

Childnet International response on Culture, Media and Sport Committee Inquiry on Online Safety.

Summary:

1. **Protecting minors from accessing adult material:** There are measure that can help here – tools, such as parental controls, ratings and education/awareness of parents/carers and children and young people – but education and awareness underpins all of these.
2. **Filtering out extremist material including CAI – the Internet Watch Foundation, one of our partners in the UK Safer Internet Centre are world leaders in this area.**
3. **Preventing abusive or threatening comments on social media: there are measures that can help here include improving reporting and responsiveness to reporting, and education of children and young people and those who have care of them, and educations underpins all of this.**
4. **Education is key, and this is an area in need of sustainable support so it can keep pace in this fast-moving environment.**

Introduction

1. Childnet is a registered charity working with children, young people, teachers, parents and carers, government and policy makers to help make the Internet a great and safe place for children. Set up in 1995, Childnet is an independent organisation that seeks to promote the positive use of technology and highlight the positive things that children are doing with new technology, as well as responding to the potential negative side.
2. Childnet’s Education Team have for more than ten years worked on a regular basis in both primary and secondary schools across the UK, with children and young people aged from 3 to 19 conducting targeted comprehensive sessions on e-safety and positive use of ICT technologies as well as considering the risks that school age users may encounter and designing and developing resources to promote safe and responsible use. In the academic year September 2012 – July 2013, Childnet staff visited 176 schools, (running on average 3 sessions in each school), and spoken with 20,800 children and young people aged between 3 and 18. We also spoke with 2,500 parents and carers and 1400 school staff.
3. Working directly with these audiences is important in helping us to equip them to stay safe online and informs the **resources** that we develop for them. The conversations that we have with them also helps to inform how we develop and respond to **policy** issues and the messages that we take to government and the internet industry about the real experiences of children and young people and what needs to be done to make them safer as well as continuing to provide information and advice to help young people make good decisions whenever and wherever they are using technology.
4. At the heart of all our work is the belief that when used properly the internet is a wonderfully positive tool for children and young people. We strive to take a balanced approach, making sure that we promote the positive opportunities, as well as responding to the risks and equipping children and young people to deal with them.
5. Childnet has produced a range of successful and award winning resources designed to empower the whole school community. In particular, Childnet has previously worked closely with the DoE/DCSF/DfE, BECTA and the TDA on strategic educational projects including the award winning ‘Know IT All’ suite of resources for primary, for secondary, for parents, and for NQTs and Trainee teachers – over 2 million copies of the KIA for parents CDROM resource were requested and distributed to schools across the UK.

6. In January 2011, Childnet was appointed by the European Commission to be a partner in the UK's Safer Internet Centre, see www.saferinternet.org.uk. In this role we organize Safer Internet Day (SID) for the UK. For SID 2013 we carried out a very large survey of young people – we had responses from over 24,000 children and young people about their online rights and responsibilities and held focus groups with 90 of these young people across the UK to further explore the findings. The right to be educated about staying safe online was voted in the top 10 rights on both the primary and secondary surveys. Evidence from this survey has been included in this response. The full findings are at www.saferinternet.org.uk/downloads/Safer_Internet_Day/2013/Have_your_Say_survey_-_Full_Report.pdf.

How best to protect minors from accessing adult content:

7. The internet is a truly amazing resource which enables children and young people to connect, communicate and be creative in a number of different ways, on a range of devices. The issues and potential risks that minors may encounter on the internet will vary depending on their age and online activities. At Childnet, we have grouped potential online risks into 4 categories - conduct, content, contact and commercialism. (www.childnet.com/ufiles/Supporting-Young-People-Online.pdf)
8. 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, but it may also be material which encourages activities that are dangerous or illegal, or is just age-inappropriate or biased. In our 'Have your Say' survey over a fifth of primary and of secondary aged children said that seeing unpleasant or hurtful things stop them enjoying their time on the internet. The focus group work found that there was a range of types of content that young people find unpleasant online, including scary videos, pictures, chainmail, violent films/games or rude things and swearing.
9. The steps that can be taken to help protect children from this content include **tools**, such as parental controls or filters, **ratings** (such as PEGI for games), **education** (including about the tools and the ratings) and **awareness**. Filters can be a helpful tool in reducing the chances of coming across something upsetting, but is important to recognise that these are not 100% effective and are not to be viewed as a 'solution' but rather in terms of being a useful tool. This needs to be clear in any education/awareness work, that this is only one aspect of helping keep children safe online.
10. **The tools:** There are tools available, and these are provided by ISPs, available on Search, on games consoles and other devices. For the successful take up of parental controls there are a number of obstacles to overcome. Firstly, cost, and we see this in the UK overcome by the 4 big ISPs and the Mobile Operators and others providing filtering for free. Secondly, parents need to know that these tools are available. With Mobile Operators, the tools are default on, so this is perhaps less of an issue, but for ISPs we can see the Active Choice Plus solution which is currently being implemented – once this has been effectively extended to existing rather than just new customers, that will go a great way to making sure that people know about the availability of these tools. Users will have to make an unavoidable choice, 'do you want parental controls or not'.
11. **Education and awareness:** However, we believe for this choice to be a meaningful choice it has to be an informed choice. We want to ensure the opportunity provided by the Active Choice is utilized to really help people make a good choice – making sure that parents know what tools are available to them, exactly what it is that they do, how they can be used to best protect their family, and that they are provided for free. At the same time, it should be clear that this is not a solution to keeping your child safe online, and what else you can do.

12. It is a great step that the 4 ISPs are implementing a similar approach to parental controls, ie it is at the wireless router level and covers all devices accessing the home wifi. From an educational and awareness perspective, that uniformity in approach has great advantages.
13. Childnet, in its role as the UK Safer Internet Centre, teamed up with the four ISPs and created a set of “how to” video guides to help parents set up parental controls offered by their internet provider. These videos have been created to empower parents and the ISPs have committed to keeping this video content up to date. These videos can be used by other organizations and can be embedded on other websites, to help get this information out to parents.
14. It is important to remember that filtering and technical tools are only part of the solution in protecting minors online. No filter or parental controls tool is 100% effective, and many of the risks that young people face online are because of their own and other’s behaviour. Parents need to be able to support their children holistically in the online environment as they interact online. At all age groups one of our key messages to children and young people is to ‘tell’ someone they trust - their parents, carers, teachers or school staff if they run into difficulty online. It is therefore important for parents, carers and teachers to talk with children about staying safe online and make sure they know how to respond and what to do if the need arises.
15. We know that this is an area that parents and carers as well as teachers need support in. Face to face outreach work is crucial in this, with children and those that support them, Childnet carries out this face to face outreach work, and the Childnet website (www.childnet.com) contains a wealth of information for children and young people, parents and carers and teachers and professionals. In particular the parents and carers section provides detailed information regarding specific topics such as social networking, online grooming, gaming, as well as conversation starters, a simple and effective way to help parents get involved with their children’s online activities.
16. Schools also have an important role to play in helping to keep children and young people safe online. Childnet responded to the April 2013 consultation on the Reform of the National Curriculum in England stating the importance that “the subject of e-safety is integrated into the formal curriculum both within primary and secondary schools and also within the initial teacher training and school staff continual professional development programmes.” Our partners in the UK Safer Internet Centre, the South West Grid for Learning have been working closely with Ofsted to help bring e-safety standards into schools inspections.
17. Specifically responding to the challenge of protecting minors from adult content online, we believe that schools can help on this topic. The Government guidance on sex and relationships education is now 13 years old, and at Childnet we have joined the Sex Education Forum in calling for the this guidance to be brought up to date, and we see the need to for sex and relationships education to consider technology and safeguarding, making reference to addressing on-line safety, 'sexting' and pornography. Promoting critical thinking about online content including around adult content online, such as pornography, for example, has the potential to develop understanding and resilience amongst young people. We see that schools would need guidance and support to carry this out.
18. There is a need for ongoing educational and awareness work in this area and for this work. As the UK Safer Internet Centre, Childnet (along with the Internet Watch Foundation and South West Grid for Learning) will be running Safer Internet Day 2014 which will take place on 11th February. The theme of Safer Internet Day is ‘Let’s create a better internet together’. This positive call to action provides all stakeholders with the opportunity to reach out and positively work to empower internet users in the UK.

