



Autumn Safeguarding Bulletin



There are more news and helpful articles than ever to support our young people. Hopefully there is something of interest for you here. As the online world becomes a scarier place to navigate, there are some helpful articles and guides here to support you. I have also included details of a free parenting course to support relationships between you and your child.

One Plus One – online digital courses for parents

Parents living in Essex can access **FREE** [online digital courses](#) from One Plus One. The online courses offer guidance and resources to help with managing stress and conflict in relationships. There are three courses to choose from:

- Arguing better is for parents who want help with stress and arguing.
- Getting it Right for Children is for separating or separated parents.

On the One Plus One page, choose the **Central England** map and then **Essex county**. You will be able to access the courses via Edge, Chrome, Firefox and Safari.

Vaping epidemic hits school children

[Daily Mail](#)

New research has showed that nearly 1m children aged 11 to 17 have vaped this year, prompting schools across Britain to implement measures against this alarming trend. Tony McCabe, headmaster at St Joseph's School in Greater Manchester, revealed that some students arrive at school already addicted to e-cigarettes, with one pupil triggering vape sensors 40 times in a single day. McCabe said: "It was an addiction that was actually changing children's behaviour." The school has adopted a supportive approach, focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment, and has installed advanced sensors to detect vaping. Despite the proposed ban on disposable vapes, which could help curb the issue, the bill has yet to be passed. The school aims to educate both students and parents about the dangers of vaping, as incidents of severe health reactions have raised significant concerns.

Third of children short-sighted after Covid lockdowns

[The Times](#)

A growing number of children are becoming short-sighted, a trend linked to increased screen time and reduced outdoor activities, particularly during Covid lockdowns, according to research published in the British Journal of Ophthalmology. The study revealed that one in three children and teenagers now suffer from myopia, or difficulty seeing distant objects, which typically worsens with age. Analysing data from 5m children across 50 countries, the study found that the rate of myopia surged from 24% in the 1990s to 36% between 2020 and 2023. The condition is more prevalent among teenagers, urban dwellers, and girls, the latter likely because "they spend less time outdoors and more time scrolling on screens." The study emphasises the importance of outdoor exposure to prevent worsening eyesight in children.

Health concerns rise for students due to low vaccination rates

[The Independent UK](#)

As students return to school and university, the UK's Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has raised alarms about insufficient population immunity, which could lead to a "perfect storm" of infections among the student population. Dr Avinash Hari Narayanan, clinical lead at London Medical Laboratory, highlighted that vaccination rates have declined over the past decade, with only 79.6% coverage for MenACWY. He cautioned that symptoms of freshmen's flu could easily be mistaken for more serious conditions like meningitis and measles. Factors contributing to this decline include vaccination hesitancy and disruptions caused by COVID lockdowns.

Children under 10 reported to counter-terror police

[The Daily Telegraph](#)

Matt Jukes, the head of counter-terror policing at the Metropolitan Police, has told the *BBC* that children aged under 10 are being referred to counter-terrorism police - with some as young as 12 or 13 being investigated because of their potential involvement in terrorism. Almost a fifth of those arrested for terrorism-related offences in the last year, he says, were under 18, with young people representing half of those referred to the unit. Mr Jukes said the referral figures, while not "suggesting those kids are terrorists", means that "people know they're being exposed to that content". With so many sources for online extremism and hate, he warned, "we're never going to police our way out of that challenge", adding that social media companies and messaging apps must do more to police their platforms and enforce their terms and conditions around extremist content.

Parents unite to delay smartphone use

[The Guardian](#)

An online pledge initiated by Smartphone Free Childhood has been signed by parents at 6,537 schools across the UK, representing nearly 35,000 children. The "parent pact" encourages delaying smartphone ownership until at least the end of year 9. Daisy Greenwell, co-founder of the group, said: "The ultimate aim is to permanently shift the culture around when you give smartphones to your children." The movement aims to alleviate peer pressure among children regarding smartphone ownership, promoting alternatives like brick phones. Regions with the highest sign-ups include Hertfordshire, with 2,429 parents participating. The initiative is part of a broader effort to address concerns about the impact of smartphones and social media on child development. Jonathan Haidt, an academic, advocates for parents to set a "new norm" by delaying smartphone access until around age 16.

