

# CHATGUIDE;-)

A guide for parents on how to keep children safe online and on mobiles



Meera Syal, actor and author says: "This excellent booklet is packed full of useful advice from experts"



Includes...

- How to get the best out of an online social life
- Easy things your children can do to protect themselves
- Diagrams of chatrooms and instant messaging
- Tips on how to help children use e-mail
- Learn about chat yourself

# Safe from danger and enjoying life online

Most children now chat daily either online or via their mobile phone. They are connecting to a huge community of other children all over the world. Some are shy 'in real life' but socialise with confidence online, others find support from people of their own age on relationship issues, or problems at home such as divorce and family bereavement.

## Children and the internet

Sometimes the online world, just like the real world, can introduce problems, such as bullying or arguments. Going online is great fun, but there are also a few people who use the internet for offensive or illegal purposes. Children must be made aware of both the good things and the dangers.

To keep children safe your supervision must cover the family computer. Just as you decide which TV programmes are suitable, you need to do the same for the websites and chatrooms your children visit.

Remind children that online friends are still strangers. The number of known cases where paedophiles have approached children online is extremely low, but reminding your family of the risks will keep them alert.

## Internet chat – getting technical

Computer studies are part of schoolwork now, so it's likely your children may know more than you do. We get left behind when it comes to the latest gadgets and the interactive areas of websites, like chatrooms and message boards, are especially strange. The language of chat is strange to many parents too, chatters love to use abbreviations such as:

- atb** all the best
- bbfn** bye bye for now
- cul8er** see you later
- gr8** great!
- idk** I don't know
- imbl** it must be love
- kit** keep in touch
- paw** parents are watching
- lol** laugh out loud
- xlnt** excellent!

It seems like another language, and it is!

“Going online is great fun, but there are also a few people who use the internet for offensive or illegal purposes”



A message board

# Different ways to chat

There are two main kinds of online conversations you can have, and they are both in text. One happens instantly (chatrooms and instant messengers for example) and the other is more like leaving a sticky note on a noticeboard which others can reply to by leaving a second note at any time later (messageboards for instance).

## Online chatrooms

There are chatrooms on every topic imaginable – from football chat to dating and music chat. In public chatrooms lots of people take part in a conversation at the same time. In a private chatroom, people have one-to-one chats; it's in these chatrooms that your children must take the most care.

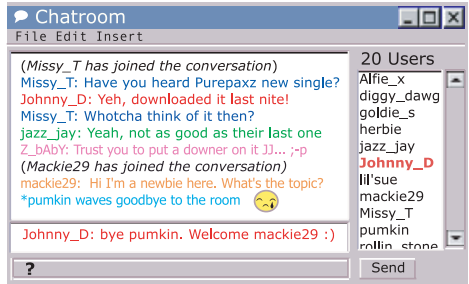
Good chatrooms require registration the first time you visit. It's important to explain to your children that they mustn't give out their e-mail address or phone number to anyone without checking with your first, either during or after registration. Good websites will have well moderated chatrooms, moderators are people who stay in the chatroom to keep an eye on things. Moderators can kick people out or ban them completely if they break the 'House Rules'

You can help your children by showing them good websites which offer chat, and by assisting them to register and chat the first few times. It is during this time that you can teach the online 'rules of the road' which are all explained in this booklet.

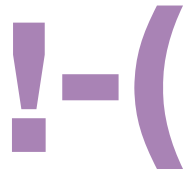
## Instant messaging

The instant messaging window opens and an alert flashes when someone 'calls' you to chat. 'IM', as it is more commonly known, may be safer than chatrooms as you can build up a 'buddy' list of trusted friends who you allow to chat with you, or who ask you if they can be put on your list of recommended friends.

It might be a good idea to talk to your children about different things they can do to find out if someone is reliable and trustworthy enough to be invited to be an internet buddy. Children should be encouraged to tell you if anyone has upset them or made them feel angry or uncomfortable when chatting.



A chatroom



Instant messaging

# Different ways to chat (continued)

## Live chat

Sometimes television programmes may offer viewers the opportunity to 'chat live' to a presenter or celebrity guest after the 'credits have rolled'. This can be very exciting for children and teenagers, especially if it is a pop band. Live chat is normally very safe indeed as questions from those joining in are filtered and only the best questions are put forward to the guest. What your children will see will be only fully moderated questions.

## Mobile chat

The internet is becoming mobile and it is easier to access from your mobile phone or laptop anywhere you happen to be. This means your children will soon be able to chat using mobile and wireless ('WiFi') devices, and send photographs too.

It's important to make children aware that they need to be careful when sending images from their mobile. It's great fun to snap away and send photos to your friends to show where you

are, but children should not send photos to someone who is an internet friend, as internet friends are still strangers. When you send a picture of yourself, you are also sending your mobile phone number with it. So children should stick to sending photos to their 'real world' friends, which is both safe and exciting to do.

Mobile phones also offer 'SMS-ing' or 'Texting' which is the sending or receiving of short text messages. This is now very common technology and it might be the main form of chat which you may use yourself already.

## Interactive TV chat

Many digital and cable television channels now offer chat using a remote control keyboard. TV chat is just like internet chat and the same safety rules should apply.



Mobile phone texting

## What parents and carers can do

Whether your children are chatting via the internet, mobiles or television, they should learn how to chat safely at home; teachers are now giving lessons on internet safety in schools too.



### Getting off to a good start

Spend time discussing both the good things and the problems, this will significantly reduce any risks. If children know the rules of the online road, they'll know what to do when they are at a friend's house or in an internet café too.

