**A RESPONSE BY CHILDNET INTERNATIONAL TO THE**

**DCSF CONSULTATION ON STAYING SAFE**

**31st October 2007**



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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 to respond to the potential negative side. Childnet is active in the area of policy around safe and responsible use, as well as awareness and education.

**QUESTIONS**

**1 a) How safe do you think children are?**

It is important to consider the safety of children acting in the online environment as well as in the offline environment. Childnet believes that more can be done to help make children safer while using technology. This is not about eliminating risk, but about reducing it. This can be by making the services online popular with children, incorporating systems and advice for users that take child protection into account, ensuring the regulatory or self-regulatory framework functions to support child protection effectively, as well as empowering young people and those that support them (parents or carers, teachers) by ensuring they are aware of the online environment and how to stay safe and use the technology responsibly.

Identifying different types of harm is important. Childnet recently supported the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in producing a comprehensive definition of cyberbullying, and we would ask that the consultation team review the approach taken to defining harm in those contexts. The Byron Review is currently investigating definitions and risk management around instances of harm associated with inappropriate web and video game content, and we would also expect these findings to be considered.

However, the three levels of activity that make up the proposed framework capture these differences very well and provide a robust model for targeted activity.

**1 b) How good are we at giving children and young people the opportunity to explore, understand risks for themselves and to learn the skills vital for their development?**

In the online environment it is important to empower children and young people to be in control of their online activities and to know how to avoid or deal with abusive or potentially abusive situations. They need to do so within scaffolded environments which allow them to determine the degree of independence they are comfortable with, to know how they can quickly access additional support if necessary, and which foster self-confidence in dealing with the world.

We would like to highlight the key role of technology in young people's social lives, development and social engagement. In particular, we would call attention to the need to treat public spaces – both online and offline – as important in terms of benefits, opportunities and risks.

**4 a) As a member of the public, do you feel a sense of responsibility for protecting children?**

Yes. Child protection has to be a shared responsibility in every community. Childnet has consistently argued that effective child protection online must involve Government, law enforcement, industry, regulators and hotlines, NGOs, parents and carers, schools and teachers and children. International cooperation is also important.

**5 If you work with children and young people, do you know what your role is in keeping children safe?**

Childnet supports children to develop media literacy skills and a sense of social responsibility in their online activities – to take care of themselves and one another. We publicise reporting routes and offer advice on how children and young people can empower themselves. We address risks frankly but also recognise that many online environments and activities provide hugely positive experiences and opportunities, and seek to promote these.

It is crucial that we do not scare young people or their parents away from using new technology, and there is a clear balance in the messages that we give out that recognises the importance of the internet and new technologies to children and young people. It focuses on the great opportunities it can give young people to discover create and connect, and also how they can use it safely and responsibly.

Childnet approaches online risks in terms of the three C's - Content, Contact and Commercialism. (**http://www.childnet.com/kia/parents/cd/textVersion/quickOverview/index.html**)

We also support teachers, parents and carers in understanding online risks in order to offer appropriate support and advice.

Childnet also works in the area of policy, and are members of the UK Home Office Task Force on child protection on the Internet as well as the DCSF's cyberbullying taskforce. We work with industry and governments, schools and other organisations and individuals, advising on issues surrounding internet safety for children.

**6 Have we got the right balance between keeping children safe and also allowing them the freedom to develop?**

Yes. We believe that the consultation team have approached the balance in a reasonable way. Childnet have always put emphasis on allowing young people to develop resilience, evaluation skills and independence – supporting self-confidence and self-reliance, while understanding the framework of support that exists for them and how to access support.

"Playing and taking part in positive activities are important, … and teach children how to recognise and set boundaries" (3.45 p37) We have witnessed that this approach is a beneficial one to take towards children's play and interaction in online spaces and would like to see the appropriate extension of this to their use of technology.

**7 a) Are the roles and responsibilities set out in Chapter 2 correct?**

We believe that a 'multi-pronged' approach taking into account all those with roles that may impact on child safety should be considered. However, the roles and responsibilities of the private sector are not explored within the document. In the case of e-safety, service providers have a responsibility to safeguard their users, including children, for example ensuring that all users know how to stay safe while using their services, and know where to report if things go wrong. Government have a role to play in recruiting and supporting industry's involvement and co-ordinating initiatives. In the UK, the Home Office has a taskforce on child protection on the Internet that has brought industry and other relevant organisations to discuss and decide what good practice is in terms of service provision and publish them as guidelines for industry. (http://www.police.homeoffice.gov.uk/operational-policing/crime-disorder/child-protection-taskforce.) This guidance has been drawn up for Chat providers, IM providers, Search providers and currently one is being drawn up for social network providers.

