

adoption counts

Top Tips for adoptive families navigating the “Virtual World”

What are the dangers for my child online?

Most young people have online lives, and should be able to be creative, personal, and expressive, without threat from bullies or people looking to befriend, manipulate, and abuse them. However, it is important to remember that any post, no matter what it is, is open to bullying, abuse, and threats. The internet can be a dangerous place for everyone, but children and teens are especially vulnerable. It is important for you and your child to be aware of the risks online, which may include:

Online grooming: when someone tricks and makes friends with a child online, often to exploit them sexually or criminally.

Coercion: being enticed or pressured to send nude photographs.

Access to inappropriate content: this can include sexual, violent, or harmful content.

Cyber bullying: receiving threatening or hateful speech online.

How can I keep my child safe online?

If your child understands online safety, and knows what to look out for, they can avoid things that don't seem right. Use some of the resources below to teach your child the warning signs and how to get out of potentially harmful situations.

It is important that your child is aware of how to protect their personal information online. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram hold great volumes of personal information. You can help your child adjust the privacy settings on their profile, so that their personal information is only shared with friends, for example. The following link can be used to find out how to do this on each device model:

www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/

Scams are illegal practices that trick you into handing over personal information. Before your child inputs their bank details online, you can teach them to look out for a small padlock symbol in the address bar, which will confirm the security of the site. Consider using filters and parental controls to help block unwanted content, and access to specific sites and pages, at home or on specific devices.

How do I know if my child is staying safe online?

Young people have a lot going on in their lives, and changes in behaviour can mean numerous things. However, there are certain changes that could be signs of online grooming:

- Talking about older or new friends they've met online
- Talking about gifts or money they've received online
- Becoming withdrawn and secretive
- Having a new phone or more than one phone
- Receiving a large number of calls or messages
- Worried about being away from their phone

What should I do if I think my child is at risk online?

If you are worried about the way someone has been communicating with your child online, or if your child has been coerced into sending a nude image, you should report it to CEOP's Child Protection Advisors at: www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/

CEOP work with the police and other relevant agencies to ensure that those who make a report are kept safe, and if a crime has been committed, that the perpetrator is brought into the criminal justice system. CEOP are unable to respond to bullying, fake accounts, or account hacking.

Social networks don't allow explicit images of children or hateful comments to be posted online. A report can be made on most popular social networks, and the image or comment should be taken down. If the site doesn't have a way to report the image, you can report it to IWF (Internet Watch Foundation) at: www.iwf.org.uk. They should be able to assist with getting the content removed from the internet.

What are the online risks associated with my child's adoption?

Adopted children may be curious about their birth family, they may search online for answers or be contacted online directly by them. For a child, finding their birth family when using the traditional channels can be emotional and challenging. Offline this would involve preparation and significant support; however, the speed of the internet means online contact can be instant, direct and can happen without anyone knowing. As an adoptive parent, it is important that you keep talking:

- Good communication is essential, it is important your child feels able to ask questions about their birth family and know they can talk openly with you about their feelings without judgement. Talk to your child honestly about what they would do if their birth family contacted them online and what kind of contact, if any, is best to maintain safe boundaries. If the situation does arise, having a plan in place means they will be more likely to come to you for support.
- Explain the formal routes your child can take to contact their birth family if appropriate, such as using the letterbox service. You may even wish to search for your child's birth family members online together, to monitor your child's online use and let them know you are supportive of their curiosity.

How should I respond to my child's unmanaged contact with birth family members?

If you find out that your child is in touch with their birth family or someone inappropriate online, respond calmly and do not blame your child. Whatever emotions you are experiencing, this is also a difficult situation for your child. By staying calm, you are showing your child they can trust you.

Contact Adoption Counts at: www.adoptioncounts.org.uk to get advice and support. If you have any concerns that your child may be in danger, call 101 or 999.

Useful Resources for both you and your child:

www.saferinternet.org.uk

www.childnet.com

