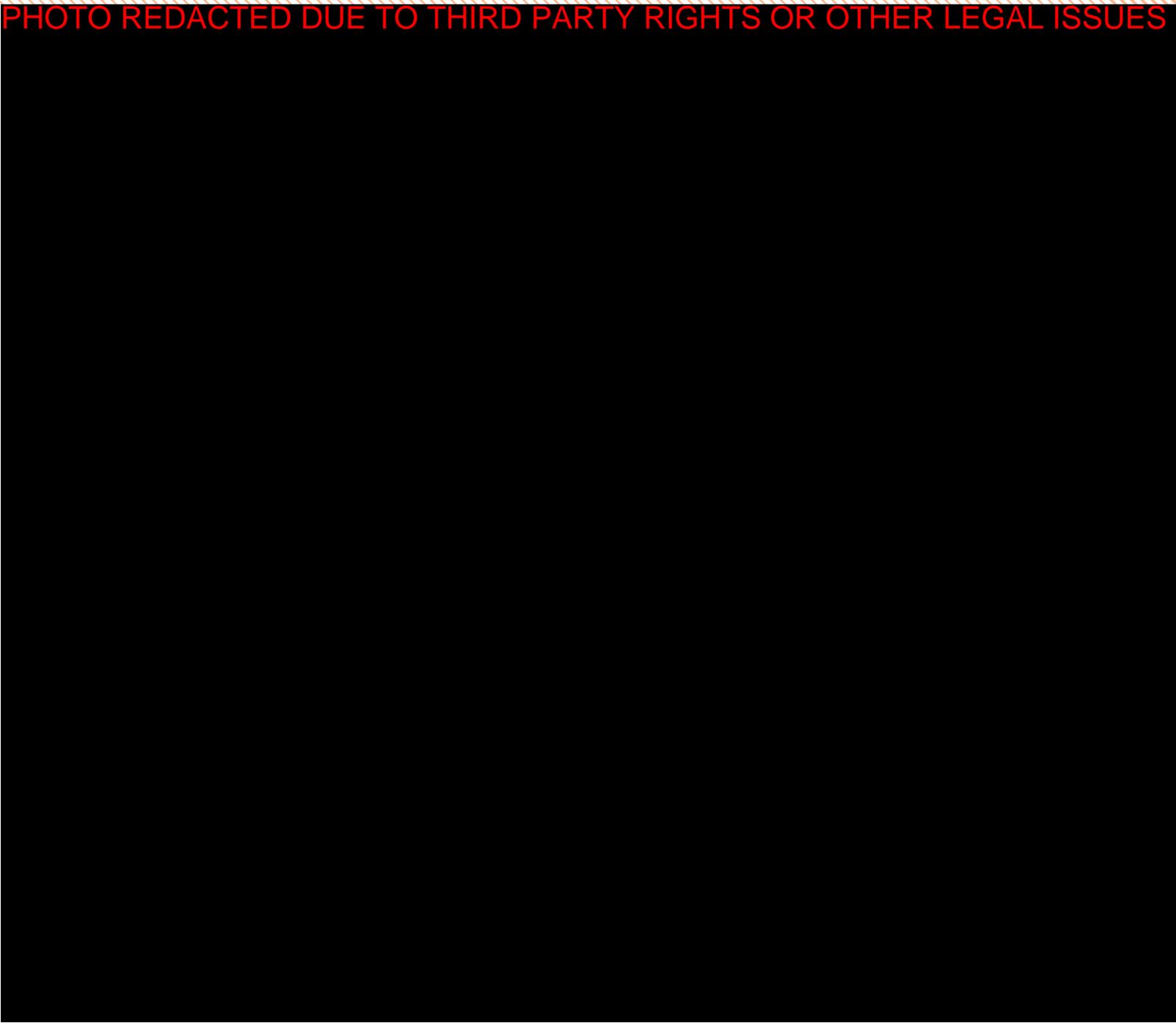
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<sup>42</sup> Service providers wishing to facilitate or adopt direct reporting are encouraged to seek the advice of CEOP or their local VGT partner (Online Child Sex Exploitation Team (OCSET) in Australia/NCMEC in USA) on potential options.

