

The Facts

- The number of applications is growing fast. Each and every week some 400 new ones arrive on the market.
- **This kind of development costs money. There is always a cost either in money up front, or in the transfer of data.**
- Children LOVE gadgets and apps. They will want the latest one, even if that means upgrading their phone to get it. Some e-safety experts are suggesting that this is pump-priming to stimulate a more rapid upgrade of mobile phones. You need the latest phone to run the latest app.
- **Be honest about what apps you want or need. Encourage your youngsters to be discriminating users.**
- There is no such thing as a free lunch.
- **Adult users can be caught out just as easily as young people.**
- Check your privacy settings every time you add an app to your phone that links to your social networking site.
- **Do not put location tags on that could put you or your property at risk.** Allowing people to know your home is in Brighton, but you are in Spain is an invitation to thieves.

Further information

You may find these sites useful.

The Data Protection Act (1998) for teachers

http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/ims/datamanagement/data_protection/

Three rules for safer passwords

<http://seictchampion.wordpress.com/2010/02/03/three-rules-for-safer-passwords/>

Using Truecrypt to encrypt a USB memory stick

<http://www.truecrypt.org/>

The Byron Report (An investigation into online safety for children and young people by Dr Tanya Byron)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/>

Parent's centre (A government resource for parents who want to know more about e-safety.)

<http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/usingcomputersandtheinternet/>

A word on online games

What is online gaming

Online gaming means using a games station or computer to play a game while connected to other players around the world.

Are there games that don't require internet connection?

Yes. There are many games that work on their own and they do not require either internet connectivity or any other kind,

Are there risks?

Yes, both in terms of content and length. Some games are very violent and children really can get addicted to them. Research shows that were children play aggressive games for long periods of time, they can become dependent on the "high" that they get. Adrenaline (the excitement hormone) and dopamine (the "feel good" hormone) are both released in quantity when playing aggressive, high excitement games, and children really can become addicted to them.

Does it matter where the games console is?

Most definitely! Avoid placing the games console in the child's bedroom. It is not unknown for children who wake in the night to be playing online games until the early hours of the morning. Neither is it unknown for parents and carers to quickly lose track of just how much time their child is playing electronic games.

Sounds scary. What can I do?

Like any other electronic device, it is good to agree a set of rules for its use. Having the games station in the lounge is a start, but children need rationing as to how long they can play a game for. Also, having a range of games is important – they should not all be "shoot-em-up" games, or for that matter, "action" games. There are a lot of more placid, creative games out there too.

Is it all bad?

No, far from it. Research has also shown that using online games can help to develop fine motor skills as well as problem solving and anticipation skills.

I've noticed that my child has a lot of friends on their games sites – is this ok?

The problem with pretty much all technology is that for every good use of it, someone has thought up a bad one. There are people out there who have a range of undesirable interests in children. We have all heard of paedophiles, who target games and social networking sites that children like to use, but so do identity thieves and fraudsters. Ideally, only people you know in the *real* world should be accepted as "friends" both for online games and for social networking – certainly until your child has built up sufficient awareness skills to be able to detect people who may not be telling the truth.

What about additional costs – I've heard horror stories about people running up massive bills?

It is true that some games do come with additional costs. Unfortunately, it is also true that sometimes, this is not made as clear as we would like. Games stations themselves sometimes require a credit card to register them, and some games are pay as you use. It is absolutely vital that you take the time to read the manual (sometimes you have to print this out at your expense) to understand if there are any costs and how they are incurred.

Can I lock my games station down? Some offer parental controls, but others do not.

What about my computer – Can I allow my child access but at a reduced level?

Certainly! You can create sub accounts on computers. With Windows, you can specify whether the new account is an administrator (able to add or remove programmes) or not. You can also specify when and for how long that account will work.

Can I get Windows to do more? You can enable "Parental Controls" which offers a lot more besides including emailing you search reports and websites visited reports as well. **However, there is no substitute for good, old-fashioned, parental vigilance.**