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ISPCC marks Safer Internet Day with Tips and Advice for Keeping Safe Online

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Marking Safer Internet Day, the ISPCC celebrates the boom in online technology but urges children, young people and their parents to be vigilant when using the internet.

The ISPCC is aware from Childline services that over 98% of children who contact the service do so through their mobile phone or online. Through our Childline Online service we are connecting with children using media that they feel comfortable with. Throughout 2009 we received over 60,000 hits to the Childline website and there was a significant increase from 2008 of over 400% in the number of children and young people who accessed Childline's range of Online services which can be found on www.childline.ie

While this access can be a wholly positive experience for the majority of children, there is a need to issue a safety warning: sadly the internet is also an increasingly preferred platform for bullying. Ireland has one of the highest bullying rates in Europe, with over 1 in 4 children reporting bullying. Less visible and more invasive, cyber/text bullying specifically is on the rise, with 1 in 10 young people in Ireland calling it "just part of life".[1][1][1]

The internet and access to same is also helping to create new ways to administer all forms of child abuse. This includes adults posing as children, grooming (which is the deliberate actions taken by an adult to form a trusting relationship with a child with the intent of later having sexual contact) and accessing, downloading and distributing child pornography. It is for these reasons that the ISPCC are offering tips to parents and children.

Tips for Parents on safer internet use:

- Be aware of and use internet safety tools
- Communicate openly with children about their internet use
- Discover the internet together
- Agree rules for internet use
- Encourage your child to be careful when disclosing personal information
- Allow space for your child to discuss events and concerns regarding their online experiences
- Talk about the risks of meeting an online friend face to face
- Don't be too critical of your child's web browsing
- Report illegal online material to the Gardai or to www.hotline.ie
- Encourage good netiquette
- Know your child's net use
- Remember that the positive aspects of the internet outweigh the negatives

Tips for young people:

- Don't give out personal information on line
- Use only a first name or nickname to identify yourself.
- Never send photographs of yourself
- Never agree to meet someone you met online without supervision.

If you are being bullied online or by mobile phone it's important to:

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-Save the evidence

-Tell an adult

-Don't respond to the bully

-Block the bully; if the harassment is coming in the form of instant messages, texts, or profile comments, use preferences or privacy tools to block the person, if it's in chat, leave the "room."

Margie Roe, Childline Online Manager today said; "As a member of the Safer Internet Ireland Project, the ISPCC welcome the developments made in recent years. However it is essential that Internet Service Providers continue to develop safety mechanisms as part of their responsibility to protect children. It is clear that urgent safeguards need to be introduced relating to Internet safety. It is therefore crucial that key stakeholders in the Internet industry continue to work with other relevant stakeholders to develop a comprehensive, strategic approach that will keep children and young people safe in their online lives."

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