

How to stay safe online

By Jo Steel

As the new school year is now fully in swing, we all need to be thinking about helping our pupils to stay safe online. In 2016/17 Macmillan Education (together with Orange) piloted a competition to encourage pupils to produce an item of media for young people that highlights good digital practice in order to stay safe and be effective online. You can find out more about the competition and more resources on the **educainternet** website. However, here's a quick summary of that good practice, to help you to remember the key areas to focus on and some teaching ideas to go with them.

The research agency **'Family, Kids and Youth'** specialises in compiling data related to how the digital age affects young people and children. Here we detail their top ten tips for how to stay safe online (with the teaching ideas!).

1. Think before you post

This could refer to young people or children posting photos of or information about themselves, which they may later regret doing. They need to think carefully about how it could affect them later in life, for example, when they want to apply to study at university or apply for a job. We also really want to avoid cases of grooming or ***sextorsion***.

Lesson idea: You could find a real example from the local press and get your pupils to write two questions in pairs about it. All the questions can be written on the board for the whole class to find the answers to. Provide the class with extra questions if you feel the pupils haven't asked the right ones.

2. Don't give out personal details online



They really need to take care not to give out details such as telephone numbers, their address, their parents' family names and even bank details. Unfortunately, not everyone they have contact with online is who they say they are. In addition, some children and young people even have access to credit card information in order to shop online, so they need to know how to use it appropriately.

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Lesson idea: Get pupils to try to google themselves in class to see how much information is already out there about them. Then ask them how they feel about it.

3. Use a password, keep it private

They need to know how to manage their settings and be able to set a strong password, which they change regularly. Here's a guide from **howtogeek.com**.

Lesson idea: Challenge pupils to research how to create strong passwords in groups so that they can then give mini-presentations with their findings to other groups. In this way, they are combining their collaborative skills, practising their online search skills and also their presentation skills.

4. Treat others online the way you would offline

It's important for pupils to understand that they have to be responsible for their posts online (images, text or video) just as much as their behaviour face-to-face.

Lesson idea: To help pupils understand that we're all different and that it's ok to be different assign each pupil three other random pupils in the classroom and three sticky notes. They have to write something nice about those three pupils on the notes (in five minutes). Then they have to hand in the notes to the teacher who has volunteers stick them on the desks of the corresponding pupils. Finally, all the pupils walk around and read the comments on the stickers on the desks. The class then discusses how the experience made them feel. You can highlight the impact the written word has, that it makes you feel good to receive positive comments and that we can all be positive towards others.

5. Tell someone

There's nothing worse than suffering in silence so pupils need to know that it's important to tell a responsible adult who they trust if they feel uncomfortable about anything they see or experience online. This could vary from unkind words, to distressing images, to threats and as mentioned above, grooming or sextorsion.

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Lesson idea: Get half your class to think of five reasons why it's important to tell a responsible person if you are suffering online and the other half five reasons why people don't ask for help. Then give each group half a minute to guess the other group's ideas. By doing this, they will come up with many more than five ideas so then as a whole class you can go over all of their suggestions.

6. Don't go where you shouldn't go

Everything we can imagine is out there online and so we can avoid being exposed to things we know will upset or hurt us. It's also good to understand that certain sites are more reliable than others and that we need to follow a set of criteria to be able to ascertain which sites are suitable ones.

Lesson idea: When assigning projects or homework, give pupils the sites recommended by **commonsensemedia.org** to guide them in the right direction. Also, be sure to ask them how they decide on a new site and how they assess how reliable and accurate the information on it is.



7. Manage your use

Hopefully, parents will have worked with their children to help them develop their digital use wisely, however, even if they have, it's always a good idea to make pupils more aware of what a responsible and healthy use of the internet is. Again, **commonsensemedia.org** has good advice on how much screen time a child or young person should have.

Lesson idea: Devise a role-play with your class. In groups of four, half the group take on the role of parents and half the group take on the role of their children. Use or adapt the handout at **commonsensemedia** for your pupils to go through together as a family in their role-play. Then go over any doubts or extra points the pupils raised as a class.

8. Look out for dodgy apps

Our pupils will be exposed to any number of apps. So, it's vital that they know how to set their privacy settings for them, why this is important and how to update them.

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Lesson idea: Divide the class into 4 groups and assign them the handouts on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter here on the **SaferInternet.org.uk** site. Each group does their own assessment of each app and then presents it to another group. The class then discusses what other apps they use and if they could use the same checks to make them more secure.

9. Keep it real

Our pupils need to know how to distinguish what is true and what is fake online so that they can be well informed about current affairs, make informed decisions and also even enjoy media gossip. So, they need a few tips on how to check what is real and what is not.

Lesson idea: On the **SaferInternet.org.uk** site there is a guide which helps them learn how to do this check. Ask the pupils to suggest some sites they regularly use (have some ready yourself, in case they can't!) and divide them into groups. Assign each group one of the sites and give them the checklist. Each group assesses the site and then reports back to the class. Finally, review with the pupils how useful the checklist is for them and how it can benefit them in their everyday lives.

10. Explore online but do it safely

The internet has so much fun and useful information as well as resources that we can all get a huge amount of enjoyment from. So, we need pupils to also focus on everything that is good about it.

Lesson idea: Pupils make a list of the five best things you can use the internet for (how it benefits people and how entertaining it can be). Then they pair up with another pupil and compare their lists. The aim is for them to agree on a new list of the five best uses. After this the pair teams up with another pair to form a group of four and they repeat the activity, deciding on a new list of the five best uses of the internet. Finally, the whole class can debate their top five uses and vote on them. There are no right or wrong answers but you have celebrated the positives of the tool which now rules our lives in almost every way!

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