Online Safety for Learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

What is different for learners with SEND?

The internet and technology are an integral part of everyday life for children. It is important that we acknowledge the positive opportunities the internet provides for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); the accessibility of images and video online make it an excellent learning tool, whilst global connectivity enables children with SEND to socialise and access support.

However, children with SEND are more likely than their peers to experience online issues such as cyberbullying, online grooming and exploitation. Similarly, children with SEND are more likely to have their internet use restricted and therefore have limited opportunities to learn through experience, develop resilience or seek support, which would empower them to use technology safely.

Online safety is a fundamental part of our safeguarding responsibilities and education settings should implement a range of targeted and differentiated strategies to enable learners with SEND to access the internet safely and appropriately.

Online safety messages

For some learners, the use of abstract language and concepts can lead to confusion, frustration and misunderstandings. It is important that settings work together with their learners to build and develop a collaborative understanding of the terminology being used.

Consider:
- *What does the term 'online predator' mean to a child with SEND? Is it a dangerous person or a wild animal?*
- *Isan online contact still a stranger if you know their name or they send a 'friend request'?*
- *If you must never share personal information online, how do you tell online shops where to deliver your orders?*

Be mindful that there are usually exceptions to rules which can sometimes be difficult for children with SEND to accept; ensure the 'rules' you provide are clear, consistent and not left open to interpretation.

Examples:
- *A learner who finds it difficult to understand abstract meaning may not be able to interpret hidden messages or metaphors in many popular video resources.*
- *Instead of saying: "Don't share personal information online", consider a more realistic statement: "Always ask your trusted adult, before sharing personal information online".*

Education and training

Online safety education should be delivered in an age and context appropriate way, based on learner needs and experiences. Staff should establish what learners already know about online safety and how much experience or exposure they have to the online environment.

Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) should also access appropriate training and guidance regarding the specific online risks for learners with SEND (Annex B, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018).

Consider:
- *What online experiences do your learners with SEND already have?*
- *Can your learners identify and/or explain online safety risks?*
- *Can your learners understand and remember online safety messages?*
- *Has your DSL accessed appropriate training regarding the specific risks to learners with SEND online?*

Many learners with SEND will want to engage in the same activities as their peers, but may lack the understanding, skills or support to do so safely. Education settings, with the support of parents/carers, should implement a small step approach to online access, enabling learners to develop experiences and build resilience in the online environment.

Online safety education should not just take place within computing lessons but should form part of an embedded and progressive curriculum, including appropriate PSHE and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE). One-off events or assemblies, provided by external visitors, cannot be as effective as directed, differentiated teaching which addresses the specific needs and vulnerabilities of your learners.

When teaching about online safety, learners with SEND may need:
- Complex online safety issues to be broken down and explained in greater detail
- To explore issues in a variety of contexts and approaches
- More examples of safe and unsafe practices
- Constant reinforcement and repetition of key safety messages
- Differentiated teaching resources and materials

Visual resources and verbal support can be useful for learners with SEND, but some learners may respond better to multi-media content such as videos, interactive presentations, screensavers or spoken/ sound recordings that they can associate with 'good' or 'bad' decisions. 'Know your friends with Josh and Sue' is an illustrated video from CEOP which uses clear facial expressions and visual clues to communicate basic online safety rules. Try to use a variety or resources and see what works or adapt and use teaching resources you know work for your learners.

Examples:
- *When delivering lessons about privacy and security settings on social media, consider using actual websites and allowing learners to explore the real tools.*
- *A learner with hearing impairment will benefit from adapted education material, such as, videos with subtitles or British Sign Language.*

Acceptable use rules:

Education settings should provide clear boundaries and expectations for appropriate internet use for all staff, learners and parents; however, the way in which we communicate these 'rules' to learners with SEND may need to be adapted. Some learners with SEND may intentionally test boundaries and contravene the rules; consider presenting consequences alongside the rules (i.e. cause and effect).

Consider:

- *Do all learners recognise and understand safe and unsafe behaviour online?*
- *Can they transfer rules about safety, or skills, from one activity and apply it to the online environment?*
- *Are there appropriate boundaries and support networks for learners at school?*
- *Are there appropriate boundaries and positive role models for learners at home?*

Acceptable use policies should be shared with parents/carers to ensure that rules and consequences are consistent at school and at home.

Examples:

- *A learner who has difficulty transferring rules, or applying them out of context, may find constant reinforcement and visual reminders near devices helpful.*
- *A learner who is allowed unrestricted access to technology at home and intentionally tries to bypass school filters may require a strict AUP which is shared and supported by parents.*

Childnet have produced SMART rules for online safety, using Widget symbols; these can be displayed near computers as a visual reminder.

Engaging parents and carers:

Parents/carers play a vital role in supporting their children learn how to be safe online, but they can sometimes be difficult to engage with; concerns about insufficient computer skills or a limited understanding about the online environment can be off-putting for many parents, regardless of whether their child has SEND or not.