## PART 3

# Safety tips

PHOTO REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



**These safety messages are for parents, carers, children, young people and service providers. The safety tips draw on the available research, and issues discussed in the Home Office Task Force project group.**

**The information in this section is intended to help provide material for any media literacy, education, awareness or campaign work that providers or others may wish to develop.**

## **1. SAFETY TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CARERS**

### **BECOME FAMILIAR WITH SOCIAL NETWORKING AND USER INTERACTIVE SITES**

- You should not be afraid to become involved in your children's online activities. Most social networking and user interactive sites are easy to examine and evaluate, and children are best protected when they communicate with their parents or carers.
- Ask your child about what social networking and user interactive sites they use and how they work. This will help you understand your child's interests and enable you to assess how well they understand the issues associated with using the service.
- Depending on the age of your child, consider the use of parental controls such as filtering or monitoring software on which you can set the permissions to manage your child's access to social networking sites. For more information on such tools, see [www.getnetwise.org](http://www.getnetwise.org).
- It is important to remember that social networking and interactive sites can be accessed through a mobile device as well as a PC or laptop. So any discussions with your child should cover how they access and use social networking sites, including, for example, through their mobile phone.
- You should become familiar with the social networking and interactive sites your children are using. Pay particular attention to:
  - i the terms and conditions of the site (i.e. the rules for using the service), but particularly to what is acceptable behaviour or not on the service.
  - ii the age requirement to register for the service, for example whether the service is suitable only for children 13 years and over;
  - iii the safety advice that is provided on the service for the user; and
  - iv the safety tools on the service, including:
    - user profiles – view user profiles to check what personal information is published;
    - privacy controls – look for privacy tools offered by a site, what the privacy settings are (e.g. whether private or public for those under the age of 18 years) and how they can be changed; and
    - reporting concerns – check how users can contact or report any difficulties they are having to the service provider or other agencies.
- Teach children the importance of registering their correct age to ensure that the safety protection tools provided for those under the age of 18 are applied to them so they get the most appropriate content and experience.
- Visit the sites and familiarise yourself with the features the sites have on offer, such as creating a webspace, creating a profile, blogging, making friends, instant messaging and chatting, posting videos and photos.
- Remind your child to review their contact/friends list on a regular basis to make sure they want to share their information with everyone on the list.
- Negotiate with your child to visit and view all their profiles on social networking sites; some children have a version for their parents and another for their friends.
- Discuss with your child the mechanisms available to them to manage their profile. All

users can change their privacy settings, block users and report abuse, and have the option to cancel their account.

## STRIKING A BALANCE

- Children and young people have strong views about their privacy and it will be important for you to help your child to use social networking sites responsibly and safely, while respecting their privacy.
- There is an important balance between educating children and young people about the risks online, viewing what they are doing and actually trusting them in their use of social networking sites and allowing them a degree of autonomy.

## GUARDING PRIVACY

- It is critical that children and young people understand the importance of protecting their privacy online. Many, if not all, of the popular social networking sites provide privacy tools to ensure that users can manage whom they choose to interact with and who can post the comments on their blogs or personal sites.
- It is important that children and young people think carefully about adding someone they have only met online to their 'friends list' even if another friend has recommended them – people are not always who they claim to be.
- Talk to your child about the importance of keeping the password to their account or space private to protect against someone taking control of it.
- Mobile phones can be easily lost or stolen. It is a good idea to set up a PIN lock on your child's mobile, so it cannot be used without their permission or if it is lost or stolen.
- Your child should only use auto login (where the site remembers your password for you when you return to it) when signing into a social networking site if PIN protection is being used on their mobile. Otherwise anyone finding their

mobile phone and accessing the site from it will be able to access and abuse their social network account, for example by changing their profile, or sending messages to contacts in their name.

- Ensure that your child is aware of the privacy setting options of their account. It is important that you negotiate with your child the appropriate level of privacy and that it matches their level of emotional maturity and understanding.
- Advise your child to be careful not to share any information that may help locate them in the real world. For example, a photograph of a school uniform or street sign.

## MANAGING PERSONAL IMAGES AND VIDEO POSTINGS

The use and sharing of images and videos has proliferated online, especially on social networking and video-sharing sites. Images and videos can be loaded from cameras and mobile phones. Some mobile devices enable users to upload images and videos directly to social networking sites.

- It is very important that children and young people consider and choose carefully what they share online with friends and the wider community on the Internet, especially as photos can be easily copied and changed.
- The convenience of mobile phones means it is easy to upload images and videos 'on the go'. Particular care should be taken to 'think before you post' to avoid compromising privacy or safety, for example images from a party or of outrageous or compromising behaviour. If a child is posting photos containing their friends, for example, they should seek their friends' permission first.
- Photos and videos can contain information that on its own may seem innocuous, but when put together with other information such as school details can be used to locate and identify the child.

- Photos and videos should be appropriate – not sexually provocative or explicit – so as not to attract unwanted attention from adults who may wish to exploit children and young people.
- Check the ‘acceptable use’ policies of social networking and other user interactive sites. Most sites will remove explicit and ‘inappropriate’ images when they are brought to their attention.
- Ask your child whether they are comfortable with the content they are posting being seen by everyone they know and whether it might embarrass them at a later stage.

### MANAGING COMMENTS AND POSTINGS

Many young people go to great lengths in building their profiles and webpages, so receiving comments from the wider community can be exciting, compelling and is expected.

