EDUCATION, INFORMATION

Anti-Bullying Week – Will you be part of the solution?

The internet is a great resource; inspiring children to be creative, communicate and learn; but as users become ever younger, protecting them from the risks they may encounter is a growing concern for parents and carers. So with cyber-bullying and E-Safety being two of the central themes of Anti-bullying week (16-20 November) here Stella James, an online safety champion and driving force behind the Gooseberry Planet online teaching Apps, provides some useful advice and how empower children to recognise the signs and dangers.

"Whilst most parents are acutely aware of issues including identity theft, bullying, sexting and grooming, there is no substitute for open and regular conversations and interaction with your children to help educate them about how to stay safe online," explains Stella James, "The problem is that we are sometimes not comfortable or sure what to do and in what timeframe and therefore need a little help in identifying the facts and finding the best way to approach the subject. Also because online dangers are constantly evolving it is not always easy for parents

to remain vigilant, so building trust between parent and a child about online use is vital but it is a fine line between being a caring parent and a controlling one."

Bullying is as old as time, but today's young people have a new range of tools to do it with and our increased use of technology and social media platforms means we're increasingly being confronted by issues. Recent research from the Anti-Bullying Alliance in the UK shows that almost half (45%) of parents are concerned that their child is or has been bullied online. Cyber-bullying victims typically have nowhere to hide and most don't tell their parents when it happens but if the problem is identified and discussed openly the impact can usually be minimised. You could simply unplug your child from social media but that's a bit extreme, it's better to encourage them to talk to you so you can be supportive plus take appropriate action with teachers or others before anything more serious happens

When it comes to 'cyber parenting' it's important to remember the five core tips that can help achieve online safety.

Connect: Frequently chat with your children about the online risks, and make sure

the communication lines are open and the approach is age appropriate. Also stay knowledgeable about the newest and latest social networks and how they work particularly if your kids are on them.

Password Rules: Explain the dangers of sharing online passwords but also ensure that as a parent you have access to passwords, the sites visited and used and your children's devices so you can periodically check what's being said and done. It is also vital that you regularly check the privacy settings and make changes as required.

Apps: Parents should know which ones your children are using and ensure that they

have come via a reputable app store. They also need to examine the privacy disclosures and settings and if they share locations, be sure that only the right people have access to that location information. What may appear an innocuous App on the outside could be exploited and pose a real threat to unsuspecting or naïve individuals.

Games: Simply checking the age rating is not enough – We've all heard about kids racking up massive online 'in game' purchases (which you'll want to avoid) but certain games also allow chat with other players. So be sure your children are careful about the friends they encounter online

and the information they potentially disclose.

Browser settings: It goes without saying that controlling what your children can assess via the internet needs managing and with smartphones becoming ever more powerful more information can be easily accessed. You may have agreed to a data download bundle – but do you know what content they are accessing – regularly ask what they've been searching for and an innocent 'spelling mistake in a search term could take them down a totally different route. Ensure that they know what to do if this occurs and that they have the confidence to tell you about it.

"Taking simple steps like periodically checking the privacy setting on FaceBook is so important but all too often overlooked. We wouldn't let a child play near water if they didn't understand the dangers but we are all too happy to let them pick up a digital device and often and quite easily interact with total strangers," concludes Stella. "Don't be that uninvolved parent whose child gets into potential trouble using the internet or becomes a victim of cyber-bullying. Regular communication is key when it comes to teaching

them about online safety and Gooseberry Planet lets children learn in a fun and safe way while at the same time develop their own judgment skills about keeping safe online – which is far better than simply blocking their use altogether. You cannot always be looking over your child's shoulder and it's not just about monitoring what they do; rather helping children learn how to identify the dangers for themselves and so avoid them."

For more information and advice on helping children remain safe when online visit www.GooseberryPlanet.com where you can also download and play the fun online safety educational games and Apps.

Stella James is an advocate for empowering children to recognise the signs and dangers when online, so helping them remain safe. Back in late 2013 when Stella James couldn't find any engaging tools her kids would want to use to learn about online safety she develop Gooseberry Planet which in now going down a storm in schools with kids, parents and teachers alike. Stella is a Member of the Government's UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) scheme and regularly speaks and writes on the subject and provides practical advice.

6 in 10 parents check their child's smartphone and a quarter are shocked by what they find

Six in ten worried parents monitor their children's phones to see what they're up to online, according to new research by internet and mobile security expert BullGuard.

