

Childnet International's response to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's Inquiry on Harmful content on the Internet and in Video Games.

INTRODUCTION

1. Childnet International is a registered charity, established in 1995, working with children, young people, teachers, parents and carers, industry, government and policy makers to help make the Internet a great and safe place for children, both in the UK and on a global level. For the past twelve years, Childnet has sought to promote the positive use of technology by highlighting the creative and beneficial things that children are doing with new technology, as well as responding to the potential risks.
2. Childnet believes that the Internet offers a large number of opportunities and the benefits, but accepts that risks are part of life and believes that it is important for children and young people to learn to understand, assess and manage risks, both offline and online, as part of the growing up process.
3. This does not mean however that children and young people should be left unsupported on the Internet and Childnet believes that there should be a shared responsibility with clear roles for all relevant parties to play including government, industry, schools, the media, parents and of course children and young people themselves in ensuring the safety of young people and children online.
4. Childnet has developed a number of resources in partnership with the UK Government and others designed to help young people and parents assess and manage the risks that they may encounter online. Some of these resources are mentioned in the main body of Childnet's response to the questions asked in the review document and a full list of Childnet's resources is laid out at Annex A¹.
5. Childnet's response focus on children and young people rather than consumers in general as this is the focus of Childnet's work.
6. Childnet welcomes the attention that harmful content on the Internet has received recently and understands that this review is separate from, and has a wider remit than the Byron Review. As emphasised in Childnet's response to the Byron Review², Childnet believes that it is vital that the Culture, Media and Sport Committee recognise the work that has already been undertaken in this area.
7. There are various different initiatives designed to further E-Safety underway, including government and industry working groups, education initiatives for teachers, parents and children and the development of better filtering and monitoring tools. However, it is important that real multi-stakeholder participation is achieved in order to produce a meaningful and consistent message, and that there is not duplication of work. Childnet has always stressed the shared responsibility for this work and believes that the Committee's findings of this inquiry must be careful not to polarize and proportion blame on any sector, but actively engage and appreciate the tremendous challenges that exist in catching up with the changes in technology and the global nature of the medium.
8. At the outset it is important to reiterate that Childnet does not believe that there is a 'silver bullet' type solution that will act to ensure the safety of children and young people online or minimise potentially harmful content online overnight. Rather securing the safety of children and young people as they engage with and use new technologies is a long term process requiring education aimed at the behaviour of various user groups and providers of the technology. Childnet believes that an integrated approach to sharing key messages and empowering Internet users, particularly children and young people to use the Internet and mobile phones safely is vital.
9. The Committee's consideration on harmful content on the Internet should keep a balance between recognising the very real fear and concerns that many parents and other late adopters of the technology have, with the undoubted benefits and positive opportunities which the new interactive, mobile and gaming services provide for children – both within the family and within the whole-school community.

¹ Childnet's Award-winning resources can also be accessed through the Childnet website www.childnet.com

² See <http://www.childnet.com/publications/policy.aspx>

THE BENEFITS

10. The Internet provides a wide number of benefits to children, young people, society and the economy alike. Over the last few years, the Internet has become an indispensable part of family life. 61% of homes in the UK now have Broadband access and 84% of those households have a broadband connection.³
11. Current academic and public policy research shows that the use of technology assists teachers and tutors, improves attainment and motivates students in new ways. This has most clearly been demonstrated by raised standards and improved learners' attainment in schools and further education colleges where technology had been effectively embedded.⁴ Use of technology also helps children and young people to develop key skills required for thriving in today's economy.
12. Furthermore, the Internet presents a great number of opportunities for children and young people to discover content, create content and connect with other people.
13. The Internet can be likened to the greatest library in the world. Search engines facilitate effective searches through vast reams of data which, with due care and caution, can be utilised by children and young people in doing their homework, and investigating subjects of personal interest.
14. The Internet also empowers young people to create content in new and exciting ways. The Childnet Academy⁵ awards programme which ran from 1997 to 2005, acted to showcase some of the ways in which children around the world were creating content online and using the Internet for good.
15. The Internet can act to bring children and young people together, connecting them through diverse applications and in many instances the Internet offers the opportunity to break down barriers such as geography, thereby enabling peers to connect inter-globally as well as breaking down barriers created by disability that may be a block to conventional dialogue and interaction.
16. The creation and development of applications termed as Social Networking Sites, such as Facebook, YouTube, Bebo and MySpace have added to the ways that children and young people are able to express themselves and publish material online giving them a voice and enabling them to post creative content without the need to learn html and specific coding languages.
17. In addition to these advantages for children and young people there are tremendous advantages for society and the economy to the extent that it is now generally recognised that the Internet is becoming an indispensable part of family life, and those without access are disadvantaged from access to cheaper products and 24/7 services, shopping, access to information, participation and the very democratization within society. Increasingly the skills required in the new "Knowledge Economy" are the skills which the Internet fosters such as creativity, presentation, networking, retrieving information, assessing value, analyzing and reviewing.