**7 b) What should the role of central Government be, and what is the responsibility of local organisations and communities?**

Government's role should be in supporting joined up thinking and actions, and overseeing the delivery of the various strands of child safety initiatives. They particularly need to set targets and monitor progress with regard to child protection online.

**8 How can local and central Government do more to protect all children by reaching out to minority communities and those speaking minority languages?**

Childnet has produced various groundbreaking resources in multiple languages, and would welcome the opportunity to extend its work in this area. This includes the 'Know IT All for Parents resource which recently won the award for Diversity in the Nominet Best Practice Challenge Award 2007, an initiative by Nominet, Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) and key parliamentarians to recognise organisations, groups or individuals that have delivered a safer, more accessible, diverse Internet experience. This valuable resource makes use of video and other interactive elements rather than text to reach those challenged by lack of literacy in English or disability and made a summary section available in 8 languages, including British Sign Language, Urdu, Bengali, Arabic, Polish and Mandarin.

**9 Are the areas we have identified for new action right? What other areas could be considered and what more could we do?**

"Improving protection for children and young people on the internet."
It is important that child protection is explicitly understood in it's broadest term, and that we are not seen to be supporting programmes designed to protect children from technology but empowering children and young people to use technology responsibly, creatively and in order to participate in and contribute to in their communities. The same skills and approaches we take to offline spaces can be applied to online spaces, including an understanding of risk, risk management, and responding to incidents.

**"Helping parents to understand how to keep their children safe."**

It is important to emphasis the role of the parent in supporting safety, self-esteem, social responsibility and confidence in their children's online activities.

**"Communicating to parents … about risks their children face online."**

Communicating the benefits and opportunities that technologies provide is essential for framing risk identification and management in an even handed way. Additionally, schools, parents and carers very often do not have the opportunity to explore the online environments and practices that their children are familiar with. Childnet has been very active in this area.

We believe that action in this area needs to focus on supporting whole school communities to engage creatively and actively in designing their own information programmes and solutions. Action measures must include whole-school community led activities that practically implement and respond to advice and information, for example see the prevention section (**http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/fullguidance/preventing/**) of the Cyberbullying Guidance produced by Childnet and the DCSF. It is also important to remember the speed with which new technologies, sites and practices arise, and to ensure that information and advice about cyberbullying, online grooming, and inappropriate content (for example) is regularly reviewed.

**12 Are children and young people taught enough in school about how to manage risks and stay safe?**

Current e-Safety provision, advice, guidance and resources in the UK are highly valued by schools. Childnet has worked hard to provide the broad range of resources needed meet the needs of children, young people, schools staff, parents and carers. Ongoing work is necessary to ensure that the excellent materials that do exist are promoted and accessible, and to ensure that information remains relevant in an extremely fast moving environment.

We were pleased that the QCA's recently launched new curriculum for Key Stages 3 and 4 makes reference to e-safety online within Citizenship, ICT, PSHE, and in the cross-curriculum dimension Technology and the Media. However, we are keen to see delivery well supported in terms of teacher training and support materials, and to see e-safety embedded across education at primary as well as all secondary levels.

Childnet is well aware of the importance of providing authoritative and accessible resources to schools both on and off line. We have produced a wide range of resources that cover all aspects of e-safety (including mobile phone use, data protection, social networking service information, and cyberbullying advice) in a range of media, accompanied by teacher's notes and support packs.

Additionally we have designed and regularly deliver face-to-face e-safety support, in response to needs identified by the education sector. These include activity days and sessions for schools, classes and year groups, as well as seminar presentations and workshops for trainee teachers, school staff, Local Authorities and parents. These sessions include discussion and investigation of internet safety issues and cover all issues from positive use of the internet to staying safe online and encouraging responsible use of applications such as peer to peer (file-sharing) and Instant Messaging.

Childnet is currently developing its Know IT All series of resources with Know IT All for Teachers and Know IT All for trainee teachers (in addition to Know IT All for Parents). This resource recognises that embedding e-Safety issues into general lessons is key to a young person's ongoing development, and the provision of resources for the teacher also recognises that this is a new development and provides the necessary support.

We are also providing up to date advice on social networking services and cyberbullying via our Digizen site (http://www.digizen.org/).

**13 Is teaching safety education in Personal, Social and Health Education a good way to increase children and young people's resilience to harm? Are there other ways we could do this?**

Childnet's approach to empowering young people to recognise, prevent and respond effectively to cyberbullying recognised multiple opportunities across the curriculum for addressing issues – particularly within citizenship, PSHE, but also within English, drama, IT and within school councils and whole-school community meetings. It is important that safety issues are not restricted to an individual subject, or indeed are primarily addressed only through the formal curriculum.