Vaping ban near schools and hospitals

[The Times The Times](#)

The Government is considering a ban on vaping outdoors near schools, hospitals, and playgrounds to prevent children from taking up the habit. Health Secretary Wes Streeting is leading discussions on this issue, with Sir Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer for England, supporting outdoor restrictions. A recent study revealed that a million non-smokers, particularly young people, have started vaping, raising concerns about aggressive marketing targeting children. Whitty condemned the practice as "utterly unacceptable" and said that while vaping is safer than smoking, it is not risk-free. The proposed restrictions will be included in the forthcoming Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which aims to regulate e-cigarettes more strictly, especially to protect children from harmful marketing tactics. Hazel Cheeseman, chief executive of the anti-smoking charity Ash, urged: "Tougher regulation on vapes is needed, particularly to protect children from aggressive marketing." The Government is also contemplating a vape tax to deter youth consumption.

Petition calls for smartphone ban

[London Evening Standard](#)

An online petition initiated by the Smartphone Free Childhood (SFC) movement is advocating for a ban on smartphone ownership for children under 14, amassing thousands of signatures from concerned parents across the UK. The movement emerged from a WhatsApp group where parents shared their experiences and concerns regarding the impact of smartphones on children's mental health, addiction, and exposure to harmful content. Ofcom data indicates that 97% of UK children own a mobile phone by age 12. UNESCO previously reported that removing smartphones from schools improved learning outcomes, particularly for underperforming students. The petition has garnered support from a quarter of UK schools and approximately 37,000 parents. In a related effort, EE has recommended that children under 11 use basic mobile devices to enhance their digital wellbeing.

Children's online safety: A gap revealed

[The Star](#)

Recent research by Vodafone highlights a concerning gap between children's understanding of online safety and their actions. Nearly half of the 1,000 children surveyed admitted to having social media followers they do not know offline, with only 16% recognising the importance of rejecting unknown follow requests. Dr Elly Hanson, a clinical psychologist, said: "While many parents and children are having the right conversations... putting this advice into action can be less straightforward." To address this issue, Vodafone has partnered with First News to launch a creative writing competition, encouraging children aged 7-15 to create fables that promote online safety. Winning entries will be published in a book, serving as a resource for families and schools to facilitate discussions on online safety. The initiative aims to make safety advice more memorable and actionable for children.

Council funding cuts threatening wellbeing of children

[BBC News](#)

Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children's Commissioner for England, has said that the crisis in council funding is threatening the wellbeing of children and young people. "Children", Dame Rachel warned, "must not pay the price for balancing budgets." Research by the *BBC* has found that councils across the country are considering cuts to social work and safeguarding teams, including teams supporting young people at risk of sexual exploitation, cuts around transport for children with disabilities, cuts to projects supporting young people, playground maintenance and apprenticeship recruitment, and cuts on education spending. Many of the cuts, Dame Rachel said, will "disproportionately impact children who rely on the state for protection and a stable home environment".

All these guides will be attached to the bulletin email.



If you've played or seen any online games from the past few years, you've probably noticed that almost every title of this kind has some kind of chat functionality. Whether allowing players to send text messages to one another or letting them use their mics to chat together on voice if you're on a multiplayer game, chances are you can talk to your fellow gamers, one way or another

Sadly, such a function comes with its fair share of risks – as is to be expected with a feature intended to connect gamers from around the world and it is immensely important for parents and educators to understand these concerns and help young players address them. That's why we've put together this free guide, breaking down the most prevalent issues associated with in-game chat and letting you know how to keep youngsters as safe as possible if or when they're exposed to this feature



Ofcom's latest Media Use and Attitudes Report states that most children can watch streamed films on a mobile device both in and out of the home, with 80% of UK children watching films on phones, tablets or laptops. That's a lot of youngsters who might be using their own gadgets to watch something suitably spooky this Halloween season or perhaps, something a little too frightening.

With older children in particular, it can be difficult knowing how to manage their increasing interest in more mature content – including horror films, in many cases – let alone knowing how best to safeguard them from inappropriate material. Our free guide offers expert advice not only on the risks of exposure to horror films and other potentially upsetting content, but also on preventing young viewers from seeing this material or protecting them from being too deeply affected by it if they do.