THE RISKS

18. It is important to balance these positive factors against the risks that children and young people may face online. Childnet believes that there are three main risks facing children and young people in the online world; Content, Contact and Commercialism.
19. There is a risk that when using the internet or other online services and technologies, young people may be exposed to inappropriate content. This may be material that is pornographic, hateful or violent, encourages activities that are dangerous or illegal, or is just age-inappropriate or biased. One of the key benefits of the web is that it is open to all, but unfortunately, this also means that those with extreme political, racist or sexist views also have a voice. However it is important to clarify that both harmful and illegal material can put children at risk and children may be placed at risk by accessing content that may not be illegal or considered harmful in its rightful context.

³ National Statistics Omnibus Survey; Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey; Survey of Internet Service Provider, (28 August 2007)

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=8>

⁴ Learning in the 21st century: The case for harnessing technology; (17 September 2007)

<http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=33996>

⁵ See this for examples of previous winners: <http://www.childnetacademy.org/>

20. Children and young people are also put at risk by accessing content that may not be accurate. Use of unverified websites may put children and young people at risk from accepting content to be true when in fact it is not. Anyone can write what they want and post it on the Internet, and as a result not all the information available online is good information. Inaccurate information can be misleading or even dangerous in some situations, for example when it covers health advice. Plagiarism and copyright are also key issues, particularly in relation to copying schoolwork and downloading music or games, as popularised by many filesharing services.
21. The Internet is a fantastic tool for keeping in contact. However there is an element of risk involved in this and children and young people can be at risk from unwanted contact on the Internet from those who may seek to bully them and also sadly from sexual offenders. Childnet's youth panel highlighted a lack of awareness surrounding children and young people verifying new contacts and checking their reliability, perhaps most evident in the willingness to add 'friends of friends' to their personal contact lists in various online fora. The youth panel also underscored a lack of awareness regarding privacy online. This is an issue both in terms of sharing contact details and also in sharing financially sensitive details.
22. The Internet is also a commercial environment. As young people and children have migrated online from other forms of entertainment so the marketing industry has developed sophisticated and innovative techniques to chase them. Children and young people may be placed at risk in the commercial environment online where data protection rules and marketing codes of practice are flouted, hidden persuasion techniques are employed in the form of advertisements and commercial messages that cannot be easily identified by children and where products and services that have a legal age limit are advertised indiscriminately such as gambling and dating. Childnet's recent research report titled 'Fair Game? Assessing commercial activity on children's favourite websites and online environments' co-authored with the NCC and Dr Agnes Nairn highlighted the impact that commercial activity has on children online.⁶
23. The proliferation of Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Bebo and MySpace has also led to wide variety of risks. Children and young people are not discriminate about the information that they 'put up' and make available for others to see online and many young people are uploading music, images or videos without thought about the long term consequences.
24. Social networking sites also bring the very real danger that young people may readily share personal information or images that could put them at risk, both emotionally and physically.
25. Furthermore, there has been an increase in online 'peer abuse' and in the UK, a reported 22% of children and young people claim to have been the target of cyberbullying⁷. In 2007, Childnet was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families to produce advice and guidance for schools on preventing and responding to cyberbullying. Childnet worked in close consultation with a wide range of sectors including children and young people, schools, industry, law enforcement, professional bodies, parent groups and child welfare organisations to produce this well-received guidance.⁸ Childnet have also produced a DVD resource which can be viewed by pupils, staff and parents, to help build a whole-school community approach to dealing with this problem.
26. Childnet believes that the risks outlined above are extended by the ongoing convergence of technology. As the Internet is increasingly accessible from ever sophisticated mobile phones, the risks are extended by the fact that mobile phones are personal, meaning that children and young people can, and often do use them away from supervision. Furthermore, the portable and private nature of mobile phones combined with the fact that children and young people are not discriminate about when they turn their phone off, renders it likely that are always reachable via their phone.

