

Q. I have heard and read a lot about the dangers to children when they are online. But whenever I ask my child what they are doing, they start to talk about online sites and services that I have never heard of. How as a parent can I help my child stay safe online?

It is not easy. More and more children are online all the time and many of these so called social networking sites are part of lives like never before. They use the internet to talk with their friends, share information, play games and a whole host of other fun things. But where children go it is a sad fact that sex offenders will follow. That is where the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre or CEOP for short can help. They are the police organisation focused on dealing with this problem and have free services to help parents. Visit ceop.gov.uk/parents and find out more.

Q. My child spends a lot of time online and is 14 years old. How would I know if they were being groomed?

There are some common signs to watch out for which may suggest they are doing something or have got into something online that might be a problem. Are they using the computer in an excessive way? Do they want to go online at the same time every day or are they being secretive about what they are doing? All of this of course could be perfectly innocent but don't take the chance. Speak to them. Explain to them the dangers and see what you can do together. Thinkuknow.co.uk is a site specifically for young people delivered by the police specialising in this area and is a good place to start for general advice and guidance

Q. My child came home from school and told me about a Thinkuknow session they had attended. It covered online safety and sounded good. How can I find out more?

Thinkuknow is a free education programme that is being shown to children and young people across the country showing them how to stay safe online. It is delivered by the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre who are part of the police and focused on cracking down on the dangers children face online from sex offenders. They have a website specially for young people – www.thinkuknow.co.uk – have a look at it with your child because it has lots of free and practical advice. As a parent you may also want to have a look at CEOP's free services for adults at ceop.gov.uk/parents.

Q What can I do if I find that my child has been sent something inappropriate online? Should I just delete it or do I email it to my local police station?

It is difficult to give general advice on what to do if you receive anything inappropriate, as forwarding it on could be a criminal offence in itself. The simple solution is to speak to your local police and ask them for advice, or speak to the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre – they have a reporting button on their site at ceop.gov.uk – where you can talk to them direct, make a report or get specific advice.