Safer phones bill targets teen doomscrolling

[The Guardian](#)

The Safer Phones Bill, introduced by Labour MP Josh MacAlister, seeks to protect young teens from addictive social media algorithms. With support from both Labour and Conservative parties, the bill will be discussed in Parliament this week. It proposes a review of mobile phone sales to under-16s and aims to raise the age of internet adulthood from 13 to 16, making it harder for companies to exploit children's data. MacAlister stated: "The evidence is mounting that children doomscrolling for hours a day is causing widespread harm." The bill also includes provisions for legal bans on phone use in schools and mandates Ofcom to safeguard children's interests. While the government is cautious about outright bans, they acknowledge the need for strong protections under the Online Safety Act.

Teen brains struggle with smartphone addiction

[Daily Mirror](#)

Scientists have found that teenagers are more vulnerable to smartphone addiction due to their developing brains. MRI scans featured in ITV's *Tonight* programme illustrate how the brain responds to enjoyable activities like social media browsing. According to Ciara McCabe, a professor of Neuroscience and Mental Health at the University of Reading: "Adolescent brains or teenage brains respond differently and in particular to rewarding experiences than the adult brain." This difference in brain development leads to a lack of control over smartphone use. John Wallis Academy in Kent has already seen a 40% drop in detentions since implementing a smartphone ban, with headteacher Damien McBeath noting: "Reports of online bullying are at a five-year low." Almudena Lara from Ofcom highlighted the risks of children accessing harmful content, stating: "It's very easy for children to access harmful content."

Schools warn of normalisation of underage vaping

[The Times](#)

A number of pieces in the *Times* look at concerns around underage vaping - citing warnings about the potential health risks linked to the devices, particularly in younger users, from the World Health Organisation and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. Risks range from asthma and other breathing-related conditions to "negative impacts on brain development" that could be linked to learning and anxiety disorders, the expert bodies have warned. Research by the paper has found that the majority of schools are worried about the growth of underage vaping - with the habit having become normalised for many, and some parents buying vapes for their children and even passing them through school fences. The paper argues in an editorial that "any sane society would take strong measures not only to discourage young people from vaping but to prevent them buying e-cigarettes in the first place", and urges the Government to take the one "very obvious path to help eliminate sales to children: follow the Australian model and treat e-cigarettes solely as a smoking reduction tool, available only to adults from pharmacies".

Government urged to act on spice vapes

[Express.co.uk](#)

Wera Hobhouse, MP for Bath, has called for legislative changes to combat the alarming trend of children purchasing drug-laced vapes online. In a Commons debate, she highlighted that 16.6% of vapes tested in schools contained the synthetic cannabis spice, often referred to as the "Zombie Drug." Hobhouse said: "Gone are the days when you needed to meet a sketchy person in a back alley to get hold of illegal drugs," as she highlighted the ease of access through platforms like Snapchat and Telegram. Policing minister Dame Diana Johnson acknowledged the existing illegality of spice-laced vapes but admitted that "further restrictions are needed" to address youth vaping. The Liberal Democrats are aiming to revive the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which includes measures to regulate online sales and enhance oversight of digital platforms. Professor Chris Pudney from the University of Bath warned of the severe health risks: "We know children can have cardiac arrests when they smoke spice."

Teen Boys and Body Image Challenges

In light of the new content recommendation changes by YouTube which is going to [restrict content to teen boys](#) in particular it's good to see platforms finally start to acknowledge that their algorithms can have a negative effect. A lot of research has been undertaken in relation to algorithmically driven content force-fed to girls but not so much boys who can be just as susceptible, particularly when a simple 'like' on one post can create a feedback loop of similar and more extreme content.

Darren Laur, aka The White Hatter has written a really good article about this, specifically in relation to body dissatisfaction, causing boys to feel they fall short of societal expectations. A good read for both parents and educators which you can find [HERE](#).

For Parents- Parental Supervision- How Far is Too Far?

Many parents will opt to use apps to track and monitor the location and online activities of their children. These apps can be really beneficial (e.g. physical safety) but as with anything there are drawbacks (e.g. invasion of privacy).