6 This is available on the policy documents section of the Childnet website at : www.childnet.com/publications/policy.aspx

7 Research carried out for the Anti-Bullying-Alliance (ABA), P.Smith, J.Mahdavi et al 2006.

8 This can be accessed in summary version <http://www.digizen.org/downloads/cyberbullyingOverview.pdf>. A full of the guidance copy is available from the DCSF <http://www.digizen.org/downloads/cyberbullyingOverview.pdf>

ATTITUDES TO RISK

27. However, research has told us that there is a difference between the reality of the dangers experienced by children and young people online and the perception of their parents and carers of the extent of these experiences.⁹
28. There is also a difference of opinion as to what constitutes online risk. Very often parents are unaware of the risks posed by technology, which in itself is a risk as lack of discussion on these areas may lead to potential isolation of the child or young person in their online experience leaving them more vulnerable than a young person or child exploring the Internet with parental supervision. For example, a child may not confide in their parent about a negative experience in a chat room if the child felt that their parent did not know what a chat room was and how it operated and thereby might not be in a position to give advice. Conversely, children and young people might be reluctant to share their experience through fear of the potential response of the parent or carer in dealing with the problem, such as their mobile being confiscated or their internet access limited. The technology has become such an important and integral part of children's educational and social lives that the risk of losing it would be terrible. One child in a focus group held by Childnet in 2004 said, "If you take away my mobile phone you would take away a part of me".
29. In many instances, what parents perceive to be the key and immediate danger for their children is not the same thing as that which children perceive to be a danger. Focused Childnet discussion sessions with young people has suggested that their biggest fear online is their peers, with many concerned about suffering at the hands of their peers through a "practical joke", or through their email account being hacked into for example.
30. Childnet's work with adult in parent's focus groups has revealed that there is also a split in perception of risk based on the user's own experience. Users who are more technology savvy themselves are aware of the subtle consumer manipulation and content related risks that in many instances young people may encounter on the Internet.

DEALING WITH RISK

31. There are a range of mechanisms that exist to help children, young people and parents manage the potential or actual risks of engaging with the Internet. Childnet firmly believes that the key universal point of access in engaging with children, young people and schools in managing the potential and actual risks of engaging with the Internet is through schools.
32. The most comprehensive work in the UK to date which identifies the risks that children and young people are faced with is the UK Children Go Online Survey (2005). However, nearly one third (30%) of children and young people questioned in the study reported having received no lessons at all on using the Internet, risking the dangers of ill-informed use. Childnet firmly believes that a three pronged approach comprising of inspection, curriculum and continuing professional development should be implemented in the UK, and would like to see e-safety as a mandatory part of the national curriculum.
33. Managing, guiding and regulating children's Internet use is a delicate and challenging task and one that Childnet believes will most effectively be pursued with children's cooperation, particularly by empowering them to manage their own online experience.
34. It is crucial that parents are helped in this area, and are brought up to speed with the technology their children are using, and also the potential risks and the key safety messages they need to ensure their children know. In 2007 Childnet produced a CDROM called Know IT All for Parents for the DCSF, and in only a few months over 1 million of these had been ordered. There is a great demand for information here.
35. Other mechanisms also exist to help children, young people and parents. The majority of ISPs in the UK are committed to helping and supporting their customers to manage their own online experience. Many ISPs provide access to forms of parental control that users can apply themselves through a selection of various levels of protection. Equally, ISPs provide advice and guidance on a range of other issues as well

