

Up-to-speed on: Teaching Online Safety in Schools

The DfE has published non-statutory guidance outlining how schools can ensure pupils understand how to stay safe and behave online as part of existing and forthcoming curriculum requirements – it does not imply any additional content or teaching requirements.

The position of online safety in the curriculum

As part of the relationships, RSE and health education curriculum that will become statutory from September 2020, pupils will be taught about online safety and harms in age-appropriate and relevant ways. Subjects in the existing curriculum also cover online safety, including through computing and citizenship education.

Online safety teaching can be built into existing lessons across the curriculum, covered in specific online safety lessons and/or implemented in whole-school approaches – the teaching must always be age and developmentally appropriate for your pupils.

You should use the DfE's advice to consider what your school's curriculum already delivers in relation to online safety, and then build in any additional teaching as necessary.

Underpinning knowledge and behaviours

It can be difficult to stay up-to-date with the latest technology and online trends, and the threats these pose. To combat this, you should focus on developing underpinning knowledge and behaviours in your pupils that can help them to navigate the online world safely, no matter what device, platform or app they are using.

How to evaluate what pupils see online

Teaching pupils how to evaluate what they see online will help them to make judgements about what they see and not automatically assume that it is true, valid or acceptable. You should help pupils to consider questions including:

- Is this website, URL or email fake – how can I tell?
- What does this cookie do and what information am I sharing?
- Is this person who they say they are?
- Why does someone want me to see this?
- Why does someone want me to send this?
- Why does someone want me to believe this?
- Why does this person want my personal information?
- What is the motivation behind this post?

- Is this information too good to be true?
- Is this information fact or opinion?

How to recognise techniques used for persuasion

Being able to recognise techniques that are often used to persuade or manipulate others can make pupils less vulnerable to these techniques and better prepared to respond appropriately.

You can help pupils to recognise:

- Online content which tries to make people believe something false is true and/or mislead – also known as misinformation and disinformation.
- Techniques that companies use to persuade people to buy something.
- How games and social media companies try to keep users online for longer – also known as persuasive or sticky design.
- Criminal activities such as grooming.

Online behaviour

Pupils should be taught about what acceptable and unacceptable online behaviour looks like, that the same standards of behaviour and honesty apply on and offline, and how to recognise unacceptable behaviour in others.

You can help pupils to recognise acceptable and unacceptable behaviour by:

- Looking at why people behave differently online, e.g. how anonymity and invisibility affect what people do.
- Looking at how online emotions can be intensified, resulting in mob mentality.
- Teaching techniques to defuse or calm arguments and disengage from unwanted online contact or content.
- Considering unacceptable online behaviours often passed off as so-called social norms or 'just banter'.

How to identify online risks

You should teach pupils how to identify online risks and make informed decisions about how to act. Pupils should not be given a list of what not to do online – instead, you should focus on helping pupils to assess a situation, think through the consequences of acting in different ways, and decide what action to take.

You can help pupils to identify and manage online risks by:

- Discussing the ways in which someone may put themselves at risk online.
- Discussing the risks posed by another person's online behaviour.
- Discussing when risk taking can be positive and negative.
- Discussing 'online reputation' and the positive and negative aspects of an online digital footprint – including how the way they act online now could affect their future.

- Discussing the risks and benefits of sharing information online and how to make a judgement about when and how to share and who to share with.
- Asking questions about what might happen when something is posted online, who might see it, and who they might send it to.

How and when to seek support

Pupils need to be aware of safe ways to seek support if they are concerned or upset about something they have seen online.

You can help pupils by:

- Teaching them to identify who trusted adults are.
- Looking at the different ways to access support, e.g. from the school, police and the CEOP reporting service – this teaching needs to link to wider school policies and procedures for reporting safeguarding and child protection incidents and concerns to school staff.
- Teaching them to understand that various platforms and apps will have ways to report inappropriate contact and content.

