



Get I.T. safe

Children, parents and technology
survey 2006



the children's charity

Get IT safe – Children, parents and technology survey 2006

Technology has had a massive impact on our day to day lives. Mobile phones and the internet have made a huge difference to the way we communicate and access information, most of which has been extremely positive. But with all new technologies there can be problems. We hear stories of child sex abuse images increasing in number, paedophiles grooming children on the internet, credit card scams, mobile phone bullying and children being exposed to adult content.

Parents play a crucial part in protecting children from these dangers, but too often it is children, not their parents, who are in the driving seat when it comes to the use of new technology. That is why NCH and Tesco Telecoms have joined forces to investigate the extent of parents' technology know-how, the risks this poses and steps that can be taken to bridge this knowledge gap.

The gap revealed

In June 2006, 1,003 parents and 1,003 young people aged 11–16 were surveyed by ICM about their personal use of technology, on behalf of NCH and Tesco Telecoms. By surveying parents and their children it was possible to compare what parents thought their children were doing on their mobile phones and the internet with what children said they were doing. There were some alarming discrepancies.

Key findings

1% of parents think their children are blogging

33% of children use blogs

67% of parents don't know what a blog is

One third (33%) of children surveyed, including one in five of 11 years olds, regularly use the internet for blogging, where they can upload personal details and information that can be accessed by anyone. Yet two thirds of parents don't know what a blog is and only one in 100 (1%) thought their children used them.

13% of 11 year olds are never supervised online

11% of 11 year olds say parents know nothing about their online communication

One in 10 of the 11 year olds surveyed say their parents know nothing about who they communicate with online (11%) and that their parents never supervise them online (13%), however 45% of parents with 11 year olds think they know what their child is doing on the internet at all times.

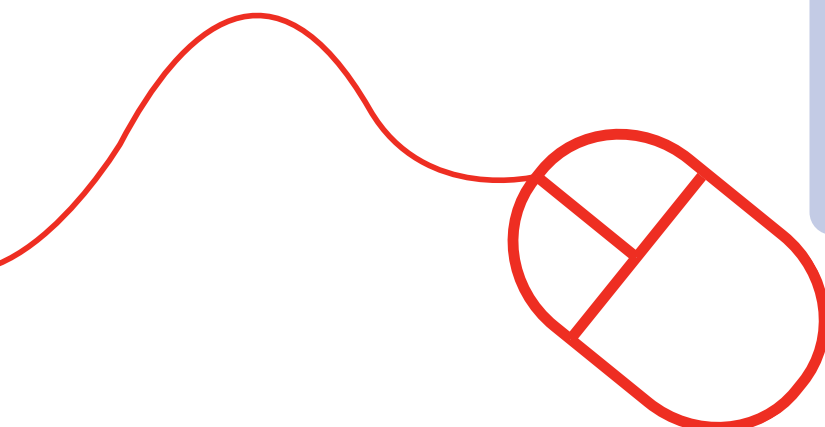
More than a third of parents said they don't know how to deny access to specific websites or install parental controls and 40% don't know how to block certain content from being viewed. Children say that nearly 60% of their parents have not mentioned certain websites or types of website they are not allowed to visit.

More than half of all children (53%) are never or hardly ever supervised online by their parents yet 81% of parents think they know what their children are doing at all times or most of the time on the internet.

65% of parents can deny access to specific websites

46% of children can get round parental blocks

Although two thirds (65%) of parents are confident they can deny access to specific websites, nearly half of children aged 11–16 (46%) are confident they can get round them, including 43% of 11 year olds.



79% of children use IM

29% of parents don't know what IM is

79% of children said they use instant messaging (IM) regularly, where they can communicate with anyone online. This includes 59% of 11 year olds. However, while 78% of parents think their children use this form of online communication regularly, one third (29%) don't understand what instant messaging is.

Seven out of 10 (69%) parents acknowledge they know less about mobile phones than their children, and more than half (57%) acknowledge they know less about the internet than their children.

26% of parents can't check website history

65% of young people can clear internet history

One quarter of parents are unable to check which websites have been visited (26%) but even those who can don't necessarily get a clear picture because two thirds of children (65%) say they can clear internet history without assistance.

43% of parents don't know what WAP is and more than half (53%) don't know what 3G is.