⁹ This is evidenced by the UK Children Go Online report which revealed that although 57% of children and young people between the ages of 9 and 19 had come into contact with online pornography, online 16% of their parents thought that their child had seen pornography on the Internet UKChildrenGoOnline; Surveying the experiences of young people and their parents (July 2004)

<http://personal.lse.ac.uk/bober/UKCGOsurveyreport.pdf>

as operating help lines for their customers. There are also a wide range of tools offered by ISPs to their customers on a cost basis. However, despite the many filtering tools on offer there are still parents who are unaware how to use these tools or who deactivate them as a result of over-blocking. Furthermore, many users are not aware of the very basic tools that are available to them, or how to use them. It is important to make sure that people are aware of the existence of such tools and that they understand how to use them.

36. In considering the revisions to the regulatory approach in this area, Childnet accepts the importance of the self regulation to the Internet industry in the UK and would be hesitant to propose stringent regulation or the creation of any new regulations in this space.
37. With regards to industry, the self regulatory regime set out in the Communications Act is ongoing, and while widely considered to be successful it is not monitored. There are strong industry best practice messages coming from industry bodies such as the Internet Services Providers Association (ISPA) and the best practice guidelines set out by the HOTF¹⁰, but these valuable guidelines are not mandatory and there is currently no way to easily verify how far industry is conforming with good practice advice. It is crucial that industry do take up the recommendations outlined in the industry good practice to ensure that the key child protection issues have been addressed and built into the services that they provide.
38. As an international organisation, Childnet has had the opportunity to share its resources on a global and level and also to review online safety initiatives else where in the world. One initiative that the Committee might be interested in considering is the scheme announced by the Australian Government in 2006, aimed to provide every family with a free Internet filter. Under this scheme it was proposed that every family would be provided with a free Internet filter as part of a \$116.6 million package of measures to crack down on Internet pornography. Under this scheme, called the National Filter Scheme, families were offered a filtered service or a free filter for their home computer either for download from a dedicated website or delivered to them on CD-ROM. ISPs were also required to offer filters to new and existing customers at no additional cost.
39. A crucial part of this campaign was the comprehensive national community education campaign, conducted to ensure that all Australian families were aware of the benefits of regulating their children's Internet experience by using a safe and effective computer filter. It was envisaged that the filters would allow parents to set access limits based on their own family values to protect children from offensive content on the Internet and emerging new mobile content services. An important and key part of the approach involved educating parents about the dangers present on the Internet and equipping them with the tools they needed to make sure their children remained safe online.
40. In highlighting this initiative, Childnet only seeks to highlight to the Committee approaches taken to minimize the availability of harmful content in other parts of the world, and to inform further thinking on this topic. It is important to reiterate that software tools are not 100% effective and should not be seen as panacea to internet safety, but rather as a helpful aid.
41. Because children will be increasingly accessing the Internet on their mobile phone, it is crucial that they and their parents/carers are aware of the tools which exist assist them in this area. For example, the Mobile Operators in the UK have signed up to a Code of Practice around helping parents keep their children safe, and this includes several commitments to provide information and tools to help protect children from certain types of content¹¹. However Childnet has found that despite these tools being available to parents, not all parents whose children have mobile phones are aware of these tools, or even of what services are available on their child's phone. To respond to this Childnet have developed a Checklist for parents¹² who are thinking of getting their child a phone, containing questions that the parent needs to ask the mobile operator to ensure that all the available protections for their child's phone are in place. O2 are using this Checklist in their communications with their customers, and Childnet is continuing to work to get more operators to take on this Checklist to help ensure parents are taking up all the information and protections that are available to them.
42. This Childnet mobile checklist for parents illustrates a really important point, namely that there is a need for companies to better promote the existing tools and services they have established to parents at the

10 See <http://www.police.homeoffice.gov.uk/operational-policing/crime-disorder/child-protection-taskforce>.

11 The UK Mobile Operators – Orange, O2, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile, Vodafone and 3 - signed up to a Code of Practice in January 2004 with the stated aim of helping parents keep their children safe (see www.imcb.org.uk/assets/documents/10000109Codeofpractice.pdf). As part of this code they agreed to certain conditions concerning the provision of new content and services on mobiles, including Internet content and services.