You can add filtering software that prevents children entering sites you would not wish them to see; however filters may need updating from time to time and also may block sites that are ok. The most effective tool of all is common sense.

Internet browsers like Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Communicator are likely to have inbuilt filters you can turn on, and many internet service providers also offer the same service. Filters are sometimes termed 'Net Nanny' services.



### Registration

Help your children to register for quality websites which have well moderated chatrooms or instant messaging. Check what will happen to their personal details and avoid any websites which say details will be passed on to other companies.

Personal details such as your child's 'real name' and location should never be on view to the general public. Encourage children to use a nickname and never give out their home address, phone number, e-mail or school to anybody online, they shouldn't give out their friends personal details either.

**"Personal details such as your child's 'real name' and location should never be on view to the general public"**

# What parents and carers can do (continued)

## Learning computer skills

Apart from the hours of fun it will give you, basic computer skills will help you teach your children how to chat safely and even protect the whole family from fraud, computer viruses and unwanted e-mails ('spam').

There are plenty of chatrooms and online communities which are designed for parents so you can get advice from other mums, dads and carers easily. We have suggested some places to start, at the end of this booklet.

## E-mails and attachments

It's wise not to open e-mails from people or companies you don't know, they may contain viruses which can damage the software on your computer. Never download or open attachments if you don't know what they are as this is one way of passing around computer viruses from one computer to another.

Just as the postman brings junk mail electronic in-boxes can fill up with spam. There are many ways to avoid getting too many unwanted e-mails, one way is never to agree to your e-mail address being passed on to a 'third party', another is to try and avoid giving your e-mail out in response to 'free' offers or competitions.

Spam can be offensive or even pornographic, and anyone can get them, even children. Show your children how to manage their e-mail and how to turn on the 'spam-filters' which all good e-mail services offer.

## Competitions

Get your child to check with you before entering and make sure the competition organiser won't pass on personal details to others.

## Shopping

Bank or credit-card details must only be given out by you. No website should collect information from a child under 12 without getting your consent and they must also ask your permission to pass on details to other companies.



## When to stop chatting

You are in control. Just as you hang up on an abusive phone call, you can either leave the chat, alert a moderator or end the conversation with anybody, or group of people, you don't like.

### Stay in control

Encourage your children to let you know if they experience anything which might make them feel angry, upset or uncomfortable during an online conversation. Incidents can be reported to your service provider or to the Internet Watch Foundation (details at the end of this booklet) the police also have national systems in place to deal with enquiries.

### Bullying

If a child is being bullied the abuse may continue onto mobile phones or even into internet chatrooms or instant messaging. It is unlikely, but if it does happen tell your children they are in control.

Children can leave a chatroom easily, they can often click on a button which enables the technology to 'ignore' or completely ban someone who is bothering them.

If the bullying is via a mobile phone tell your child to report it to you or a teacher at school. If you know the time and details of the calls the mobile phone operator can help and give advice.

### Stranger danger

On the internet, people usually use nicknames, and they often pretend to be a different age, or even gender; it's part of the fun. Children need to be made aware that their new internet friend is still a stranger.

Some chat software lets children build up a 'buddy list' of friends; this means only those people who have been accepted can chat and people you don't know can't. Why not show your children how to build up a buddy list of reliable people?

Your children must tell you if they want to meet up with a chat buddy and you must always go with them. Children should NEVER go alone to meet someone they have met online without a parent or carer being present. Plenty of children go with their parents to meet their new internet friends and come away having had very positive and rewarding experiences, many have very good online friendships with 'internet friends' all over the world without any problems at all.

There has been a lot of publicity about paedophiles, also known as 'child sex offenders'. It's important to put this risk into perspective. The overwhelming percentage of children who suffer sexual abuse are approached by someone they have met or who they already know 'in real life'. Some children are sexually abused by teenagers or other children.

The internet is mainly used by paedophiles to swap child pornography, which fuels their interest and addiction. The police, internet service providers, community managers and the UK Home Office are working together to make sure websites which enable the swapping of child pornography are tracked down and closed.

### Further supervision

Children may need further supervision or extra care if they become very secretive about their online friends, encourage them to be open. In addition, too much time spent at the computer may cause problems such as RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury), eye strain or simply lead to a lack of physical fitness.

# Help at your fingertips

## More on chat and the internet

### ChatGuide

[bbc.co.uk/chatguide](http://bbc.co.uk/chatguide)

Further resources on internet safety

### WebWise

[bbc.co.uk/webwise](http://bbc.co.uk/webwise)

Beginners guide to the internet

### BBC Schools

[bbc.co.uk/schools/bullying](http://bbc.co.uk/schools/bullying)

Advice on online bullying

## For parents

### BBC Parenting

[bbc.co.uk/parenting](http://bbc.co.uk/parenting)

Tips and help for parents

### Parents Online

[parentsonline.gov.uk/parents](http://parentsonline.gov.uk/parents)

UK government website

### UK Parents

[ukparents.co.uk](http://ukparents.co.uk)

Helpful site with many links

## Reporting suspicious activity

### Internet Watch Foundation

[iwf.org.uk](http://iwf.org.uk)

## Information on 'Cyber crime'

### The National High Tech Crime Unit

[nhtcu.org](http://nhtcu.org)

## Internet safety websites

### Wise Up To The Net (Home Office)

[wiseuptonet.org](http://wiseuptonet.org)

### NCH – The Children's Charity

[nch.org.uk](http://nch.org.uk)

### Childnet International

[childnet-int.org](http://childnet-int.org)

### For Kids By Kids Online

[fkbko.co.uk](http://fkbko.co.uk)

