

What is the focus for this edition?

The topic of online safety is probably the biggest current concern for those involved in educating and caring for children and young people across the developed world. This edition of Educare includes material on e-safety for TCKs, a glossary of terms, strategies for protecting children, education and role-modelling, and a list of helpful resources.

E-safety for TCKs

The challenges

Keeping children safe on-line is a global issue, and it also includes addressing off-line use from downloads.

Most parents rightly fear two major risks for their children – pornography and violent games, and these are at the top of their concerns, but keeping safe is about much more than this. The recent scandals involving Facebook's sale and misuse of personal data highlight the scale of how much information some of the giant corporations store about their customers, including children, and the potentially damaging and manipulative ways that it can be used. They also demonstrate the ease with which many people give away far too much personal information when they don't have to, just because someone asks for it.

There are four big areas of risk for children:

- Those caused by giving away personal information, contact details and photographs. This information can be used by stalkers and groomers who want to exploit children online or arrange to contact them in person. A potential danger more specific to TCKs is that of damaging uploads that fall foul of local laws or safe behaviour. For example, criticism of the host country authorities is rarely likely to be well-received, but in some cases it can break *lèse-majesté* laws and even result in the expulsion of expatriates or serious problems for national friends.
- Risks to health and well-being from cyberbullying*, trolling*, stalking*, and from groomers* who arrange to meet in person. There is also a risk to mental health from misuse of social media and the messages projected by some websites popular with young people; there is a well recognised growth of mental health concerns in children and teenagers where one of the factors is technology being used to create or reinforce problems.

Underlining the power of social media on mood and mental health, a mood control experiment was conducted in 2014 on 689,000 social media users without their informed consent. Facebook filtered users' content posted by friends either positively or negatively, and showed that the users reacted by posting more or less positive comments of their own in response.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/29/facebook-users-emotions-news-feeds>

To quote from another source on the concerns of mental health:

"..... the internet, which has grown up at the same time as the explosion in teen mental illness, and is often seen as part of the problem, with cyberbullying and worries about body image (created partly by selfie culture) often cited as triggers. Social media doesn't create bullying or anxieties about*

body image (it's worth noting that rates of bullying haven't risen in the last 10 years). But technology can amplify problems or give them new forms of expression."

Source: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/teenage-mental-health-crisis-rates-of-depression-have-soared-in-the-past-25-years-a6894676.html>

- Overuse and even addiction. The more common addictive uses are social media, pornography, and interactive gaming although many other sites and uses can lead to the same compulsiveness. On-line friendships can become more 'real' and comforting for anyone, but for TCKs repeated cross-cultural transition for both themselves and their friends can lead to more and more time spent on maintaining social media friendships around the world than on shifting to local, face-to-face relationships.
- Inappropriate content. As already noted, violence and pornography often top parents' lists. With pornography it is important to recognise that a very high proportion of those accessing it are women and girls – imagining that it is only a male problem is naïve. It is so easily accessible that with a few key words and a click on an unfiltered device, hard-core images can be viewed any time of the day. However, violence and pornography are far from the only inappropriate material available on-line. Websites and social media are strongly influenced by subjectivity, values expressed where feelings over-ride truth, hard-line secularism, and postmodernist relativity. These can do an enormous amount of damage. TCKs living in more socially conservative societies, where major social changes affecting their passport countries are not discussed, can simply absorb views on those changes from passport country media and social media they are exposed to.

***What do the terms mean?

Grooming – the deliberate effort to use power, favours, status and/or influence to gain the trust of a target victim and possibly other family members in order to exploit the victim in some way, e.g. for sexual activity, financial gain through blackmail or trickery, recruitment into gangs, unpaid work etc Grooming can take place in person or on-line.

Stalking – deliberately tracking a victim, monitoring their behaviour and movements. The term is drawn from hunting where the predator stalks its prey. Stalkers may gain satisfaction just from tracking the victim, but often it leads on to a desire to meet in person and to exploit and harm the victim in some way. Many stalkers are obsessive and may be mentally unbalanced. Stalking can take place in the physical world or on-line.