12 See <http://www.childnet-int.org/downloads/mobilesQ.pdf>

point of sale. Having tools is one thing, helping parents use and feel confident about them, evaluating their impact and value in protecting children is quite another thing. Childnet is committed to working with various partners¹³ in promoting and also distributing Childnet's resources. A copy of the checklist as an Appendix B of this submission as an example of how parents could be made more aware of tools and how to better use them.

CONCLUSION

43. It is important that all Stakeholders in this area engage in meaningful dialogue and also play their part in dealing with harmful content on the Internet.
44. Childnet believes that industry should consider how best to verify the success of best practice measures in this area and implement meaningful methods of assessment.
45. While filtering and monitoring can be a useful tool, there is no substitute for parental involvement in communicating key messages regarding online safety.
46. Childnet believes that there is a need for ongoing education and awareness initiatives as new generations continue to come online and with the advent and development of new technologies and applications.

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A summary of Childnet's resources is available at Annex A

¹³ Such as the DCSF who distribute a range of Childnet resources to schools through their prologue distribution service

Annex A: Childnet Resources

Childnet has developed an exciting range of award-winning online projects resources and offline resources for children, young people, parents/carers and teachers.

BUYING A MOBILE PHONE - A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS

Childnet worked in conjunction with The UK Mobile Operators to provide parents with a checklist of important questions to ask their Mobile Operator when purchasing a mobile phone so that they can ensure that they have the tools and support to help their protect children and to make sure they get the most out of using their mobile phones safely.

<http://www.childnet.com/downloads/mobilesQ.pdf>

CHATDANGER

Chatdanger is a site all about the potential dangers on interactive services online like chat, IM, online games, email and on mobiles. Aimed at children and young people it offers tips about keeping safe and presents true life stories of how some young people have been affected by danger online.

<http://www.chatdanger.com/>

CYBERBULLYING GUIDANCE

In 2007, Childnet was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families to produce advice and guidance for schools on preventing and responding to cyberbullying. Childnet worked in close consultation with a wide range of sectors including children and young people, schools, industry, law enforcement, professional bodies, parent groups and child welfare organisations in producing this material.

<http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/>

DIGIZEN

Digizen is Childnet's latest online offering aimed at promoting 'digital citizenship'. Digital citizenship isn't just about recognising and dealing with online hazards, rather it is about building safe spaces and communities, understanding how to manage personal information, and about helping an individual use their online presence to grow and shape their world in a safe, creative way, and also to inspire others to do the same. The website offers information, advice and resources for using Social Networking Services with young people, a competition and the opportunity customize a personal Digizen widget and information and advice on recognizing and tackling cyberbullying.

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

JENNY'S STORY

"Jenny's Story" is a hard hitting film based on the true story a young teenager who chats to a stranger online using Instant Messenger. The film shows how through online chatting, Jenny reveals personal information which results in her being contacted in real life, and ultimately hurt.

The film and accompanying supporting resources aim to challenge young people about the dangers of chatting to strangers on the Internet, but also help them reflect on important issues such as trust, flattery, personal information and how they can develop strategies to avoid being manipulated or feeling "trapped". The teachers' resources will help teachers prepare this as a classroom activity for secondary school pupils from KS3 and upwards. <http://www.childnet.com/jenny/>

KIDSMART

Kidsmart is a unique Internet safety programme run by Childnet in schools throughout the UK and beyond. With sections for young people, teachers and parents and careers the resource contains games designed to test online safety knowledge, lesson plans, leaflets, posters, information on activities and interactive and resources, facts on filtering, and practical steps to help create a safer environment for young people online.