19. We are hoping a proposed industry-led awareness campaign, led mainly by the 4 big ISPs, can combine with our work and help make Safer Internet Day 2014 even bigger than last SID 2013, which reached 10% of the population, and led to 40% changing their online behaviour as a result of the campaign.

Filtering out extremist material including CAI and material intended to promote terrorism and/or other acts of violence

20. The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) is the UK Hotline for reporting Child sexual abuse content hosted anywhere in the world, criminally obscene adult content hosted in the UK and non-photographic child sexual abuse images hosted in the UK. Since 1996, the IWF have worked to reduce the Child Abuse Images hosted in the UK from 18% to less than 1% of the total amount of known content.
21. The IWF is a crucial partner in the UK Safer Internet Centre fulfilling the role of hotline within the Centre. We are proud to work closely with the hotline in the Centre, and to collaborate on joint ventures. For the IWF Awareness Day 2012, the IWF conducted a study which looked into self-generated, sexually explicit images and videos of young people online. The research sought to discover how much of this content was copied from its original source and put on other websites. The findings showed that 88% of the images and videos young people put up appeared on 'parasite websites', meaning they were taken from the original area where they were uploaded and made public on other websites. The study reinforced the message to young people that they may lose control over their images and videos once they are uploaded online.
22. Working in close partnership and in response to this, the UK Safer Internet Centre developed resources providing advice and guidance to help young people consider the consequences of posting sexting images online and what they can do if they find themselves in a position where they have lost control of their images. The preventative resource, 'Picture This' is a drama/role play activity designed for use by schools to help young people address the delicate subject matter of sexting. 'So you got naked online' is advice on what to do if you have 'sexted' and lost control of your images – this resource is designed for young people to be able to use by themselves. The resources can be accessed at: www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources/teachers-and-professionals/sexting

Preventing abusive or threatening comments on social media

23. As part of the 'Have your Say' survey, we asked young people what stops them enjoying their time online. For both primary and secondary age children, people being unkind was one of the main things that stopped them enjoying their time on the internet the most. Almost a third (31%) of primary school age children (7-11s) and a quarter (23%) of secondary school age children (11-19s) said that mean comments or behaviour stops them from enjoying their time online. This isn't necessarily always what young people would describe as cyberbullying, but can be thoughtless and mean comments and behaviour.

Response to question: What stops you from having fun on the internet?

"People saying my house and movies are rubbish" (8 year old girl)

"Friends spreading rumours about me and telling other people my account settings or putting some pictures of me on the website that they have changed a little to make it look more silly." (10 year old girl)

Response to question: What stops you enjoying your time online?

"Seeing screenshots of people saying mean stuff about me, and worrying if people can give my screenshots to other people." (12 year old girl)

“Video calls from people that you know who used to or still bully you” (12 year old girl)

“Sick, evil Facebook pages that make me feel sad for the person that's being targeted” (13 year old girl)

