At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

CROSS-PLATFORM SHARING OF INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Creepy characters like Slender Man or Huggy Wuggy. Dangerous online challenges. Songs or videos that aren't suitable for youngsters. When things like these begin trending online, it can be difficult to prevent children accidently stumbling across them – especially if they use a range of platforms, like online games, social media, streaming sites or messaging apps. A trend can originate in one online space and rapidly spread to other platforms or via chat apps. The frightening Huggy Wuggy character, for instance, first emerged as part of a game on Steam; now there are parody songs on TikTok, videos on YouTube and more than 45,000 results for #huggywuggy on Instagram.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

UNSUITABLE VIDEOS AND IMAGES

Anyone can upload footage to a video-sharing platform, which has resulted in clips that *appear* age-appropriate but actually aren't so innocent. The audience for Peppa Pig, for instance, is very young – but there have been reports of Peppa cartoons with extreme violence spliced into them. Likewise, footage of the razor-toothed game character Huggy Wuggy has been inserted into numerous child-friendly videos (even on YouTube kids), scaring many young viewers.

INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

On a similar theme, there is always the possibility that user-uploaded video content could include language which really isn't suitable for children. The on-screen imagery may *look* child friendly, but if your child is wearing headphones, then you'll remain unaware of what is being said: some videos have featured songs containing explicit language or characters graphically describing violence.

COPIES OF LIVE STREAMS

Social media and messaging apps can inadvertently spread extremely harmful content very quickly. Footage of violent attacks (such as the recent Buffalo supermarket shootings) can often be viewed on multiple platforms as people start to share the video. Moderators try to react swiftly to remove upsetting content, but the rate at which it goes viral makes it difficult to prevent the spread completely.

ACCIDENTAL EXPOSURE

Even if your child doesn't have access to social media platforms or video-streaming platforms (where the majority of issues arise), they might still use messaging apps to communicate with family and friends. There is always going to be a risk, therefore, of them seeing something which isn't child friendly: either shared by one of their peers or sent accidentally by a relative.

Advice for Parents & Carers

USE SAFETY FEATURES

Enable safety settings like Google SafeSearch and the optional restrictions on video-sharing platforms like YouTube. Whenever possible, stick to YouTube Kids for young children, as the software will help to filter out unsuitable content. Remember that filters aren't always enough to block all inappropriate material – especially when child-friendly videos have been edited maliciously.

LESS IS BEST

Manage the number of online platforms your child has access to, based on their age and maturity. Just because their friends use a certain game or app, it doesn't mean your child must have it too. Follow the age guidelines for games and apps, and check regularly that privacy settings are in place.

KEEP IT COMMUNAL

Encourage your child to stay in a communal family space when they're watching videos or playing online games on their devices – without headphones, if possible. This will make it far easier for you to keep one eye (and ear) on what they are seeing and hearing while they're online.

AVOID FAN-MADE CONTENT

If your child watches cartoons and shows on YouTube, spend time with them making a playlist of videos that you're comfortable with them watching. Always source videos from official channels, as opposed to fan-made content: you can never be completely confident about material that another user has created or uploaded.

REACT CALMLY

If you hear or see anything unsuitable on your child's device, calmly ask them to turn off the game or video in question. Explain that they haven't done anything wrong, but that you didn't like what you saw or heard and you would much rather they watched or played something else instead.

SUPPORT AND REASSURE

Remind your child regularly that *anyone* can post *anything* online – and that not everything online is real. If your child is sent something that scares or worries them, ask them to show you. Watch it alone (to avoid unnerving them further), then praise them for coming to you and talk about what upset them. Recommend a break from their device to do something which helps them feel calm and happy.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant at BCyberAware, who has developed anti-bullying and cyber-safety workshops and policies for schools in Australia and the UK. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government, comparing the internet use and sexting behaviours of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.

Sources: https://www.kidspot.com.au/parenting/youtube-kill-makes-peppa-swear-like-a-sailor-news-story/38c04b8d3f6d06d0d0f0089ac7b41d7

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