<http://www.kidsmart.org.uk/>

KNOW IT ALL

Know IT All is a set of award-winning resources developed by Childnet to help educate young people, parents and teachers about safe and positive use of the internet.

<http://www.childnet.com/kia/>

- **Know IT All for Parents** contains advice for parents and carers but the section for children and young people is designed to be shown to them. There is also an interactive section where families can create and print out their own agreements about using the Internet.

The DCSF have made the latest version of the **Know IT All for Parents** CD-ROM available to all maintained schools in England free of charge.

- **Getting to Know IT All** was a special presentation designed for volunteers to deliver in schools. The programme was piloted in 2005 and has now been updated and rolled out by the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre) as part of their education programme called Think U Know.
- Previous resources in this series included **Know IT ALL for Schools**. Know IT All for Schools was originally distributed free of charge to every school in the UK in 2005. This has now been replaced by Know IT All for Parents which includes the earlier modules from the schools pack, plus new content presented by young people themselves and advice for teachers.
- **Know IT All for Teachers** and **Know it ALL for Trainee Teachers** are currently in production and will be launched on 10 December 2007. These resources have been designed to empower teachers and trainee teachers with the knowledge and understanding to effectively teach e-safety in the class-room. Supported by The Training Development Agency, Becta and Microsoft, these new resources reflect the growing supporting role teachers play, alongside parents, in teaching children about e-safety. KIAfTT will include a DVD with support for tutors to deliver E-safety training face to face in initial teacher training, including a lesson plan.

LET'S FIGHT IT TOGETHER – CYBERBULLYING FILM

'Let's Fight it Together' is a powerful film produced by Childnet for the Department for Children Schools and Families to help sensitize young people to the pain and hurt which can be caused through cyberbullying.

<http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/film.aspx>

MUSIC & THE INTERNET

Childnet has produced a special website and leaflet which gives advice on Peer2Peer, file-sharing and downloading on the Internet for parents and young people. This is currently being updated, and the updated resource will include special advice for teachers.

<http://www.childnet.com/music/>

PARENT'S RESOURCE

Childnet has produced a number of resources for parents including the world's first interactive safety resource for parents and a special audio seminar for parents. The animation is designed to be accessible and represent the main concerns that parents have for children from a range of ages and backgrounds

http://www.kidsmart.org.uk/POL_IPSA_Mac%2BPC/main.html

STAY SMART ONLINE

Staying SMART Online is a special interactive learning module produced by Childnet for Microsoft, aimed at 8-12 year olds. Staying SMART Online has been designed to deliver the safety messages regarding children's use of the Internet in a fun and interactive way to primary aged children. It can be used as a presentation tool for teachers, or as a stand alone tool for children. By playing, reading and answering multiple choice questions, children will be encouraged to think about Internet safety.

<http://www.kidsmart.org.uk/stayingsmart/>

Annex B: Mobile Operators Checklist

See <http://www.childnet.com/publications/policy.aspx> (click on July 2006 second line down)

BUYING A MOBILE PHONE? DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE GETTING? A CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS



You can now access the Internet on most mobile phones and whilst this access brings a world of incredible opportunities in terms of communication, interaction and entertainment, there are certain risks to children posed via the Internet. These risks include accessing potentially harmful content, such as pornography, possible dangerous contact with strangers in chatrooms and commercial pressures like spam and intrusive advertising.

The UK Mobile Operators have recognised these risks and have taken steps to help you protect your child from potentially harmful content accessible via your mobile phone. There are also things you can do to block premium rate calls and texts.

This guide written by children's internet charity, Childnet International, gives you a checklist of important questions to ask your Mobile Operator when purchasing a mobile phone so that you can ensure you have the tools and support to help protect children and make sure they get the most out of using their mobile phones safely.

1. SAFETY ADVICE

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. Ask for information and advice about the phone and the services that are available on it, so that you can ensure your children know how to use it safely.

Your mobile operator is committed to providing you with information and advice on safe use of their service. Be sure to check that they are keeping you informed.

