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Online threats and concerns for families to watch out for by Sean Burke

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Parents throughout the ages have worried about their children, from fretting about their basic safety to considering how their life choices will affect their future prospects. However, in the 21st century, parents also have to worry about their childrenâ€™s online lives as well as their real ones. The internet is a fantastic, imaginative place, but itâ€™s also a dangerous one that can have damaging consequences for your child. Not sure what to look out for? Here are a few online threats and concerns that families should be aware of.

One major online concern for families to watch out for is copyright violation. Many of todayâ€™s children and teenagers have become accustomed to downloading music and TV programmes for free. However, not only can these downloads infect your computer with suspicious software, they are also usually illegal. Often, this results in a warning letter being issued by your internet service provider. But in the worst case scenario, your child may be subject to legal action in the UK or be extradited to face charges abroad. So itâ€™s important to educate your children of the consequences of illegal downloading or file-sharing.

Another problem for parents to worry about is who their children are interacting with online and the kinds of websites they are looking at. Surveys show that eight per cent of parents have discovered their child viewing adult websites and five per cent have found their children chatting to strangers online. Whatâ€™s more, 88 per cent feel that smartphones encourage their children to grow up too quickly. At the same time, one in five parents admit to never using online parental controls. So if youâ€™re afraid your child is interacting with dubious strangers or may be a victim of cyber bullying, itâ€™ important to both implement parental blocks of certain websites as well as talking to your child about modifying their online behaviour.

The biggest technical problem for your children to be aware of is malware, which can be combated by installing free anti virus or paid protective software. Figures suggest that in 2010, 27 per cent of teenagers infected their computers through malware. Malware - or malicious software - includes programmes like viruses and worms, which can adversely affect the way your computer operates and steal personal information from you, such as banking details. Children may be more likely to visit untrustworthy websites â€“ such as video streaming sites or fansites â€“ and these may be carriers of vicious malware. As a result, itâ€™s important to make your child aware of the consequences of malware, and alert them to the ways in which malware can damage a computer.

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Sean Burke - About Author:
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