Trolling – posting negative, harmful and damaging material on-line about a victim. Celebrities are often trolled about things such as their appearance, personality or families. In the worst cases the trolling can extend to repeated and frequent rape and death threats. Obviously, trolling reflects an inadequate and unbalanced personality in the offender.

Cyberbullying – the deliberate use of technology such as social media, blogs, websites, e-mail, texts etc to intimidate, threaten or harass a victim. This does not mean the occasional badly worded message, but rather the deliberate and consistent misuse of these communication methods.

The author was recently sent a list of 10 apps for parents and teachers to be aware of should their teenage (and sometimes younger) children try to use them. This came from a regional newspaper at <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/10-apps-parents-warned-look-14503738>

1. Omegle
2. Yubo
3. Calculator app lock

4. Ask.fm
5. Kik messenger
6. Hot or not
7. Burnbook
8. Wishbone
9. Whisper
10. Instagram

Like the person who sent the list I had only heard of one of these – Instagram. It may be that readers of this Educare article are the same, and may wonder how we can help protect children with so many apps and websites that we don't know about. However, I had heard about the **type** of apps and websites before so it was only a question of matching names to types in most cases.

Some of these apps are not necessarily wrong in themselves, and can be used to positive effect, but they can also be misused. The best known one, Instagram, is in this category. It is easy for a person to open multiple accounts using various nicknames or even false names. Falsely-named accounts are popularly known as 'finstas'. Ordinary sharing of pictures on Instagram is one thing; using 'finstas' to bully or access pornography and other inappropriate material is a much darker use, and it is sadly common enough among children. All of this can occur with no parental control, or even without their knowledge because a click of a 'clear search history' facility removes any record of misuse. Like all social media, it can so easily be used to project an image of the person someone wants to be rather than who the person actually is. For children and teens struggling with identity and appearance, the temptation to project an image of themselves as prettier, more intelligent, and more interesting is enormous and potentially very harmful.

Many of the other apps fitted certain categories – contact with strangers on-line (Omegle – slogan 'talk to strangers', Whisper which allows 'anonymous' secret sharing); sex and hook-up apps (Yubo, Hot or Not); sext messaging (Yubo, Hot or Not, Kik); spreading malicious gossip, negative comparisons and other forms of bullying (Burn Book, Ask.fm and Wishbone); and deception (the Calculator app which is designed to look like a calculator on screen while allowing private messages to be sent).

The names of these apps will continue to change, but knowing about the **type** of app available is already useful. Not knowing the names of the latest apps doesn't mean that parents cannot or do not do anything and just resign themselves to being unable to protect children. Knowing that such things exist allows for more open and frank discussion with children about their dangers.

It is also not a matter of trying to keep ahead of the children on technology expertise – something most parents will ultimately fail to do. Instead, they need to fully educate and role model what they expect their children to be on-line. Children may be many IT steps ahead of their parents, but they are still socially immature and naïve. As a result they find it harder to see when they are being exploited or manipulated on-line, and harder to know what to do when they realise it is happening.

How to protect: start young

So what can parents and other responsible adults do to help protect their children?

It is much easier to make and stick to family rules on e-safety when children are younger. Teenagers who have already developed unhealthy patterns of leisure-time screen use, both on-line and off-line, will almost certainly strongly resist efforts to correct them. This should

not stop parents from trying. However, if a child has been trained to manage screen use from the first time that they are allowed to use a device, there is a much greater chance of success.

One aspect of starting young is respecting COPPA law. Previous editions of Educare have highlighted that the social media age limit of 13 is not just the policy of the providers, but is required by American COPPA (Children's Online Protection of Privacy Act) law. In fact many of the social media providers do not accept this law; back in 2011 Mark Zuckerberg indicated that he would like to challenge COPPA so that children could use Facebook. Under pressure recently in US Senate Judiciary hearings, Zuckerberg repeated this opposition when asked about legislation to protect 13-16 year olds. It is in the interests of social media sites to have as many people as possible using them in order to gain data and advertising income; these site providers mostly ignore the fact that huge numbers of their users are under age and therefore make no real efforts to apply the law.

