

Online Safety

A Toolkit for Early Years Foundation Stage



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Document Purpose and description

This toolkit aims to support practitioners in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with their use of technology in the setting, and to highlight and endorse best practise for managing the risks associated with online technologies. Included are policies and procedures which should be used as exemplars. This means they should be considered best practice. Settings are required to tailor the policies to meet their own individual requirements, but there is an expectation that the core messages and values will remain.

Authors and Editors

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*“Safety needs careful
thought and
discussion to arrive at
decisions that are
balanced, fair and
effective.”*

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Online Safety: A Toolkit for Early Years Settings¹ is designed to be used by a range of EYFS settings and organisations, including nurseries, pre-schools, out of school clubs, crèches, childminders and children's centres. The toolkit primarily aims to inform services provided for the early years age group (birth to five years), but the core messages will also apply to any organisation working with older children and young people.

We have, through the online world, tremendous opportunities to learn, to be creative and to communicate with each other globally, through both work and play. We could never have dreamt when we were young, the wealth of information and knowledge we would have at our fingertips as adults.

Online safety should be recognised as both a philosophy and a statutory requirement. It is defined not only by policy but also by leadership, infrastructure, education, monitoring and review. This wider view will lead to cultural changes needed to support online safety in practice.

The toolkit aims to support EYFS practitioners in their everyday use of technology in and outside the setting; to encourage an understanding of how children might be supported in their safe and responsible use of technology and to raise awareness of the role of technology in families and in the wider community.

This toolkit also aims to highlight and endorse best practice for managing the risks associated with online technologies. Included are policies and procedures which should be used as exemplars. These comprise of an Acceptable Use policy and related sub policies.

These policies should be considered best practice. The Acceptable Use policy should be deemed the absolute minimum that any early years setting should adopt as a baseline requirement. EYFS settings will be required to tailor the policies to meet their own individual requirements, but there is an expectation that the core messages and values will remain.

The policies are designed to be generic and as such will apply to a range of EYFS settings who offer distinct types of care and work with children of various ages. It should therefore be recognised that not all aspects of each policy will be applicable or relevant to all organisations².

¹ The term 'setting' is used throughout the document for ease of reference.

It should be taken as referring to any Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) setting, including school nurseries, non-maintained nurseries, pre-schools, out of school clubs, crèches, childminders and children's centres.

² N.B There is a whole range of appropriate model policies for other education and social care settings available and freely adaptable from the South West Grid for Learning.

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“..among 3-4 year olds, in the last year, time online increased from 6 hours 48 minutes to 8 hours 18 minutes a week..”

A report from the Children's Commissioner's Growing Up Digital Taskforce
Published January 2017

Foreword

It is now seven years since the original Early Years Toolkit was published as a direct result of serious abuse within an early years setting in Plymouth; a case which gained huge national attention and changed thinking around safeguarding in early years settings. It is thanks to the tireless work of professionals in Plymouth that the toolkit was published. It is safe to say that the reaction to the toolkit has been immense, with worldwide interest and requests from professionals all over the UK and the world to adopt this approach to safeguarding the youngest users of the internet.

The internet has changed considerably in the last seven years. Access to it by ever younger children is an increasing concern for parents, carers and practitioners. The report for the Children's Commissioner "Growing Up Digital" published in January 2017 reported that the time spent online by 3-4 year olds, in the last year has increased from 6 hours and 48 minutes to 8 hours and 18 minutes a week. Clearly, the opportunities and benefits of technology far outweigh the risks; yet it is risk that the toolkit concentrates on. How can we safeguard children from online content and contact, and at the same time empower them to create, communicate, collaborate and learn? How can we get a healthy balance between online and offline activity? How can we build resilience in our youngest learners? How can we empower practitioners to embrace technology? To record learning through image and video, to encourage curiosity, to foster communication skill, to engage parents and carers, and to embed a sense of digital responsibility and citizenship in children's everyday use of technology? These are the questions that practitioners wrestle with, as they see increasing evidence of the impact of the online world on children's learning and development.

As Tony Staunton and Maria Hollett from Plymouth wrote in the original foreword to the toolkit:

"Early Years practitioners, carers and parents deserve guidance and support in managing children's online experiences. Most importantly, children will learn from how they see adults use the internet and how we behave online. This means we should not pretend the internet does not exist, or stop children from using computers or mobiles. Instead, we must role model good behaviour and safe use"

Fundamentally, the toolkit aims to support all early years settings, whether a maintained school nursery or a child minder caring for just one child. The purpose of using the toolkit is to safeguard the children in their care and to promote safe practices in the use of technology. It can be used to increase awareness of technology and to reinforce the safeguarding of all within the setting. It provides access to comprehensive policy wording on all aspects of online safeguarding and general information about online safety in EYFS settings. It may be used by other organisations that work with children and young people; and for all those settings and organisations where technology and the internet may be a challenge, the toolkit, along with the self-review tool **Online Compass**, may be a great place to start.