Teaching about harms and risks

Understanding and applying the knowledge and behaviours outlined above gives pupils a solid foundation from which to navigate the online world in an effective and safe way; however, your school also needs to have an understanding of the risks that exist online so your teaching and support can be adapted to meet the specific needs of your pupils.

The DfE's advice includes a variety of harms and risks that pupils might face online, and how these can be addressed in school, in relation to the following areas:

- **How to navigate the internet and manage information** – including age restrictions, how content can be used and shared, disinformation, misinformation and hoaxes, fake websites and scam emails, online fraud, password phishing, personal data, persuasive design, privacy settings, and targeting of online content.
 - **How to stay safe online** – including online abuse, online challenges, inciting content, fake profiles, grooming, live streaming, pornography, and unsafe communication.
 - **Wellbeing** – including impact on confidence, impact on quality of life, physical and mental health and relationships, online vs. offline behaviours, reputational damage, and suicide, self-harm and eating disorders.

It is for individual schools to decide which harms and risks they want to cover in their curriculum – any activity that does look at individual harms and risks should be considered in the broader context of providing pupils with the underpinning knowledge and behaviours.

Teaching online safety in a safe way

As with any safeguarding-related lessons or activities, you need to consider the topic being covered and the potential that pupils in the class may be suffering from online abuse or harm in this way.

Online safety lessons should be planned in collaboration with the DSL or their deputy as they will be able to identify and advise on how to support pupils that have been abused or harmed online. Attention should not be drawn to these pupils during any lesson or activity in a way that would highlight or publicise the abuse.

You need to create a safe environment in which pupils feel comfortable to say what they feel. Pupils must not feel that they will get into trouble or be judged for talking about something that has happened to them online – this may deter them from reporting what happened and getting help.

Some pupils may want to report a concern following an online safety lesson or activity, so it is important that all pupils know how to report concerns and staff know what to do if a pupil makes a disclosure.

Supporting vulnerable pupils

Any pupil can be vulnerable online – their vulnerability can fluctuate depending on their age, developmental stage and personal circumstances. There are, however, some pupils, e.g. LAC and pupils with SEND, that may be more susceptible to online harm or have less support from family or friends in staying safe online. Online safety education should be tailored to ensure these pupils receive the information and support they need.

Using external resources and visitors

You need to review any external resources you are considering using, even when they are from a trusted source, as some resources will be more appropriate to your pupils' needs than others. When reviewing resources, ask yourself:

- Where does this organisation get their information from?
- What is the organisation's evidence base?
- Has the organisation been externally quality assured?
- What is the organisation's background?
- Are the resources appropriate for the age and developmental stage of your pupils?

You may want to ask people who specialise in online safety and have up-to-date knowledge and information to come into school to help deliver some elements of online safety education. The right external visitors can provide a useful and engaging approach to delivering online safety messages, but this should enhance what your school already offers rather than be delivered in isolation. You can use the UK Council for Internet Safety's [guidance](#) to help you when selecting suitable visitors.

Implementing a whole-school approach

The DfE recommends that schools embed online safety teaching within a whole-school approach. This means your school should:

- **Create a culture that incorporates the principles of online safety across all elements of school life** – the principles need to be reflected in policies and procedures and communicated with staff, pupils and parents.

- **Proactively engage staff, pupils and parents** in activities that promote online safety principles, e.g. through involving everyone in designing programmes to ensure the school knows about emerging issues pupils are facing online.
- **Review and maintain online safety principles** – this includes ensuring staff undertake training and CPD and using information available to the school to review practices and ensure they cover the issues pupils are facing.
- **Embed the online safety principles during lessons** and reinforce what is taught in lessons by acting when a pupil makes a report of unacceptable online behaviour from another pupil or shares a concern about something they have seen online.
- **Model the online safety principles consistently** – this includes expecting the same standards of behaviour whenever a pupil is online at school and extending support to parents.

What's next?

- You can read the DfE's guidance in full [here](#).
- We will be updating our relevant policies with the DfE's advice and incorporating the information on what risks and harms pupils face and what schools should be teaching in relation to these.