2. INTERNET ACCESS

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. Does this phone have Internet access?
- 2. Is there a filter to help block Internet content that is potentially harmful for children?
- 3. Is the filter switched on? If no, can you switch it on please?

All the UK Mobile Operators have to provide an Internet filter on their phones to help block accessing material that is potentially harmful to children, such as pornography. However, with most operators you will need to ask your Operator to activate the filter.

3. REGISTERING THE PHONE

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. Is the phone registered for a child or for an adult user?

Being registered as a child user will mean that you cannot access material provided by your mobile operator or its partners that is rated as 18+, ie unsuitable for children.
All mobile phone users are considered to be children by their mobile operator unless or until they have proved to their mobile operator that they are 18.
Proving your age is a one-off action, so if you "inherit" a phone check with your operator whether the phone is registered as a child or an adult user.

With the stated aim of helping parents keep their children safe, the UK Mobile Operators - Orange, O2, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile, Vodafone and 3 - signed up to a Code of Practice in January 2004 (see www.childnet.org.uk/assets/documents/1000010302/childnet_uk_mobile_code_of_practice.pdf) whereby they agree to certain conditions concerning the provision of age content and services on mobiles, including internet content and services. In this Code the Mobile Operators give certain promises to users and at the same time the Code gives mobile phone users certain expectations of their Mobile Operator.

4. BLUETOOTH-ENABLED PHONES

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. Is this phone 'Bluetooth-enabled'?
- 2. How can I turn this off, or set it so the phone is not visible to others?

Bluetooth technology essentially enables your mobile phone to find and "talk" to other bluetooth-enabled mobile phones in the vicinity, or other enabled phones to talk to your mobile. When activated on your child's mobile phone, for example, it means that your child may receive unexpected and unwanted messages from other bluetooth-enabled phone users nearby, and any personal information stored on your child's phone - for example their contact list - could be vulnerable. Switching off the bluetooth option is safer as it makes the phone 'invisible' to other bluetooth users.

5. PREMIUM RATE CALLS AND TEXTS

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. Can you put a bar on all premium rate numbers (ie all number starting with 09, or 5 digit shortcodes for premium rate texts), (please)?
- 2. If you can't bar these numbers, what services do you provide to protect the user here?

Calling premium rate numbers can be expensive. If you have a complaint about such a service you should contact ICSTIS the Premium rate service regulator, www.icstis.org.uk or 0800 500212.

If you do find you have signed up for a reverse-billed premium rate service (where you pay to receive rather than send text messages, for eg ring tones or football score updates) and you do not want to continue this, then text STOP to the shortcode number you got the text from. This will end the service and your payments to it.

6. CHATROOMS

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. Can this phone access chatrooms or games where users can chat to each other?
- 2. Are these chatrooms (or games) moderated?
- 3. How are the chatrooms (or games) moderated?

Chatrooms or games (where you can chat to other users) that are provided by your Mobile Operator or its partners and which do not have 18+ age-restrictions must be moderated.

Different mobile operators may have different moderation policies and systems, which may affect the level of safety, so ask your Mobile Operator about this. In Childnet's opinion, a view shared by the Home Office in their guidance issued on this subject, moderation by a person is better than purely technical moderation (a filter blocking out bad words for example).

Remember that chatrooms accessed on the Internet via mobile phone (ie which are not provided by the Mobile Operator or its partners) may not be moderated.

7. NUISANCE/MALICIOUS CALLS

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. What number can I call to report receiving unwanted or abusive calls or messages?

Your Mobile Operator should have systems and procedures in place to help you deal with nuisance and malicious phone calls.

8. REPORTING ABUSE

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. Where do I report abuse of service? If for example I receive unwanted adult (18+) material on my phone while the filter is switched on, who should I report this to?

It is important to let your mobile operator know if their system is failing, both in order to protect yourself and others using the same service.

9. SPAM

QUESTIONS TO ASK

BACKGROUND

- 1. What action is your Mobile Operator taking to prevent Spam?

Your Mobile Operator will take action against spam, whether it is text, picture or e-mail. Find out what action your mobile operator is taking and report any spam received on your phone to them.