In practice, with so many children using Facebook and its subsidiary, Instagram, there has been little need to challenge COPPA law which is probably the world's most widely ignored piece of legislation. Reliable information indicates that 70%+ of 10-12 year olds in developed countries use Facebook, and in one group of 9 and 10 year olds about one third said that they already used Instagram*.

(*Reference <https://protectyoungminds.org/2016/05/12/instagram-kids-5-hidden-dangers/>)

The COPPA age limit of 13 is in place for a good reason – to protect children. To gain access to many of these sites children need to lie about their age. Given this, it is best to start young and explain why there will be no social media access until the law allows it at the earliest, and then to continue to insist on that policy whatever the peer pressure on under-age children to sign in to the sites.

Switch screens off at night

Another simple measure which is now routinely recommended in school and parents' presentations is to switch all screens and internet access off at night.

Many people don't.

The advantages of doing this and problems caused by not doing so are clear. A huge number of people check social media before even getting out of bed and many more do so before breakfast. Even more alarmingly, approximately one in five teens uses social media during the night, waking up to read and post. This, linked to late-night screen use, leads to a very disrupted sleep pattern, long-term fatigue and greater risk of mental health problems. Having all screens switched off at least half an hour before going to sleep avoids many of these issues. This works best if everyone in the home follows the same rules with a good parental role model to follow.

Filters

Filters are essential, as unfiltered internet use allows extremely easy access not just to pornography but also to violence and other inappropriate content. However, just setting up filters and trusting that all will be well is naïve, as any determined and tech-savvy young person can find ways around them. The same is true of supervision at home where it is very helpful for family members to see what each other is looking at. However, this does not manage what a child looks at elsewhere especially when apps have a 'clear search history' facility, or if a child is using teenage code such as MOS (mother over shoulder) or PIR (parents in room). It is useful to be aware of these kinds of codes, and of deception apps such as the calculator one, but supervision like this could degenerate into a counter-productive game of parents and children trying to outwit each other.

At the time of writing the filter and browsing history software called 'Covenant Eyes' is recommended. It keeps a browsing record from all family members using it, so that there is also some degree of mutual accountability. Also, having a trusted accountability partner is very helpful – as long as there is full openness and honesty about all areas of internet and other screen use.

Chat rooms?

Chat rooms involve users in anything from real-time on-line conversation and other interaction with strangers to fully immersive graphic social environments such as multiplayer on-line games which often have virtual worlds where players are represented by avatars. Most chat rooms focus on sharing information via text with a group of other users – this distinguishes them from instant messaging, which is more designed for one-to-one communication. However, many chat rooms also include the possibility of shifting over to private instant messaging. The primary motive of most chat rooms is to link up groups of people with similar interests so that they can discuss and interact together; if the subject of the group is positive and that is all they discuss then the chat room can serve a useful purpose. However, many chat rooms are open to all comers, including dangerous individuals who identify new members or isolated and quiet individuals and then try to initiate personal messaging. For this reason, among others, chat rooms are banned in most schools and colleges – it would be good for parents to apply the same ban at home.

Lifestyle changes

Trying to deal with internet use in isolation may miss the point for many children where they perceive little alternative for any leisure time. There are situations where a child's world seems to them to consist of school, travel to and from school, homework and little else. Social isolation combined with over-busy parents leads to boredom and loneliness. It is easy to see how the internet can become a 'friend' to fill the gap and then become an obsession if the child perceives that he or she has few other leisure alternatives. When the effects of teenage self-identity struggles are added in and maybe raised on-line, the internet 'friend/s' can provide a wide range of bizarre and unpleasant versions of identity as well as harbouring threats from groomers and stalkers.