Dangers of the gap

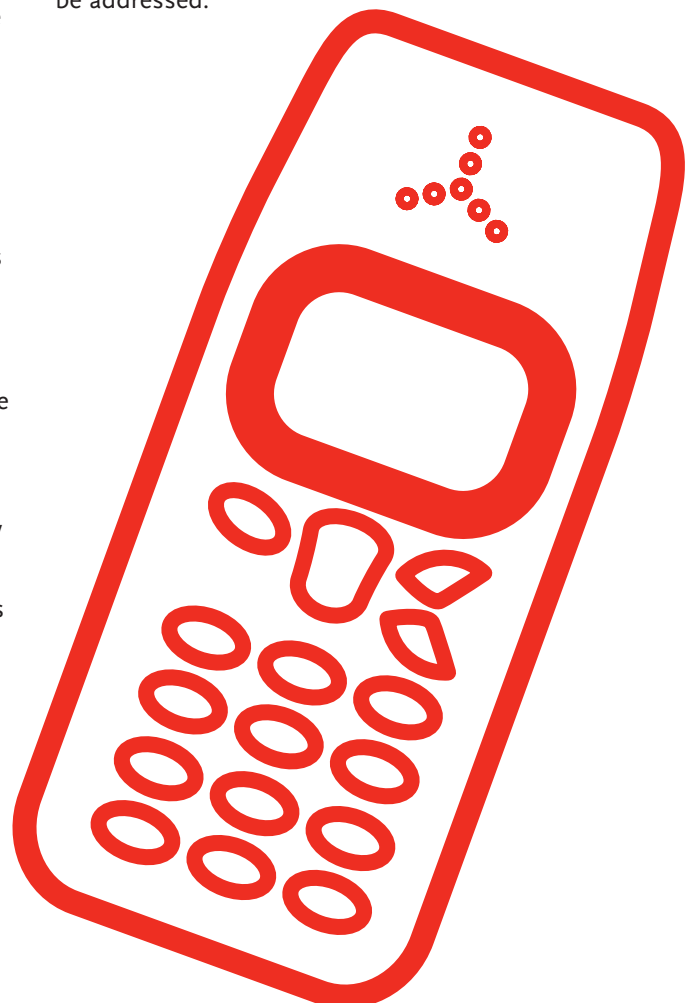
This knowledge gap means many parents are unable to provide realistic advice and support to children who are too young to know how to protect themselves from some of the risks associated with new technology. The main hazards to children can be categorised into three broad areas: content, contact and commerce.

Content issues arise in relation to children being exposed to material that is not age appropriate or is upsetting or potentially damaging for some other reason. There is a great deal of pornography in the online world, some of it very hard core or even illegal. Parents feel their children should not be able to access it, either by accident or design. Similarly there is material available that is very violent, racist, or simply wildly inaccurate.

Contact issues can arise if inappropriate individuals are able to use technology to get in touch with children or young people, for example in chatrooms, via emails or text messaging. Generally they will seek to develop a relationship with the child or young person with a view to meeting up with them in real life.

Commerce issues arise when unscrupulous companies have been known to use mobile phones and the internet to promote or sell often largely worthless goods and services to children and young people, or obtain valuable commercial information from them, for example about household income levels and expenditure patterns. There have been several scams around ring tones for mobile phones.

Addiction or a compulsive relationship with technology will also have a negative effect on children. This can obstruct the development of normal social relationships or involvement in other healthy activities such as sport. Very often this type of compulsive behaviour can be an indicator of a deeper or underlying issue that ought to be addressed.



Plugging the gap

As the survey results clearly show, both children and parents agree that children lead the way when it comes to technological know-how. If we're going to protect our children from harm, this information gap must be bridged as quickly as possible. NCH and Tesco Telecoms have joined forces to raise awareness of the issue, and to make sure children and their parents know where to find more information and advice about how to increase their technological knowledge and keep children safe.

Get I.T.? Got I.T.! Good! – A family guide to getting to grips with technology

This free user-friendly guide presented by BBC TV presenters Dick and Dom has useful advice for children and parents, from buying a PC or mobile to keeping your child safe online and dealing with mobile phone bullying. With safety tips from NCH throughout the guide it's a great way for parents to increase their knowledge, engage their children in safety issues and protect their family. For a free copy of the guide please visit www.nch.org.uk/internetsafety or www.tesco.com or pop into your nearest Tesco store.

'Technology doctor' roadshows

In July and August, Tesco Telecoms and NCH are running 'technology doctor' roadshows in selected Tesco stores throughout Britain. Designed for children and parents, each roadshow will have a range of technology experts available to offer advice and specialist knowledge.

Conclusions and recommendations

By their own admission, parents do not have the same technological knowledge as their children. But this gap in knowledge can be narrowed. Parents need to ensure they understand the technology their children are using and talk to them about how to stay safe. Survey results identify the areas where parents need to improve, for example understanding their children's use of blogs and instant messaging.

By narrowing the gap, risks to children will be lessened and parents will be able to play a larger part in their children's technological lives.

Protecting our children is up to everyone. If young people can get around website blocks there is an obvious need for more sophisticated software that is less easy to manipulate or circumvent. This is why technology and mobile phone companies and initiatives like the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre and the Virtual Global Taskforce are stepping up their efforts to help parents protect their families.

Children can learn how to stay safe and parents can get sound advice and information by visiting www.nch.org.uk/internetsafety and www.ceop.gov.uk

NCH and Tesco Telecoms working together

NCH is a recognised leader in the area of child protection and new technology and has spent more than 10 years campaigning about the need to reduce the risks to children that come hand in hand with technological advances. Tesco Telecoms is a family-focused telecoms operator working toward ensuring their services are safe for all the family.

About NCH

NCH is the UK's leading children's charity, working in partnership to run nearly 500 services for more than 160,000 of the UK's most vulnerable children, young people and their families. For further information visit www.nch.org.uk or call 08457 626579.

About Tesco Telecoms

Tesco Telecoms is a leading telecoms operator and retailer providing consumers with a mobile network, broadband and dial-up internet access, home phone and internet phone services.

Tesco Telecoms' customers benefit from simple, great-value pricing, a focus on excellent customer service and Clubcard points, which are gained with telecoms spend.