



ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter - Volume 2 Issue 2

Tuesday 8 February 2011 marks the 8th international Safer Internet Day as coordinated by Insafe. Insafe is a network of cyber safety awareness centres across Europe and undertakes a range of activities to promote the safe and responsible use of technologies.

The theme of Safer Internet Day 2011 is "It's more than a game, it's your life". We've probably all, at one time or another, dismissed something that has happened online by uttering the words "it only happened online" or "it's not the real world". The slogan for this year's Safer Internet Day highlights that there is now little divergence between the online and offline environments, they are both part of real life.

In this second issue of the ThinkUKnow e-newsletter for 2011, we'll look at some of the key messages of Safer Internet Day in more detail.

Hiding behind your avatar, pseudo or profile page will not shield you

There is some evidence to suggest that young people feel as though they can take more risks online as they believe they can be anonymous. This might include saying something mean or hurtful to someone else, talking about things of a sexual nature with people you don't know, or visiting inappropriate sites because you think no one will find out.

Whilst the person they pretend to be online might look or behave differently, it's still the same person in front of the screen. Pretending to be someone older may mean that other users treat you as though you were an older person and you might not be prepared for the types of communication that could entail.

Your actions in your virtual life can impact on your real life

The link between playing violent video games and aggression is still under debate, the content children and young people see online, as well as how they behave, can impact on their offline

Time2Talk

This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their use of technology.

Do you think it's easier to say things online than face to face? Why or why not?

Has anything online affected you offline?

How much time should you spend online compared to how much time you spend on offline activities? Do you think you've got the balance right?

Do you know how to test the credibility of a website? Can you tell who wrote the content, why and how that person's objectives might affect you?

We need to raise children and young people who are ethical digital citizens, but also contribute positively to their communities offline. Parents, carers and teachers can model this behaviour by showing a balanced approach in their lives as well.

Look for virtual worlds that don't encourage consumerism

Children and young people need to develop skills which allow them to interrogate the websites they visit to see what motivations the creators might have, bias, or incentives to have people visit the site. These digital literacy skills will assist children and young people in identifying whether information on a website comes from a credible source or if they are being targeted with advertising for particular goods and services.

The focus of Safer Internet Day may be on

relationships. For example, exposure to pornography has been shown to create unrealistic expectations of sexual activity amongst teens and has been linked to sexual dominance over young women.

Monitor your playing activities: a balance between online and offline is important

As the saying goes “everything in moderation”, including online activities. Children and young people, and adults as well, need to ensure that they lead a balanced life. We need to encourage children and young people to enjoy both online and offline activities in a balanced way. This means getting outside and engaging in some physical activity, as well as communicating with friends online. There need to be occasions when the computer is switched off and the mobile phone on silent, particularly around family meal times.

educating children and young people, but there are also lessons for parents, carers and teachers. Firstly, we need to acknowledge that the internet, gaming devices, mobile phones and other forms of digital technologies are very important in the lives of some children and young people and need to be taken seriously.

Secondly, we need to accept that the use of these technologies should not be considered as separate to the offline aspects of everyday life. We need to incorporate the advice, guidance and lessons we provide children and young people on how to become a positive member of society with how we guide them into becoming ethical digital citizens. After all, it's more than a game, it's *our* life.