DIGITAL SAFETY DURING COVID-19: SAFEGUARDING FROM HARMFUL INFLUENCES ONLINE



The impact of COVID-19 means that most of us will be at home for an extended period and are likely to be spending increasing amounts of time online.

The online world is a necessity for many children in accessing school work and it delivers huge benefits, not least in enabling us to stay connected to family and friends during this period. However, many parents may feel concerned about the content their children are accessing.

Although rare, there is a risk that increased online activity and feelings of stress and isolation may be exploited by negative influences and online groomers of all kinds to target vulnerable children and young people directly.

An understanding of digital safety will help parents and carers safeguard loved ones from a range of harms, whether that's child sexual exploitation, fraud, or extremist influences seeking to radicalise vulnerable people.

Extremists may use the COVID-19 outbreak to promote hateful views, for example through conspiracy theories blaming a particular group for the virus, or through spreading misinformation regarding these groups' responses to it.

What steps can I take to keep my child safe online?

If you have downloaded new apps or bought new technology to help stay connected at this time, remember to review and adjust privacy and safety settings if you or your child is signing up to a new online service.

Government has encouraged Internet Service Providers to allow parents to easily filter content to put you in control of what your child can see online.

You can switch on family friendly filters to help prevent age inappropriate content being accessed on devices in your home.

The UK Safer Internet Centre provides guidance on how to do this.
Internet Matters has also provided step by step guides on how to setup parental controls.

More information is included in the 'Further Resources' section.



What are the signs that my child may be being exploited online?



Online exploitation is often hard to recognise because it is a complex issue. When it comes to being drawn into extremist ideas online, sometimes there are clear warning signs, in other cases the changes are less obvious.

Although some of these traits may be quite common among teenagers, taken together they could be indicators that your child may need some help:

- ✓ Exploring new and unusual websites, chat forums and platforms. Harmful influences may push individuals towards platforms with a greater degree of anonymity.
- ✓ Joining new or secret groups since isolation.
- ✓ Speaking with new friends or being secretive about chats during online gaming or in forums.
- ✓ A strong desire to seek new meaning, identity and purpose.
- ✓ Using language you wouldn't expect them to know.
- ✓ Watching, sharing or creating films online linked to religious, political or racial hate.
- ✓ Becoming increasingly argumentative or refusing to listen to different points of view.

Should I be concerned that a loved one is being exploited online?

The above are merely signs that they might need help, but you know your child best and you will want to speak with them first. Check in with them and ask about what they are viewing, who they are speaking to and how they are feeling. This might feel difficult, but here are some pointers to help you:

- ✓ Listen carefully to their fears and worries. Find some helpful tips here.
- ✓ Avoid explanations that could be interpreted as antagonistic, belittling or frightening.
- ✓ Advice and support is available to help them understand COVID-19.
- ✓ If they are finding it hard to cope with bereavement and grief - advice can be found here.

What help is available if my child is being exploited online?

It is important to safeguard loved ones from a range of online harms, whether that's child sexual exploitation, fraud, or extremist influences seeking to radicalise vulnerable people.

If you are concerned that your child may be at risk of radicalisation, help is available to make sure they get the support they need to move away from harmful influences.

Teachers, healthcare practitioners, social workers, the police, charities, psychologists and religious leaders work together to safeguard those vulnerable to radicalisation through a local authority Lewisham safeguarding programme known as Prevent.

Prevent protects people from being drawn into hateful extremism – regardless of the ideology. It works in a similar way to safeguarding processes designed to protect people from gangs, drug abuse, and physical and sexual exploitation.

Receiving support through Prevent is voluntary, confidential and not any form of criminal sanction. It will not show up on any checks or negatively affect an individual's future in any way.

The type of support available is wide-ranging, and can include help with education or careers advice, dealing with mental or emotional health issues, or digital safety training for parents; it all depends on the individual's needs.

With this specialist help, vulnerable people across the country have moved away from supporting hateful extremism, enabling them to live more stable and fulfilling lives.

How can I access support and advice for a loved one being radicalised?

As with other safeguarding functions, Prevent is still operating during this time and is here to support families in times of need.

If you are worried that a loved one is being radicalised, you can call the police on 101 to get advice or share a concern so that they can get safeguarding support. Alternatively, you can contact your school safeguarding lead, the local authority Prevent team or Lewisham Children's Safeguarding Partnership for help.

Contacting the authorities will not get the individual into trouble if a criminal act hasn't been committed. The local authority or police will discuss your concerns, suggest how they can best help and give you access to relevant support and advice.

If you think someone is in immediate danger, or if you see or hear something that may be terrorist-related, trust your instincts and call 999 or the confidential Anti-Terrorist Hotline on 0800 789 321.

Lewisham



I have seen concerning hateful content online that could cause harm. What should I do?

Prevent takes robust action to tackle radicalisation online and to counter the ideology promoted by extremists. This includes removing terrorist-related material and action to suspend the accounts of those fuelling these views.

Any member of the public can report terrorist content they find online through the GOV.UK referral tool. The Action Counters Terrorism campaign provides more information on this.

Further resources

There are resources available to help you understand and protect your child from different harms online.

Educate Against Hate Parents' Hub provides resources and government advice for parents and carers on keeping young people safe from extremism.
Let's Talk About It provides support for parents and carers to keep children safe from online radicalisation.
UK Safer Internet Centre has guides on the privacy settings, parental controls and internet safety features of the major internet service providers.
Parent Zone works with Prevent to provide digital safety advice for parents.
Thinkuknow provides resources for parents and carers to help keep children safe online.
Childnet has developed guidance for parents and carers to begin a conversation about online safety, and on keeping under-fives safe online.
Parent Info provides digital support and guidance for parents and carers from leading experts and organisations
NSPCC guidance for parents and carers is designed to help keep children safe online. Their Net Aware website, produced in collaboration with O2, provides specific safety information on popular apps and websites.
Childline can provide advice and support if your child is worried, from dialling 0800 1111 or downloading the 'For Me' app.
This list of online education resources for home education includes resources to support your child's mental wellbeing.

Contact Prevent: prevent@lewisham.gov.uk Tel: 07710387930

Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership

Or Lewisham Safeguarding Children Partnership:
safeguardingpartnership@lewisham.gov.uk Tel: 020 8314 3396

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