- It is important that children and young people understand the need to be responsible in what they post and contribute to other people’s social networking sites – ‘think before you post’ is a good maxim.
- There have been some incidents of bullying – often among known friends or peers on social networking sites – where bullying in the playground has continued and possibly escalated online. The potential to humiliate and harass individuals through comments and by posting images can be extremely hurtful and have a number of unintended consequences, such as spreading very quickly to a much larger audience online. It is important to set rules with your child about what is OK and not OK to post about anyone known or unknown.
- Emphasise to your child that once a comment or a posting is made, it may not be possible to take it back. It is also important to be aware that what may be sent or posted as a joke, may not be taken in that way. When a message is posted to or about someone, the sender cannot see the impact that their words or images have on the other person.

### MANAGING YOUR TEENAGER’S FLIRTATIOUS BEHAVIOUR

- It is important to discuss and establish boundaries with your child from an early age, about flirting online, especially when your child begins to show an interest in and is beginning to use interactive services.
- Teenagers may engage in flirting or sexual exploration online, and it is important to discuss the need for boundaries in relationships even with known boyfriends and girlfriends.
- You should discuss, and emphasise, particularly with older teenagers, the dangers of flirting with people they have first met online. As some people lie about who they are, you never really know who you are interacting with or talking to.

### MEETING IN PERSON WITH PEOPLE FIRST MET ONLINE

Meeting people in the real world who are only known online is not new or particular to social networking or user interactive sites. Children and young people often assume that those people they have spent time interacting with online are real friends and therefore safe to meet. However, great caution should be applied.

- It is important for children and young people to think very carefully before agreeing to meet anyone they have met online and agree that any such meetings should be approved by their parents or carers.
- You should ensure that any meetings take place in public and with trusted adults present.
- It is important to address and consider the possibility of your child being involved in organised ‘gang’ or rivalry meetings in the real world, which can be arranged online.
- It is also important to recognise that there are online groups and communities where children and young people meet that can be educational and fun.

## GETTING HELP AND REPORTING ABUSE

- It is critical to maintain an ongoing dialogue and have regular conversations with your child about anything that is worrying them or has happened online.
- If you suspect that your child or another child is being solicited online or is being ‘groomed’ by someone with a sexual interest in children, it is important to report it to the appropriate authorities.
- Preserving the evidence of any abusive or potentially illegal communication is important. This evidence can be helpful if you need to report to the child’s school, the service provider or to the police. If you have any copies of communications, images, messages or other content related to the solicitation of a child, it is important to save them and pass them to law enforcement agencies.
- It is very important that both you and your child understand how to report anything that might be inappropriate or illegal either to the service provider, law enforcement or other designated agency.
- There are now a number of places to report potentially illegal behaviour online, for example:
  - i in the UK, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) ([www.ceop.org.uk](http://www.ceop.org.uk)), see Appendix C for more information about CEOP; and
  - ii in the US, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) CyberTipline ([www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com)), see Appendix G for more information about NCMEC and the CyberTipline.

## 2. SAFETY TIPS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Many children and young people have an online profile or belong to an online community. These are lots of fun and can be a great place to share your interests, communicate with friends and learn new skills. However, as in the real world, it is important that you take care of yourself, your friends and the wider community.

The following tips will be useful whether you access your social networking site through a PC, laptop, games console or mobile phone.

### STAY IN CONTROL – GUARD YOUR PRIVACY

Social networking sites are used mostly to connect with friends you know in the real world. So you might not think about strangers getting hold of your personal information, such as your mobile number, email address or where you live. But it is important to think about the information you post on your page and on other people's.

- Before setting up your profile, think about who you want to see your personal information.
- Different social networking sites have different privacy settings – read about these carefully and decide who you want to see your personal information.
- If you only want people you know to see information about you – set your profile to private. This is the recommended option.
- Every now and again, look through your contacts or friends and make sure you still want them to know your personal details. Remember, it's not how many people you know but how well you know them.
- 'Private mode' may be safer than 'public mode', but arguments can still occur between friends. People you know could use something you have posted against you, for example to bully you or to damage your reputation. Think very carefully about what you share with your friends.

- It is important to protect your password – don't give it to your friends even for fun. If you give it to them, you just cannot be sure who they might pass it on to.
- If you use your mobile on social networking sites, remember mobile phones can be easily lost or stolen and you don't know who could get your information, or pretend to be you. Put a PIN lock on your mobile, so it can't be used without your permission.
- If your computer or mobile remembers your password, use a PIN number or password every time you sign in.
- Make sure that you register your real age so that other people don't think you are older than you are and treat you in a way that is inappropriate.

### 'GOING PUBLIC'

If you intend to share your profile and content with everyone who is online, there are several things to think about.