Consider:

- *Do all parents/carers understand the risks online and how to access support?*
- *Do all parents/carers know how to talk about online safety and support their child in accessing the internet safely?*
- *Are all parents/carers aware of the key online safety messages that are taught to pupils in school?*

Settings should reassure parents that online safety has more to do with parenting than technology; their child is likely to be vulnerable both on and offline, so encourage parents to adopt similar mechanisms for supporting their child online, as they use in the 'real' world.

Examples:

- *A parent assumes that their child is not physically or mentally capable of accessing the internet, so does not implementing blocks or filters.*
- *A parent is frightened that their child will be an easy target online, so bans internet access, restricting their child's ability to learn and develop online resilience.*
- *A parent assumes that their child, who is very technology literate, knows how keep*

themselves safe, so does not actively discuss online safety rules.

Both professionals and parents should take an active interest in children with SEND online activities and talk to them regularly about what they do online. Creating an open and positive dialogue about technology will encourage learners to speak to an adult if something negative happens online.

General advice and ideas to engage parents/carers in online safety are available on Kelsi; however, due to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children with SEND, education settings will need to supplement this with their own expert knowledge and targeted resources.

Policies and procedures:

The DSL should work with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and other appropriate staff, to develop and review the online safeguarding policies, ensuring the specific needs and requirements of learners with SEND are met.

Consider:
- *What are the specific needs and abilities of learners with SEND within your setting?*
- *How might their needs increase their vulnerabilities online?*
- *What actions can be taken to minimise risks online for learners with SEND?*
- *Are these needs and actions reflected within the policies and procedures?*

If settings identify individual learners with specific online safety concerns, this could be incorporated into their Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.

Examples:
- *A learner with autism who becomes fixated on online material may require additional monitoring and supervision (particularly if the material is likely to cause them harm, such as pornography or terrorist material).*
- *A learner with visual impairment may require screen adaptations and more verbal support when accessing the internet.*

Technology and infrastructure:

'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (KCSIE) 2018 states that education settings should *"ensure appropriate filtering and monitoring systems in place"*. Education settings should also be careful that *"over blocking" does not lead to unreasonable restrictions as to what children can be taught with regards to online teaching and safeguarding."*

Consider:
- *What are the specific needs of learners with SEND within your setting?*
- *Are the filtering systems appropriate to safeguarding learners with SEND?*
- *Are the monitoring systems appropriate to safeguarding learners with SEND?*

What is deemed *"appropriate"* will depend on the specific needs, abilities and vulnerabilities of the learners within your setting; leaders and managers should conduct a risk assessment to inform policy or practice changes required. The UK Safer Internet Centre has guidance available for education leaders regarding implementing appropriate filtering and monitoring.

Examples:

- *Learners who lack the ability to regulate their own behaviour online may require closer supervision and instruction.*
- *Learners who are unable to recognise or manage online risks may require direct adult supervision (at least initially) to safeguard them.*

Reporting concerns:

Education settings should be conscious that, learners with SEND may require a range of methods to enable them to report concerns and seek support.

Consider:
- *Are there sufficient and appropriate reporting mechanisms in place to enable learners with SEND to raise concerns?*
- *Are the reporting mechanisms reflected within the online safety policy?*
- *Do all staff have appropriate training to respond to online safety concerns?*

Some learners with SEND may find it difficult to explain or describe things that have happened online; learners might find it easier to show adults what they did, whilst others may not actually know how something happened. Careful investigation by DSLs may be required with support as appropriate from technical staff.

Examples:
- *A learner who is non-verbal, may require a messaging or sound system on their devices to help them to get adult attention.*
- *Learners may have 1-2-1 workers or trusted adults that they prefer to speak to who will be able to support the DSL in communicating with the learner.*

Educational settings should highlight external reporting systems, such as the CEOP report button or the Childline website and ensure learners understand when it would and wouldn't be appropriate to contact them.

Useful Educational Resources

Childnet:
- www.childnet.com/resources/know-it-all-for-teachers-sen
- www.childnet.com/resources/star-toolkit
- www.childnet.com/resources/be-safe-and-smart-online

Think U Know:
- www.new.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/lee-and-kim/lee-and-kim-adapted-resource
- www.new.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/know-your-friends-with-josh-and-sue
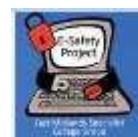- www.new.thinkuknow.co.uk/professionals/resources/sams-real-friends/

NetSmartz:
- www.netsmartz.org/SpecialNeeds

East Midlands e-Safety Project:
- www.em-esafetyproject.co.uk

Anti-Bullying Alliance:
- www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/cyberbullying-0/cyberbullying-and-sendisability

Office of the e-Safety Commissioner: Cybersmart Access
- www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/classroom-resources/cybersmart-access

BBC BiteSize Skills for life
- www.bbc.com/education/clips/zfk34wx

Useful Resources for parents/carers

Parent Info:
- www.parentinfo.org/article/learning-disabilities-autism-and-internet-safety

Think U Know:
- www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Does-your-child-have-Autistic-Spectrum-Disorder/

Cerebra:
- www.cerebra.org.uk/help-and-information/guides-for-parents/learning-disabilities-autism-and-internet-safety-a-parents-guide/

The National Autistic Society:

- www.autism.org.uk/technology