The underlying ethos of the toolkit has not changed in seven years. “In the same way that safeguarding is everybody’s business; online safety is everybody’s business. We must learn together”.

We hope you will find this toolkit useful.

Peter Bower, Online Safety Consultant to South West Grid for Learning and the UK Safer Internet Centre

Judith Bower, Independent EYFS Education Consultant

“At the very beginning of life we learn astonishingly quickly about the physical world, about other people, about who we are and what we can do, and about communicating and using language to shape and share our thoughts.

“But beyond what we learn about, in our earliest years we are also building habits of mind that will support us to continue to learn and be successful throughout our lives.”

Nancy Stewart. How Children learn. The characteristics of effective early learning.(2011)The British Association for Early Childhood Education



Introduction to Online Safety in Early Years Settings

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*“Our children are the
guinea pigs of the
digital age”*

Professor Sonia Livingstone

Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1. Technology has developed over recent years and will continue to evolve, leaving many of us struggling to keep up. Children will often be the first to embrace new technologies. As an adult it can be daunting to embrace a culture which requires us to fully understand a wide range of developing technologies that we have not been brought up with.
- 1.2. Technology has had, and will continue to have, a profound effect on the way we communicate. For example, texting, instant messaging online chat and emailing are for many a normal and accepted means of 'written' and spoken communication. Many young children learn to communicate through technology before they learn to read and write.
- 1.3. Technology encompasses a wide range of media applications and connecting methods, which are continually changing and advancing. These include:
 - Computers, laptops, iPad's, tablets, smart TVs – access to fixed and mobile internet, email, chat rooms, blogs, social networking sites, podcasts, instant messaging and location based technologies;
 - Wireless and Broadband access;
 - Mobile phones with internet access, Bluetooth, cameras, videos, Wi-Fi and more;
 - Gaming – online and game consoles, such as the Xbox, or the PlayStation, many of which can interconnect with other devices;
 - Video broadcasting and music downloading;
 - Digital cameras
 - Whiteboards.
- 1.4. We cannot stop advances in technology and nor should we try to do so. We should not prevent any member of our learning community from having access to such enabling resources – to do so would border on social exclusion and could potentially infringe on human rights. It should be recognised that children and young people have rights as learners. They should be entitled to have access to the most appropriate technologies to support their learning and development to prepare them for the 'real' world.
- 1.5. EYFS practitioners³ and their managers should recognise the exciting opportunities and the innovative tools advances in technology will provide. This should be deemed central to their role of supporting the learning and development needs of children and young people. It is therefore vital that early years practitioners and their

³ The term 'practitioner' is used throughout this document for ease of reference. It should be taken as referring to any individual working with children, including qualified and unqualified staff, volunteers and students.

managers have a clear and agreed understanding of the benefits and risks of such technology.

- 1.6. Research shows that technology strongly develops the study and learning skills children and young people need now and in the future, including the fundamentals of online safety⁴.
- 1.7. The influence and value of technology should be firmly embedded within the EYFS and it must therefore be reflected in practice. By the end of the Foundation Stage, most children will be able to demonstrate and achieve the following early learning goal:

Find out about and identify the uses of everyday technology and use information technology and programme toys to support their learning⁵

- 1.8. To reflect this, practitioners and their managers should be encouraged to support children in using a range of technology and resources, and encourage them to talk about technology, what it does, what they can do with it and how to use it safely.
- 1.9. The indirect, as well as the direct, impact of technology on children's learning and development should also be considered. Practitioners and their managers should be expected to use a range of technological resources to manage their roles as professionals; to be enabled to use the internet to research and communicate professionally; to use online systems to track and record the progress of children and young people and to share their work; to communicate with parents and carers through newsletters, email or the internet and to be able to manage administrative tasks and systems. All these should be referenced as areas that require clear agreements regarding acceptable use; and must be recognised for their indirect value in supporting the learning and development of children.
- 1.10. Many children will have their own language exclusive to the online world, and will use abbreviations like LOL (laugh out loud) and symbols, such as emoticons. This use of language will often make adults feel unqualified and out of their depth. Children themselves will also feel, and be, socially excluded if they are not given the same opportunities to access the wide range of technologies as their peers. It is therefore essential that the online world is fully embraced. This should include a recognition and acceptance of both benefit and risk.
- 1.11. The dilemma for many practitioners and their managers will often be that they will put various control measures in place, such as blocks and filters, without entirely understanding the rationale for doing so. Imparting individuals with online safety knowledge must therefore be considered an essential first step towards ensuring policies and procedures are realistic, manageable and able to be implemented in

⁴ Independent Review of Primary Education (April 2009).

⁵ Early Years Foundation Stage – (Understanding the World: Technology) DFE March 2017.