Using the voices of young people Voicebox have put together an excellent article which parents can use to give a more informed opinion of these apps and to use as discussion points with their children.

You can find the article [HERE](#).

For Parents- Cyber Security

From financial scams, identity theft, using public WiFi and much more, cyber security is fundamental to all of our lives. Internet Matters have put together a number of articles and resources for parents and their children which go into these topics including:

Creating secure accounts.

- Phishing and ransomware.
- Digital piracy,
- and much more.

You can find all the resources [HERE](#).

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about IN-GAME CHAT

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Video games are continuing to grow in popularity – including, of course, among children and young people – and the emergence of gaming communities has been accelerated by the inclusion of chat functionality across many different titles. While in-game chat isn't inherently a bad thing, it can create some concerns about online safety and the people that children might be interacting with.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHAT

There are a number of ways that gamers commonly chat with one another online. As the name would suggest, in-game chat happens within the game itself. There's also party chat: a group voice conversation that console users can have with anyone on the same platform. This tends to be more commonly used by players who already know each other. Finally, many gamers – especially on PC – will chat via a third-party app such as Discord.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

Whether it's text- or voice-based, in-game chat is frequently open to all players to use. Many games default to making it an opt-in function, but some don't: meaning a child could start seeing messages within the game from people they're playing with, regardless of whether they know those individuals or not. While most strangers won't necessarily have ill intent, there are some who may behave inappropriately when chatting to a child – intentionally or otherwise.

DANGER OF GROOMING

It's been reported that some young gamers have encountered older players online who pretend to be a lower age to manipulate children, sending gifts in exchange for chatting and sending photos. Just as on any messaging platform, it's good to advise young people to avoid speaking to strangers; emphasise that they shouldn't accept gifts from anyone online that they don't know.

BULLYING AND ABUSE

While some in-game chat can turn toxic because of how a match plays out, others turn that way because of people who engage in trolling – in essence, behaving in an offensive and abusive way simply to cause pain or get a rise out of whoever they're talking to. These 'trolls' often lean on racial slurs, anti-LGBT sentiment and other hateful rhetoric; they normally feel most confident preying on younger, more impressionable gamers.

POTENTIAL FOR PRIVATE CHAT

If a player would like a re-match with a stranger after meeting them in the game, they can send a friend request, or use the party chat together in the future. For the most part, this is harmless – but it might lead to messages being exchanged in private. This could then escalate to the sharing of private information, and potentially attempts to manipulate or scam younger players.

COMPETITIVE ATMOSPHERE

Certain games are very competitive, and players can sometimes get upset if they feel a teammate is underperforming, an opponent won unfairly, or they're just a bad loser. This can lead to unpleasant messages that stray away from playful 'trash talk' and wander into the territory of bullying. Some players have been known to get incredibly abusive in situations like this, and the impact of this on a young gamer's emotional wellbeing could be severe.

Advice for Parents & Educators

LOCK-DOWN IN-GAME CHAT

In-game chat can often be disabled in the game's settings. This allows children to play without risk of contact from strangers – but it will need to be done in each individual game. Text chat appears in the corner of the screen in many titles, so it's normally easy to take a quick glance and see what's being said. With voice chat, explain to children what behaviour is inappropriate, so they can spot the dangers themselves.

REPORT POTENTIAL OFFENDERS

Most games offer a robust means of reporting other players, so you can flag an account as potentially harmful. This normally leads to the account not being matched with yours in the future and, if that person's conduct breaks any of the game's rules, they may be banned from playing entirely. This is done within the game itself, so each title has a slightly different process, but these tend to be designed for simplicity.

CONSIDER OTHER CHAT OPTIONS

If a child wants to play with people they know, consider using party chat or a third-party service like Discord. This allows everyone involved to chat on a private server and even enjoy each other's company while playing different games. It's also far more secure, as anyone looking to join will need to request and be granted access – normally by whoever is hosting the chat.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Make sure children understand the differences between being competitive and being abusive. Talk about what constitutes unusual or inappropriate behaviour from strangers online. Be clear that if anything ever concerns or worries them, they should tell a trusted adult as soon as possible. Empower children to identify the risks of in-game chat for themselves and reassure them they won't get in trouble for seeking help if anything goes wrong.

