Parents E-Safety Newsletter

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Welcome to the Autumn 2015 edition of the Parents E-safety newsletter…

This term we are looking at Minecraft, Kik, the risks of In-app purchases and how resilience can help our children enjoy the internet.

Minecraft

Minecraft is a construction game, popular with children and adults of all ages. Players work alone or together with others to build all sorts of structures and many players enjoy the open-ended nature of the game, despite the very blocky and unrealistic graphics – it looks like an online version of Lego.

Minecraft is available on tablets, PCs and on games consoles such as Xbox and PlayStation. As different versions of the game have different features, there

are different risks associated with them and as a parent it is useful to know what happens in each version.

The version for tablet is known as the *Pocket Edition*. It is the most basic (and cheapest) version and has two modes: creative and survival. In creative mode players have unlimited resources, can build what they like and can fly. In survival mode players must gather natural resources and protect themselves from hostile creatures. Because of this survival mode, the game is rated in the UK at PEGI 7 due to mild violence and fear which might not be suitable for a younger child. In the *Pocket Edition*, players can only play with someone else on the same Wifi network, rather than across the internet so this is generally the safest version for younger players.

The PC and games console versions have additional features to the game, which sometimes players want to move onto so they can construct more exciting stuff. However, they also both have the ability to do multiplayer games over the internet, with the potential to be playing games (and chatting) with strangers, and to be exposed to bad language for example. We regularly get young people aged 8 and above telling us that a stranger has entered their game and destroyed everything they have been building, which can be upsetting: however, that child is also at risk in other ways if strangers are able to enter their games. *If you do not wish you child to play games with people you don't know, you will need to switch this off or limit access to the internet from the device*.

Another feature of Minecraft is that there is a large community of players making YouTube videos to show tips and tricks, so your child may want to access these videos: note that some of these videos are created by adults and may not always be appropriate for children and young people.

For more information see:

http://parentinfo.org/article/staying-safe-on-minecraft

The risks of In-app purchases

Many games are free to download onto tablets or phones: however, an increasing number fall into the freemium category, that is they are free to download but users are encouraged to buy items or upgrades in order to progress. Where the GooglePlay or iTunes account has been set up with payment details, users can buy items not realising it is real money, or they may accidentally press buttons that lead to a purchase. A recent survey for the charity Childnet showed that 1 in 10 children had accidentally made an in-app purchase.

To reduce the chance of this happening:

- Check whether an app includes in-app purchases before you download
- Ensure that Parental controls (Android) or Restrictions (Apple) are set to require a password in order to make in-app purchases.
- Have a conversation with your child to ensure they understand what in-app purchases are and how to avoid them.

Resilience

An important aspect of E-safety is building children and young people's resilience to what they see and experience online to ensure they stay safe and are able to take advantage of new digital opportunities.

Research from the University of Oxford has showed that young people were more resilient when caregivers were involved, and respected and supported young people's use of the internet. Young people whose caregivers relied on restricting access to the internet were the least resilient.

Interestingly, the digital skills of the caregivers were not important: it was the positive attitude towards social media that helped their young people.

For more information see:

http://parentinfo.org/article/three-top-tips-for-building-your-child-s-online-resilience

Kik

Kik is a messenger app that lets users send text, images, videos and share items from social media. It uses a username rather than a phone number to contact another person. Kik is rated 13+ by the manufacturer: however, a user can simply enter a false date of birth to get access. Users aged 13-18 are supposed to get Parental permission to use the app: however, again this is not verifiable. Parents and carers are recommended to have the Kik password so they can access their child's account.

Kik recommends a strong username that is difficult to guess and that users do not publicise their Kik username in a public forum such as social media. There is also a New People feature which allows messages from unknown people to be put into a separate section and potentially deleted without the young person having to read them. Like most other communication apps, Kik does contain blocking and reporting tools but these are not that easy to find on the app. Kik also contains a mobile web browser so users can access the internet without having to leave the app. Help is available for Kik on its website.

We have had a number of reports of young people using Kik to send inappropriate images and also strangers contacting young people with inappropriate messages.

NSPCC/O₂ Parents E-safety helpline

The new NSPCC (working in conjunction with O₂) Parents E-safety helpline is now up and running. Parents can get advice on anything they're not sure about, including:

- setting up parental controls on computers or other devices
- help adjusting privacy settings
- understanding social networks
- concerns about online gaming

The helpline is a free number: 0808 8005002
More information can be found at
http://www.nspcc.org.uk/