- Are you sure you want to do this? You won't be in control of who will see your information.
- Be cautious – 'going public' may lead to things you didn't mean to happen. Be careful about the kind of information (including images) you share about yourself and how you manage your online reputation. Other people can pass on or change your information and you might not be able to stop them or delete it afterwards.
- Remember, when you 'go public', it is not just 'friends of friends of friends' but also complete strangers who will be able to see your content, search and find you online.
- Some social networking sites have a range of settings between public and private – select the one that is appropriate for you.

## ‘UPLOADING CONTENT’

One of the best things about social networking is that you can ‘upload’ your content online – including images, videos and music that you have created yourself. This can be a lot of fun. But again, there are some things to think about before you do this.

- Remember, the World Wide Web is available to everyone, and if your profile is public, everyone can see everything you post about yourself and your friends.
- Be aware of how your content could be used or misused by others. For example, pictures can be copied, or altered and posted elsewhere. You may not even know this has happened. And if you do find out about it, you may not be able to stop it or remove it.

### Guard your online reputation

- Information you post will reflect the kind of person you are, and it will influence what others think of you. What is your content saying about you?
- Think carefully before uploading content and sharing information that shows you or your friends in a compromising situation – for example images of friends drinking at a party.
- Don’t post images of yourself posing in a sexual or provocative way. These can cause you a lot of embarrassment or upset if misused by others in a way you didn’t anticipate, and could attract a lot of unwanted and unwelcome inappropriate contact.
- Also, ask your friends first, if they are identified in the content. Protect your friends and family: they have reputations too!
- It is important to understand that **you are not anonymous online**. You can be traced even if you gave a fake email account and registration information. Every computer and device

connected to the Internet has a unique address (given by your Internet service provider). This is linked to your computer in the real world – to your real-world address. The police, and some others, can access this address, and it is linked to every communication you send online.

### Consider your friends

- Remember that what may seem funny to you can actually be very hurtful and offensive to others – so ‘think before you post’ comments on other people’s webspaces.
- You know how easy it is to upload images and videos ‘on the go’ using your mobile. Think carefully before you post so you don’t embarrass yourself or your friends.
- Don’t post content that may be seen as racist, homophobic, bullying or threatening. Remember, these sorts of behaviours could result in your account being deleted by your service provider, and the police may even get involved.
- Try not to bring disagreements or arguments with people that you know in real life into the online community.
- Setting up a fake page to pose as someone else may seem a clever way to embarrass the person you are impersonating. But this can have very serious consequences – to the other person and, in fact, to yourself, as the police may become involved.
- Remember to be a good friend and, if your friends are behaving inappropriately, remind them that they are not anonymous and can be traced.

### Copyright – get permission

- Copyright is the protection given to authors (of writing, images, video or music). It protects them from other people copying their work without permission. It is important to respect this.

- If you download or copy something from the Internet without permission, there can be serious consequences, including from the police.
- You can use a Creative Commons licence to make your own creative work freely available to others. For example, you can change your copyright terms from ‘all rights reserved’ to ‘some rights reserved’. See <http://creativecommons.org>.

## RESPECT THE ONLINE COMMUNITY

People online love interactions that are interesting, funny and witty; this contributes to making the Internet entertaining for everyone. There are also some ways to show your respect for other people online.

- Respect what other people contribute and the time and effort they have put into creating and sharing content.
- The Internet is a very public place, so personal disagreements can quickly get out of control. This may result in public humiliation, hurt or distress beyond what you ever intended.
- If you realise that someone else is having problems – for example receiving threats, bullying or nasty behaviours – try not to make things worse. Report the situation to your service provider and seek their help and advice. They should respond to you.

## JUST DON'T TAKE IT! – REPORTING ABUSE AND SEEKING ADVICE AND HELP

- If problems or difficulties happen on the Internet, use the tools provided on the service to block, ignore, filter or report these to your service provider, for example the social networking provider.
- You will find contact information from your social networking provider. They should have

links to sources of expert help and advice on pages titled ‘Help’, ‘Customer care’ or ‘Report abuse’.

- Remember, arranging to meet someone that you have only met online is dangerous, and it is safer not to do so. Only do so with your parent’s or carer’s permission, take a trusted adult with you, and meet in a public place.
- If someone else’s behaviour online makes you feel that you or someone else is in immediate danger, you should act urgently and contact the police.
- There are now a number of places to report potential illegal behaviour online, particularly if someone approaches you in a sexual way:
  - i in the UK, the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP) – [www.ceop.org.uk](http://www.ceop.org.uk); and
  - ii in the US, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) CyberTipline – [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com).
- Speak to an adult or friend that you trust if you are unsure about anything. It is always good to seek advice or help if anything makes you feel scared or uncomfortable.