

ACTION

for Safety on the Internet

– the **Prevention** of
Young Suicide

This leaflet offers basic advice and sources of help for any parent, grandparent or carer who:

Wishes their child to take a safe and responsible approach to the cyber world

May have concerns that a young person is depressed or suicidal.



What is the Problem?

The internet is a wonderful means of communication, education and entertainment. It has become a necessary part of modern life for young people. But, as with all new technology, there are dangers to guard against . . .

Child pornography, sexual grooming of children and racism are all illegal and can be dealt with by regulatory bodies such as the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)*

However, there remains a danger area which currently is not clearly illegal in this country and does not fall within the remit of any regulatory body – websites and chatrooms which can encourage the vulnerable to take their own lives.

The vast majority of young people will never attempt to access these sites and very few have suicidal tendencies.

Tragically a number of vulnerable young people have taken their own lives after visiting these sites - in this country and world wide.

We all have a responsibility to ensure safe, responsible and appropriate use of the technologies in our homes, not least our computers.

Protection can only be achieved by long term education in the responsible use of computers. You need to **ACT** in three ways:-

- ◆ **Be A**ware of the dangers of access to the internet as well as the advantages.
- ◆ **Do C**ommunicate from the earliest age about sensible computer use.
- ◆ **Do T**ake precautions to ensure you have the appropriate firewall, filters and monitoring software.

* see back page.

Be A

- **of offensive internet sites that give specific and detailed information on suicide methods.**
These sites may be a particular danger for young people, who use the internet a great deal, and who may experience depression or other adolescent problems which can cause them to consider taking their own lives.
- **of chatrooms where young people can share their feelings about suicide and meet others who may be dedicated to the promotion of suicide.**
Such conversations provide anonymity, confidentiality and a feeling of empathy. They may be a cry for help. It is important that a child feels able to discuss these issues with you and that you both know of sources of professional help*
- **that safety at home is not enough.**
Young people can readily access the internet outside the home via mobile phones, friend's houses, internet cafes, etc.

What are the Danger Signs?

Adolescents characteristically show challenging behaviour patterns and the majority come through this period without harm.

A very small minority may have suicidal thoughts – this may appear to be for no obvious reason although it may be because of:

- an upsetting event,
- someone close having either attempted or completed suicide,
- a connection to alcohol and /or drugs,
- an underlying problem with depression:

- loss of interest in food
- changes in sleep patterns
- isolation from friends and family
- a preoccupation with suicide or death
- sudden changes in behaviour
- giving away possessions
- increase in use of drugs and/or alcohol.

These can all be signs of depression.

It may become a matter for concern when:

- Unusually long hours are habitually spent online, often at the expense of food and drink.
- Internet use extends late into the night and early morning, significantly interfering with normal sleep patterns .
- The screen content is quickly changed when a parent/carer approaches.

Communicate:

Probably the most Important Step in Ensuring Your Child's Safety Online

- Take an interest in a young person's use of the computer from an early age. Find out who they are meeting online and what sorts of information are they're publishing, consuming and sharing.
- Discuss the safety aspects of computer use from the beginning. For example: never give personal details online or agree to meet a contact made online without the presence of an adult.
- Make time to find out how the young person is using the computer slip the topic into ordinary conversation. How does it help with their other Interests:- sport, friends, games, school work, shopping etc? What relationships have they formed with other people online?
- Try to agree basic ground rules with your child. For example, excessive time spent on the computer – is it at the expense of other interests?
- Encourage the young person to come to you with any offensive or upsetting material online. You should respond calmly and provide support and sensible advice.

What Can I Do if My Child is Looking at Suicide Sites?

- Show an interest and try to assess reasons for using these sites.
- Don't hesitate to approach the subject of suicide; talking about it will not make things worse.
- Do not condemn suicide sites outright but try to give reasons why they are not the best way of finding information and support.
- Explain that suicide method sites and chatrooms only give one option – they do not offer alternatives such as medication; therapy; support from family/friends. The solution supported by these sites is a final one – there is no way back!
- Make sure they know that many people have suicidal feelings but can and do overcome them to live normal lives.
- Suggest alternative sites which can offer positive support.
- If you are in any doubt seek professional help from your GP or phone POPYRUS' helpline: **HOPELineUK 08000 68 41 41**



