



Online Safety

What is different for learners with SEND and our vulnerable children?

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 messages

For some learners, the use of abstract language and concepts can lead to confusion, frustration and misunderstandings. It is important that settings work 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?*
- *Is an 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?*

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?*

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.

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

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?*

Remember the [CEOP report button](#) or the [Childline website](#) and ensure learners understand when it would and wouldn't be appropriate to contact them. Always refer concerns to a DSL.