The study of 2,000 parents revealed that one in five do not trust their children online and suspect they are accessing inappropriate content, with a quarter saying they were shocked by what they found after reading through emails, Facebook posts and instant messages.

Cam Le, Chief Marketing Officer for BullGuard said: "The research shows parents are understandably nervous about what their children are up to on the internet. "Clearly parents want to protect their children from harm – yet they also want to ensure their kids do not miss out on the fantastic things the web has to offer. With the internet ever evolving it's no wonder mums and dads are troubled by what they see as a lack of control, however there are lots of steps they can take to help ensure their children are safe."

During a typical weekend, the average child sends and receives over 100 emails, texts and instant messages.

Over a third of worried mums and dads admit they look at their kids' emails, while nearly four in ten read through their instant messages on apps such as Kik, Snapchat and WhatsApp.

Just over 55 per cent look at their internet history, while 55 per cent also check text messages. More than a third of parents look at their children's pics on Facebook and Instagram to see what they are up to. Checking up on their internet activities is so routine that mums and dads spend on average one hour 45 minutes every week looking at their kids' devices.

Half of parents sneak a peek while their kids are asleep, a quarter do it when they are at school and nearly a third do it whenever their children are not looking. Despite this, four in ten admit they are wracked with guilt for spying on them after they had found perfectly innocent messages.

Over one in ten admitted

that their children know more about social media than they do and could "run rings around them". As a result nearly 56 per cent have rules in place about when their kids can access their smartphones or tablets.

The number one rule set by parents is "no gadgets at the dinner table". The second is they must know their children's passwords and number three is "no gadgets at bedtime". Four in ten said they were alarmed to see their children discussing sex or sexual content, while a quarter found evidence of their child being bullied. Nearly half found them using offensive language.

Close to four in ten feel like they have little or no control over their children's online activities. And over a third think their children could be up to "anything" online when they are claiming to be using the web for homework.

Nearly a quarter of parents have noticed their children quickly minimise windows when walking in unannounced. While four in ten suspect their children have secret social media profiles and nearly half

suspect their children delete content from their smartphone so no one can see it.

Nearly thirty per cent have parental controls set up on their children's gadgets while over a quarter said their children have a pin code on their devices – and they don't know what it is. A staggering two thirds of mums and dads aren't familiar with the apps their kids use. Seven in ten said app developers could do more to help them keep an eye on what their children are up to.

Cam Le, Chief Marketing Officer for BullGuard added: "The wide range of ways people can now communicate weren't available to modern parents when they were growing up, so there is certainly an element of the unknown when it comes to how best to protect children.

"Parents can put in place discrete parental controls which will help keep their kids safe but allow them to get the best out of the internet. The steps they can take are simple and unimposing so children can have fun without missing out on what their friends are up to."
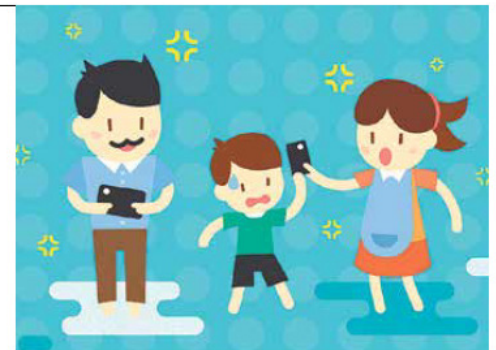
Top ten – gadget rules used by parents
1. No gadgets at the dinner table
2. Parents must know passwords
3. No phones, tablets and laptops in kids' rooms at night
4. No gadgets taken to school
5. Specified time limit everyday
6. Gadget ban until homework is finished
7. No gadgets on school mornings
8. Must be on good behaviour to use gadgets
9. All gadgets must be on silent
10. All gadgets must be loud so parents know when a message arrives

Top ten – alarming messages found by parents on their children's phone
1. Conversations using bad language
2. Topics discussing sex/sexual content
3. My child being bullied or spoken to badly
4. Groups of young children excluding other children
5. My child speaking to people badly
6. Conversations about alcohol
7. Conversations complaining about me/other parents
8. Conversations about smoking
9. My child being a bully
10. Conversations about cheating in class/during exams

follow us on twitter @**parenttalksw** visit us at **www.parenttalk.org.uk**