24. Concern about mean comments is common for both primary and secondary aged children and young people. There is a continual challenge to policy makers and schools to be aware of new services, and their implications. Our research showed that young people do see that they have a role to play in defending themselves and their friends, and it is important to equip them with tools and also knowledge to look after themselves as well as their friends.
25. **Promote digital citizenship:** Education is key. We need to ensure that young people are able to use new technology safely and responsibly whenever and wherever they use the internet. They need to be able to look after themselves, their peers and play a part in the wider community and in essence be good digital citizens. We need young people to learn about what impact their online actions can have on themselves and others, both online and offline, in order to get the most out of the technology. Thinking before you post is a crucial 21st century skill. It is vital that young people are able to learn about this and that parents and carers and schools are able to play their part in this.
26. **Improve reporting:** Industry, or more specifically, the providers of the services used by young people have a clear role to play. In fact there is established good practice for service providers in this area, both at UK level in the UKCCIS advice for industry providers on social networking, moderation, search and chat¹ and also at EU level in the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU², and more recently in the work of the ICT coalition³ and the EC's CEO's Coalition to make a better internet for kids⁴. Included in these good practice self-regulatory documents are requirements or recommendations to have clear prominent and accessible safety advice as well as safety tools for users (such as reporting tools). Many of the service providers have signed up to these principles of good practice, and there is the need to ensure that industry are following these principles, as well as ensuring that this expectation is recognised by new services, new arrivals on the scene.
27. Reporting tools are critical in helping deal with abusive and threatening comments on social media. While our Have you Say research revealed that 25% of 11-19 year old social network users say they have reported something online, 1 in 6 (15%) social network users age 11-19 did not report because they faced barriers in doing so. Of this number, 43% didn't report because they didn't think it would help (7% of all social network users), 35% because they didn't know what reporting was (5% of all social network users) and 22% because they didn't know how to (3% of all social network users).
28. The reality for children and young people in the UK is that some are still unaware of reporting tools and how to use them. There is a clear need to make sure all young people know they have these tools and are equipped to use them. There is work for service providers as well as educators and parents and carers to make sure that children know and understand what reporting is and how you can make a report.
29. Service providers need to continue to work to make reporting prominent, easy to use and effective. Work needs to be done to ensure young people have confidence in the reporting process and encourage users to make reports and young people need to be reassured about the process of reporting. Facebook have recently launched a 'reporting dashboard', where the user reporting can see the status of the report they have made, and can see the outcome of their report, and we see steps like these which create greater transparency and accountability as really important.

¹ <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/industry%20guidance%20%20%20social%20networking.pdf>

² http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/sn_principles.pdf

³ <http://www.ictcoalition.eu/>

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/self-regulation-better-internet-kids>

We would like other service providers to look at taking such steps. Services which do not rely on internal moderation, and rather rely on the reports from their users to moderate the service must do everything they can to make reporting as easy as possible (whilst being effective) and give users confidence in the reporting process.

30. Other bodies can play their part too. For example, the Professionals Online Safety helpline (POSH) run by the South West Grid for Learning as part of the UK Safer Internet Centre provides a great external place where teachers, head teachers and others who work with children can bring their issues/concerns, and the Helpline has developed contacts with the key service providers to be able to escalate these matters and have inappropriate abusive content removed. This is a great and important service which needs more publicity and support.
31. **Conclusion:** Education is key to the issues outlined in this consultation. Whether that be in relation to the tools available, such as the availability and how to use parental controls, or how to find and how to use reporting mechanisms, or to the safe and responsible behaviour of users online. The need is greater than ever with the incredible growth of social media, online content and personal devices, and the access and ownership of technology of children, even very young children, At Childnet we speak to children and young people, parents and carers and school staff, and this face to face work is vital, both in terms of helping to support and inform users or those that care for them, but also to hear from them about the key issues or questions that they have. We develop resources and programmes to help parents and schools support their young people. It is vital to ensure that this work is continued and is supported in a sustainable way going forward, and we would like to see key stakeholders including industry and government playing their part in this.
32. Education is crucial and this work needs financial support to ensure it continues and keeps pace in this fast moving area. We see that there is a clear role for service providers to support education initiatives like that of Childnet and the UK Safer Internet Centre and work in schools empowering young people to engage with and to use social media in a positive way. We have some support from some industry players, but we see that education does need more investment and sustainable support in order to ensure its effectiveness in a fast changing environment.

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