**14 How can e-safety be promoted to all professionals who are responsible for children's safety?**

Supporting education for Initial Teacher Training, Continuing Professional Development and School leadership programmes is obviously important, as is enabling young people to support and educate each other, and the whole school community about issues Childnet has recognised this in the development of the Know IT All for trainee teachers and Know IT All for Teachers resources, supported by Microsoft, Becta and TDA, that enable those training to be teachers and other professionals built an effective understanding around e-safety. These resources ensure that Professionals have a basic understanding of young people's activities online, as well as the technologies and applications they are using.

**15 What information would parents welcome about risks of harm faced by their children and how to manage them? What areas mentioned here would parents like more specific information about?**

Childnet has worked to support both parents and carers by equipping them with the tools to protect their children. Direct parental feedback has highlighted the need to explain the nature of the potential risks faced by their children online, but also the benefits of technology. Parents have also asked how they can best respond to and manage the risks as well as asking for the key messages which they can share with their children.

**17 How could training and development for social workers be improved?**

Such forms of training and development could include mandatory units in e-safety and media literacy across social worker development and training programmes.

**22 Do some parents need help to access support available to them?**

Parents do need help to access support and information available to them. Childnet have found that parents trust information given to them from their school, and we have tried to reach the parent and carer audience via schools. Schools have also wanted to have information that they could give to their parents on internet safety. Both offline and online resources are important to reach parents.

Childnet have found that parents are unaware of the support and tools the mobile operators provide (and are committed to providing in the Code of Practice, see www.imcb.org.uk/assets/documents/10000109Co deofpractice.pdf). To respond to this, Childnet have written a Checklist of questions for parents, for parents to ask their mobile operator when they are getting a phone for their child. Asking these questions helps to ensure that all the available protections that are provided by the operator are in place on their child's phone. Childnet are working with O2 to get this information out to customers, and would like all the mobile operators to take steps to better communicate to parents about the protection and support they provide.

**24 What is the best way to reach parents who might need help with problems that are affecting their children's welfare? Would national or local communications help?**

A variety of communication methods, both online and offline, would help to reach parents and reinforce the messages communicated to them. To give an example of a national communication: Childnet produced the Know IT All for parents CDRom for the DCSF. 1 million copies of this CDRom were produced and made available for all schools to order free, in bulk quantities. In 5 months over 800,000 copies have been distributed. The Know IT All for parents resource has been pre-loaded onto family PCs sold at PC World, a major computer retailer in the UK, and copies are available free at their stores, to reach parents with the information they need at the time they need it

**25 Whose responsibility should it be to address bullying that happens outside school? How could local agencies work together to address this problem?**

Childnet support a whole-school community approach to issues of cyberbullying (or bullying via technology), and this involves making all members of the school community aware of the issue and the fact that it is not acceptable, ensuring that everyone knows how to respond to cyberbullying. This includes the parents knowing where to report incidences of cyberbullying and how to support their child.

The Education and Inspections Act does give the Head powers "to such extent as is reasonable" to regulate the conduct of pupils when they are off-site or not under the control or charge of a member of staff. This is of particular significance to cyberbullying, which is often likely to take place out of school but which can impact very strongly on the school life of those pupils involved. It would be of great use for schools to see how other schools have used this power, to reassure them and encourage them to use it where appropriate.

**27 How can we make sure children have somewhere to turn to if they are being harmed?**

It is important to make sure that services are adequately resourced and that children at risk of harm are regarded as an ongoing responsibility. This can be done by ensuring that there are multiple reporting routes, and that those that already exist (for example, those run by service providers) are well advertised.

It is good practice for online service providers of services aimed at or likely to attract children to have prominent and accessible reporting routes for users. This is outlined in Home Office Good practice guidance for chat and instant messenger providers for example, see:

http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/ho_model. pdf?view=Binary.

CEOP (see www.ceop.gov.uk and www.thinkuknow.co.uk) provide a valuable reporting resource for parents and children concerned and wishing to report suspected online grooming. Childline also provides a vital resource for children.

**28 a) Does the Government need to communicate with the public to improve people's ability to identify and know how to act on concerns about children's safety?**

Childnet believes that the Government does need to communicate with the public to improve people's ability to identify and to know how to act on concerns about children's safety. The cyberbullying model that Childnet have produced with the DCSF provides a useful model for a multi-stranded approach to public information & engagement initiatives.

It is important that the Government does provide the information, or supports others who are providing this information, but in terms of technology it is vital not to raise people's fears. There is a need to address people's concerns, and empower them with the information and knowledge they need to use the technology safely and responsibly, and to help ensure their children do so.

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