Take Precautions

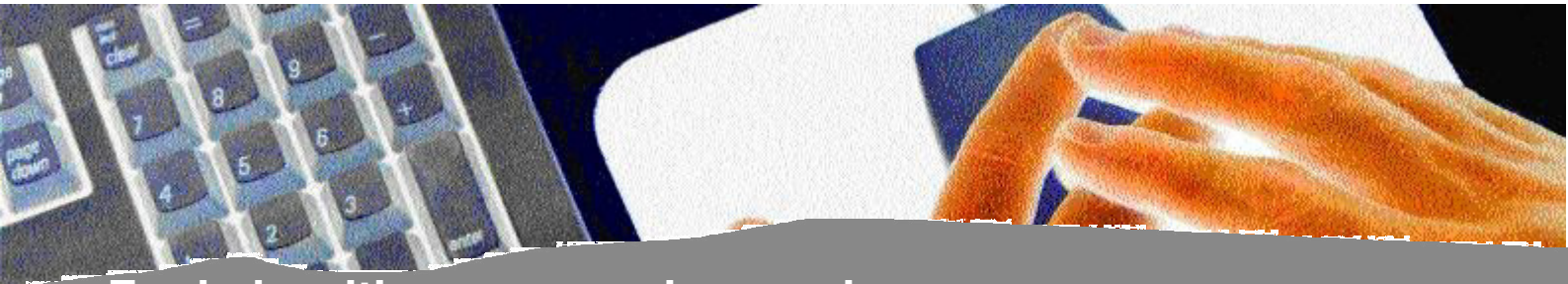
- Avoid placing computers in private places such as bedrooms for young children. As they grow older and naturally expect a degree of privacy, hopefully the groundwork in online safety will be well established.
- Do not threaten to withdraw use of the computer – access is readily available elsewhere.
- Check on websites that have been visited. Go onto the internet home page and click on the history icon (picture of icon). A list of internet sites that have been recently visited will come up. Click on any site to gain direct access. Note that it is possible for the history icon to be switched off – if your child has done this it might be a reason for concern!

Software is now available that enables parents/carers to:

- Control content
- Control contacts
- Control shopping and privacy
- Control access to games
- Help control length and time of day that the computer is in use.
- Monitor and record activity:- websites visited, emails and instant messaging for you to check later.

It is advisable to discuss these programmes with your child and to agree about their use. It is also important to realise that no filters are 100% effective and teenagers are likely to be able to disable them!

Sources of filters can be found on the back page. If you do not feel able to load these programmes yourself seek the help of a friend or a professional.



For help with a person who may be at risk of suicide

HOPELineUK 08000 68 41 41 – a confidential telephone service staffed by professionally trained advisers providing support, practical advice and information to anyone concerned that a young person they know may be at risk of feeling suicidal. Mon – Fri 10am-2pm & 7pm-10pm; Weekends 2pm-5pm, leave a message at other times for a call back.
(Calls are free from BT Landlines, other networks and mobile rates may vary)

PAPYRUS – Prevention of Young Suicide – for contact details see below.

Samaritans – 24 hours a day confidential emotional support.
www.samaritans.org. Speak to someone on the phone **08457 909090** (UK) or email jo@samaritans.org

YoungMinds – a national charity committed to improving the mental health of all children. Has Parents Information Service – a free confidential telephone helpline **0800 018 2138**.

General Advice on Online Safety

www.internetsafetyzone.com A comprehensive discussion of safety and responsible use of the internet with sections for parents, young people and adolescents.

www.thinknow.co.uk Site of the Child Exploitation and Online protection Centre. Information for parents and children on online safety.

www.wisekids.org.uk Wise Kids: Promotes positive and safe internet use. Sections for parents, young people, community groups and others.

www.chatdanger.com Advice on interactive services: mobiles, email, messaging and games.

Filters and parental controls

Microsoft Windows Vista, Primus AOL, BT Yahoo and MSN Premium, all include parental controls in their internet browsers. Other parental control software includes Internet Babysitter and Zensafe.

Filter Software are frequently reviewed in computer magazines – see Computer Buyer (eg May 2006); Computer Shopper; Computer Active. Popular filter programmes include Cyberpatrol; Surfwatch; Net Nanny; Cybersitter.

If You Wish to Report Online Criminal Content

The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), East View, 5 Coles Lane, Oakington, Cambridge, CB4 5BA. or www.iwf.org.uk to report images of child abuse and criminally racist content.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), 33 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2WG
www.ceop.gov.uk. For reporting the sexual exploitation of children.

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