

Keeping Children Safe Online

Focus: Digital Footprints and Location Settings

The third instalment of this series of briefing papers focuses on digital footprints and location settings. Children and young people today are increasingly using the internet for a variety of different reasons, downloading apps, gaming sites, social media, research for school work or online shopping. With the rise in awareness around the risks of using the internet children and young people are now becoming increasingly aware of some of the dangers which they may face online. Parents, teachers, professionals and children and young people themselves are encouraging the safe use of the internet, however some dangers may not be immediately identifiable. Perpetrators are increasingly targeting children and young people by following their digital footprint as many are not aware of the implications of posting things online and the reality that information posted can be seen by lots of different people and may stay online forever. This trail of posts can be followed and tracked by those whom the information is not intended for. These digital footprints can often lead to bullying, grooming and sexual exploitation.

All professionals who work with children and young people must have an awareness of the variety of the different online platforms children use to communicate and the implications that not being aware of digital footprints can have. In order to ensure they can offer basic safeguarding advice to children in this context, it is important for professionals to try to keep up to date of the new apps and the risks associated to using the internet. Having a basic understanding can make a huge difference between a positive and a negative experience for a child/young person.

Digital Footprints

In a nutshell a digital footprint is all the information people can find out about you from the websites you visit. For example if a child/young person shares something publicly online, like a photo or leave comments on things others have posted, they are adding to their footprint. All users of the internet leave digital footprints and with every new profile, photo or comment new ones (footprints) are added. People that you know, and people you don't, can learn a lot from them. Specifically in cases of online grooming, perpetrators are able to build a picture of what a child/young person likes from their digital footprints. This may be the bands they are in to, the places they like to visit, the TV shows they watch, friends who are closest to them, the list is endless.

The online world is a public place; once something is shared online a child/young person may not have full control over who sees that information and what they do with it. Perpetrators can search for names or nicknames which are commonly used by the young person which can result in information being gathered about them. There are several risks associated to this, perpetrators of bullying, exploitation and/or grooming could copy, share or discuss things you've posted. It is vital

for children and young people to think about the information they are posting, could these cause any problems in the future? It is easy to ensure that young people can control a lot of what others see; encouraging young people to be aware of the audience they are posting to and being aware of the risks of digital footprints will help to minimise this risk.

Short film on Digital footprints created by CEOP - <https://youtu.be/hK5OeGeudBM>

Location Settings

Location settings and services are often turned on automatically on devices, many children and young people are not aware that when they post a picture or a comment the site has enabled their location settings and this then becomes publicly available. Many sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat have location settings, leaving a digital footprint and enabling locations to be publicly available may increase the risk of harm to children and young people. It is vital for professionals to speak with young people about disabling their location settings, many sites provide a guide on how to do this. This will ensure they don't unintentionally share their location with others.

Privacy Settings

Maintaining a child/young person's privacy may not always be easy as they may not understand what information is safe to share online, or what default privacy settings are on the sites and devices they're using. Some websites may save and share information about individuals which they are not always aware of; in the online world children could unwittingly reveal enough personal details like their address and telephone number to enable their identity to be stolen. It's important to encourage children and young people to read the privacy policy and check out privacy settings for the websites they use as well as the apps downloaded onto smart phones and tablets.

Top Tips for Children and Young People

Things to remember when you're posting online:

- The internet is an open space;
- Anyone can find information if it is posted online. Encourage children and young people to only post things to the audience it is intended for and no one else;
- Online posts can be copied, saved or shared by other people. Saved copies of posts or pictures may still be available even after a young person has deleted them. Children and young people should be encouraged to think about whether a friends-only post on a social networking website would be better than a public one. Don't forget it's easy for other people to copy what you share online, change it and share it without you knowing;
- The internet is a great place to share feelings however angry posts or hurtful comments can potentially get children and young people into trouble. Encourage the young person to talk openly about their feelings or write them down in a journal as opposed to sharing them with the world. Meeting a friend, listening to music, reading or playing sport can help to get the angry feelings out without actually posting them;

- Things that we might share with friends as a joke can look very different to someone else, be aware of what you are posting and sharing;
- Vitally it is important to remember that the more information shared online will mean the more information can be gathered, learnt and used by others. Such posts may be used to bully or groom the child/young person;
- It's important to think about the impact of the posts shared online might have on others. If sharing images of friends or family, are they aware that they are being uploaded? Has permission been sought? Could a post hurt someone's feelings even if it was meant as a joke?

For all Children and Young People it is vital for them to ask themselves before posting something online, if they would be happy and comfortable to see it on a poster where their classmates, teachers, friends, siblings, parents and neighbours could see it too? If the answer is no, then it should not be posted online!

For Professionals

Tips on how to talk to children and young people about their Digital Footprint:

- Explain to the child/young person about their digital footprint and how this can put them at risk to harm;
- If a child/young person posts on a public page where they are, what they are doing, who they are with, this creates a digital footprint for perpetrators to target them and find out their hobbies, patterns and locations very easily;
- Encourage children and young people to turn off their location setting on their phones and be aware that by posting personal information and your location this may make them vulnerable to potential harm;
- For professionals understanding the apps children and young people are using and the risks associated with them is reflected in the child's Digital Footprint, therefore professionals need to engage with this and not ignore social media;
- Encourage children and young people to log out of accounts once you have stopped using them as this will reduce others from accessing their account and taking advantage of it;
- Understanding the context of a child's digital footprint is key to reducing risks;
- Services should be delivered within the context of the child's life, by understanding the effects and impact of abuse is pivotal in providing the right support, by the right agency and at the right time. Professionals must be aware of where to signpost and what to do if they are concerned for a child or young person.

Useful Links

ThinkUKnow

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_13/need-advice/digital-footprint/

Professionals also have a responsibility to engage with and educate parents about what they can do: set up parental controls on mobile and tablet devices (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing->

[abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/parental-controls](#)); signpost parents to useful sites on how to talk to their children about keeping safe (<http://lawstuff.org.uk/online-safety/>).

Parent Info

<http://parentinfo.org/article/your-child-s-digital-footprint>

Contact Us

To find out more about working with tri.x contact us on: Telephone: 024 7667 8053 or visit our website www.trixonline.co.uk.

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