Alternatives are needed. An obvious place to start is for parents to ensure that they are not too busy. This can be easier said than done of course – but if there is a long-term pattern of excessive busyness it needs to be changed to provide time to be parents and children together. Linked to this it is important for parents to ensure that social alternatives are available – activities like clubs, youth groups, sport and music practice etc. In the most isolated cases for TCKs a move to a bigger town or city may be necessary as the children enter their teen years to ensure their welfare and adequate socialisation opportunities. The peer group and role models from older children and teens are so important that it is essential to find a youth group or other context that provides them.

Education and role modelling

Education and role modelling are the most important long-term actions on the part of parents because the children need to be prepared for independent living. As Christian parents this includes seeking to be the same person who wants to honour God both on-line and in the flesh – all too easily there is an illusion of anonymity on-line especially if using a pseudonym with the cushioning effect of not facing (at least immediately) the consequences of angry or spiteful messages posted there. There are various facets to education and role modelling.

1. What parents demonstrate matters enormously even faced with a teenager challenging their values. If in their on-line activity they say one thing and do another, it will validate internet misuse in the minds of the children. If the parents do what they say then the children are much more likely to follow their example in the long run. They have a great opportunity to demonstrate how to positively use such a potentially powerful resource.
2. Honest discussion – both about the use of technology and the issues raised by the media. Because parents want their children’s attitudes to be shaped by Biblical values rather than by popular and social media, they need to deal openly with these concerns before being caught out when others feed ideas into their minds. Pretending that their children would never read, listen to, watch or otherwise access such ‘rubbish’ (parental definition, maybe not theirs) is unrealistic and opens the door to the twisted versions of reality and morality they find there.
3. Deliberate use of e-safety video material. There are some poor videos around, but also many other better ones, including those recommended at the end of this issue that have been produced by and for young people, often with professional help.
4. Teaching media literacy. This includes how to recognise true and fake news, how to recognise media bias, how to recognise hype and exaggeration and how to assess moral issues in the light of Biblical values. The author has used material like this where true and fake stories are analysed; it can be difficult to tell them apart on first reading because some real news is very strange! However, where a story is reported as fact it can be checked by comparison with other sources and also checked to verify that it comes from independent sources. This skill can be learned and a healthy scepticism about finding reliable information on-line can be developed, especially if finding it in just one news source.

A helpful checklist to identify fake news is:

- Has the story been reported anywhere else on the internet?
- Is it on the radio, TV or in the newspapers as well as appearing on-line?
- Have you heard of the organisation that published the story?
- Does the website where you found the story appear to be genuine? (meaning it doesn't look like a copycat website that's designed to *look* like another genuine website)
- Does the website address at the very top of the page look real? Is the end of the website something normal like '.net' or '.com', and *not* something unusual, like 'com.co'?
- Does the photo or video look normal and does the story *sound* believable? (However, the strangeness of some real stories has to be borne in mind)

Another issue is separating fact from opinion – again this can be deliberately taught by using examples from on-line media where the two are mixed when reporting on events or current issues. It is easy to find and compare differing opinions of the same basic facts; basic reports on a sport event can demonstrate this, before even considering reports on much more significant and dangerous issues. Media bias can also be recognised and taught – both the selection of items to report on and the angle taken in those reports. Sites with a politically correct or a more right-wing bias can be analysed fairly easily. Similarly sites that only exaggerate the positives, such as promotional ones for companies, educational institutions, political parties etc can be easily studied and critiqued.

In all of this teaching on media literacy, the analysis can be made in the light of Biblical values and the extent to which much on-line material, sometimes including that produced by Christians, falls short of Biblical standards.

