

Teaching online safety in school (DfE, June 2019)

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The government has published a new guidance document 'Teaching online safety in school (DfE, June 2019). It outlines to schools the importance of helping children and young people not only use the internet safely, but also give them opportunities to learn how to behave online. Throughout, the guidance emphasises the importance of teaching that is always age and developmentally appropriate.

The guidance is non-statutory and applies to all local authority maintained schools, academies and free schools. The advice may also be helpful to nurseries and FE colleges.

Although the guidance says that it does not imply additional content or teaching requirements, I can think of many schools that are probably not covering some of the individual topics and risks.

Teaching online safety in school says that there are many areas in the curriculum where the topics could be taught, not least in the new compulsory Relationships (Sex Education) and Health Education in place from September 2020. In these curriculum areas, pupils will be taught what positive, healthy and respectful online relationships look like.

The guidance includes the following underpinning knowledge and behaviours:

- How to evaluate what they see online
- How to recognise techniques used for persuasion
- Online behaviour
- How to identify online risks
- How and when to seek support

Although the nature of online harms has been discussed elsewhere, it is not until we look through the comprehensive risk in this document that they together they reflect how harmful the internet

might be. It is easy to see the potential harms, but it is important that we communicate them in a safe and beneficial way, so that pupils remain respectfully cautious and not fearful.

Potential Harms covered in the guidance includes:

- Age restrictions
- Content: How it can be used and shared
- Disinformation, misinformation and hoaxes
- Fake websites and scam emails
- Fraud (online)
- Password phishing
- Personal data
- Persuasive design which keeps 'users online for longer than they might have planned or desired'
- Privacy settings
- Targeting of online content
- Abuse (online)
- Challenges [to do something and post about it]
- Content which incites...hate, violence
- Fake profiles
- Grooming
- Live streaming
- Pornography
- Unsafe communication
- Impact on confidence (including body confidence)
- Impact on quality of life, physical and mental health and relationships
- Online vs. offline behaviours
- Reputational damage
- Suicide, self-harm and eating disorders

In an important section, the Teaching online safety in school guidance, reminds schools that when teaching about these safeguarding topics (and others), staff should be mindful that there may be a child or young person in the lesson who is or has been affected by these harms. During or after a lesson, a pupil may be prompted to disclose about something that may have happened online.

The guidance says that it is good practice to consult the Designated safeguarding Lead 'when considering and planning any safeguarding related lessons or activities (including online) as they will be best placed to reflect and advise on any known safeguarding cases, and how to support any pupils who may be especially impacted by a lesson'.

Teaching online safety in school should be read in conjunction with Education for a Connected World Framework (UKCIS, 2018) which offers 'age specific advice about the online knowledge and skills that pupils should have the opportunity to develop at different stages of their lives.'

The Teaching online safety in school guidance emphasises the need for a whole school approach so that it is embedded in everything the school does including:

- Creating a culture that incorporates the principles of online safety across all elements of school life
- Proactively engaging staff, pupils and parents/carers
- Reviewing and maintaining the online safety principles
- Embedding the online safety principles
- Modelling the online safety principles consistently

The guidance 'Teaching online safety in school' can be downloaded here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-online-safety-in-schools>

Education for a Connected World (UKCIS, 2018) can be downloaded

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