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is the Editor in Chief of GGRecon and has been working in the games media industry for five years. He's also a parent and therefore understands the importance of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his work has been published at sites including IGN, TechRadar, and plenty more.



The National College

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about HORROR FILMS & AGE RATINGS

The 'on-demand' availability of streaming platforms in many homes creates extra possibilities for young viewers to be exposed to age-inappropriate content. Material which features horror or violence can cause anxiety and nightmares for children, especially since it can be hard for young ones to grasp that what they're watching isn't real.

CLASSIFICATION BREAKDOWN

The British Board of Film Classification has the following age ratings:

U: Suitable for all ages

PG: For children aged 8 and above; this content shouldn't unsettle them

12A: Children under the age of 12 should not watch without an adult; this content potentially features bad language, nudity or sexual references

15: Suitable only for 15-year-olds and above

18: Exclusively for an adult audience, with potentially explicit themes of violence, nudity or sex



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

STREAMING IS EVERYWHERE

Modern mobile devices make it very easy for children to watch streamed films without the need for a TV. The availability of inappropriate content has risen significantly on streaming platforms, almost all of which host 18-rated content. If not restricted by parental controls, this could be viewed by children who aren't quite ready for such adult themes, concepts and imagery.

FACT VS. FICTION

Many children have no trouble separating fact from fiction. However, with modern day technology making pretend violence and horror look ever more realistic, it's becoming harder for youngsters to tell the difference. For instance, consider remakes of older films, where dated special effects (making it easy to discern that something wasn't real) have been replaced by far more convincing monsters and gore.

PEER PRESSURE

Friends encouraging each other to watch the latest film featuring violence or horror can lead to children consuming content that they're not ready for. As 18+ content is available on many streaming platforms, youngsters can watch these together – potentially without their parents' or carers' knowledge.

TOO SCARED?

CHILDREN SCARE DIFFERENTLY

It can be difficult to decide what content is appropriate for children. What's fine for one child could be extremely frightening for another. As many children admit to not sharing or discussing the content they watch with their parents, encouraging an open dialogue around the kind of media that young people consume can help avoid exposing them to any inappropriate content.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

Horror prides itself on its ability to startle or induce genuine fear in the viewer – so it's no surprise that this genre isn't usually intended for children. A natural side-effect of this is that 'jump scares' or a creepy, suspenseful atmosphere can have lasting effects on younger minds. The resulting anxiety can impact a child's sleeping patterns or eating habits.

Advice for Parents & Educators

WATCH THE FILM FIRST

If you're concerned that a film might be unsuitable for children (whether it's their first dive into the horror genre or a step up in age classification), then take a look for yourself. There's no better way to judge whether this content is something you'd deem appropriate for a child – and if a parent, for example, has actually seen the film (or at least a portion of it), they can construct a far more credible case if they decide it's inappropriate.

REMEMBER – IT'S NOT REAL

Emphasise to children that the content they're viewing is entirely fictional and has no chance of affecting them in real life. If a child is upset after watching a film, try to understand what exactly has unsettled them: this can help you approach the topic in a healthy and informative manner, to dispel any fears or anxieties they may have.

DISCUSS THE CONTENT OF FILMS

If a child has seen a film that you think may have exposed them to potentially uncomfortable themes and ideas, don't shy away from talking about it, and answer any questions they may have. This is especially important if they watched the film without an adult present. Ask them to summarise the story for you, as this will give you an understanding of what they've learned from watching it.

USE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Most streaming platforms have the option to put age ranges on children's accounts. This means that films and shows that are inappropriate for children won't be advertised while they're browsing and won't even appear if a child specifically searches for them. This can be changed any time at parents' discretion, but it's wise to protect these settings with a password, so a child can't alter anything on their own.

Meet Our Expert

John Insley is an assistant principal at a secondary school. He has been involved with e-safety in schools for over 10 years, writing policies and supporting various schools in developing their e-safety provision. John has introduced a range of strategies at multiple schools aimed at helping parents to better support their child in the ever-changing digital world.



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