5. Teaching good social media practice and etiquette. This includes guarding information – the social media giants have used personal data to gain revenue from advertising and some seem to have few moral problems with selling or trading other people's information for profit. Teaching children not to give away personal information such as their date of birth, address, phone number, other contact details, school or daily routines is a good start, along with clear use of the privacy settings, but there is much more. Children also need to avoid using provocative nicknames (e.g. *hottest lass* or *sexy guy*) or ones that give away information such as *dreamergirlJan2004* (almost certainly a birthday reference).
6. *Too Much Information* (TMI) on social media usually refers to giving away far too much personal detail, or to someone boring friends with excessive posts or self-absorbed content. The ultimate TMI is sexting, which has become a craze among teens and young adults over the past few years. Although it has become widespread it is well worth knowing that **the very large majority of teens do not send or ask for such pictures.**
7. Intentional explanation of popular underlying ideologies such as post-modernism, militant atheism, secularism, political correctness, and some of the unproductive counter-reactions to these dogmas, helps children understand the perspectives of commentators in the mass media, on blogs and in social media.
8. *Last but not least, focus on good social media use.* It can be used very productively to develop a positive on-line profile with thoughtful and thought-provoking posts. Christians can, and routinely do, share their faith, advertise events, offer group support, and much more. A social media profile, if managed well, can be a real force for good. If the parents' profiles are positive and good social media use is actively taught then there is a much higher chance that children will follow the example. A really helpful resource on this area is <https://cyberbullying.org/smart-social-networking> with 15 good tips for teens.

On-line safety resources

These resources are all short videos that are freely available on-line at You Tube or from charity and government internet safety websites such as https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/ They can all be used to inform parents, teachers or others responsible for children, and with children in groups or individually. Some of them produced by Children's On-line Exploitation Protection (CEOP), notably 'Exposed' and 'Let's Fight it Together', have been used by the author with parents, teachers and groups of children.

(All figures indicate the length of the video.)

Social media – good use and misuse

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aM0egir_I0c Look up from your social media addiction and live (4:58)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HffWFd_6bJ0 5 Crazy Ways Social Media Is Changing Your Brain Right Now (3:16)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFSwDtspY5c> WHY I QUIT SOCIAL MEDIA FOR A YEAR AND WHAT I LEARNED (8:20)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyjd73tUXig> Think before you post on social media (3:35)

Sexting

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDI7KuMKg90> Sexting dangers (2:12)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ovR3FF_6us Exposed (10:34)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4w4_Hrwh2XI Think before you post – sexting (1:00)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z7hnuXomx4> Sexting - The Price of a Text (10:29)

Giving away too much information; the risks of embarrassment and from stalking

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hK5OeGeudBM> Consequences: Assembly for 11-16 year olds (8:46)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euc-WcN5IkY> Oblivious (8:27)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VCTN26umVA> CEOP Clare thought she knew (3:31)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JpyO5XIfCo> CEOP Matt thought he knew (4:01)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUjwHPah72o> B4U Click Online (3:22)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE9dwAr7CUE> Amanda's Story (6:09)

Cyberbullying

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dubA2vhllrg> Let's fight it together (6:30)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKA1KzwyhtU> Cyberbullying – just a little fun (9:38)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmQ8nM7b6XQ> Cyber Bullying Virus (4:35)

...and two helpful books

Growing up Social: Chapman G & Pellicane A; Northfield Publishing (2014)

This is an excellent resource that blends general good parenting advice with facing the challenges of using technology positively, while avoiding the dangers it can pose. A summary of the books and several very positive reviews can be seen on Amazon at

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Growing-Up-Social-Relational-Screen-Driven/dp/0802411231/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1536057118&sr=1-1&keywords=growing+up+social

Will you be my Facebook friend? Chesters T; 10 Publishing (2012)

Tim has produced a short and easily readable book that covers some of the pitfalls of social media and how we manage our use of it whilst recognising their potential for good.

Educare is a free e-magazine available to anyone who is interested in the welfare of Third Culture Kids – TCKs, their parents, other family members, sending organisation staff, and any other supporters. To subscribe directly contact this e-mail address mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk

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