

## Safeguarding snippet July 2025



As the academic year draws to a close, there are still a number of safeguarding issues that are making headlines, so very much worth a read to keep yourselves up to date with recent trends. I have put together a few items that may be of interest or use to you during the summer holidays. I wish you and your loved ones a happy and safe holiday, whatever you may be doing.

For out of hours support please find below a list of agencies you can contact			
Police emergency line:	NSPCC,	Papyrus Hope	Domestic abuse Helpline:
999	ChildLine:08001111	line UK (suicide	08082000247
	www.nspcc.org.uk	prevention	
Police non-emergency		charity);	
line: 101		08000684141	
NHS non-emergency line,	Young minds: access	Kooth (Online	Karma Nirvana (Honour based
has an option for	the crisis messenger	counselling):	violence support): 08005999247
emergency mental health	by texting: YM 85258	www.kooth.com	
support: 111			
Essex Children's Social	Samaritans (suicide	Home Office	Community 360 (Support to
care: 03456037627	prevention	forced Marriage	families) : <b>01206505250</b>
	charity): <b>116123</b>	Helpline:	information@community360.org.
	www.samaritans.org	02070080151	<u>uk</u>
Y.E.S	The Outhouse	Shelter	RAMA (Refugee, Asylum seeker
(Housing/homelessness/	(LGBTQ+ support):	(Homelessness	& Migrant support):
counselling): 01206	01206 871394	advice:	01206 638454
712184		08088004444	



All Wake Up Wednesday guides will be attached to this email.

Spending time in or around water is a brilliant way for children to stay active and make memories; however, it's vital to understand the dangers This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide is packed with tips to help you keep young people safe around water, at home, school, and further afield

From teaching children what beach flags mean > to why inflatables should stay in pools | this guide is designed to support parents and educators in promoting water safety. Whether it's a bath, a beach, or a boating lake, being prepared can help prevent avoidable tragedies

## Vapes laced with spice: a crisis

#### The Independent UK

Recent findings from the University of Bath reveal that one in six vapes confiscated from schools contained the synthetic drug Spice, leading to alarming health incidents among secondary school students. The lab-made substance, which mimics cannabis, can result in severe health issues such as breathing difficulties, heart attacks, and seizures. PSCO Jon Akehurst from Wiltshire Police highlighted the dangers, stating: "We've seen vomiting and behaviour changes, and we've had an incident where there were concerns that a child was having a fit." The study, published in July last year, involved testing vapes from 38 schools in England, with over 16% found to be contaminated.

#### Report raises concerns over children's use of chatbots

#### The Sunday Times

A new report from the non-profit online safety organisation Internet Matters has found that the number of children using ChatGPT has risen from 23% in 2023 to 43% this year - with the report also raising concerns over children's use of chatbots in place of real friends. The report found that a third of children who have used chatbots say doing so feels like talking to a friend, rising to half of vulnerable children, while 12% said they interact with chatbots because they have no one else to speak to. Rachel Huggins, co-chief executive of Internet Matters, said while chatbots "are rapidly becoming a part of childhood", most "children, parents and schools are flying blind, and don't have the information or protective tools they need to manage this technological revolution in a safe way". "We've arrived at a point very quickly", she said, "where children, and in particular vulnerable children, can see Al chatbots as real people, and as such are asking them for emotionally driven and sensitive advice. Also concerning is that they are often unquestioning about what their new 'friends' are telling them."

#### Al abuse videos surge alarmingly

#### <u>STV</u>

In the first half of this year, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) reported 1,286 AI-generated child sexual abuse videos, a dramatic increase from just two in the same period last year. These videos are now "indistinguishable" from real footage, raising serious concerns about the technology's misuse. Derek Ray-Hill, interim chief executive of the IWF, said: "We must do all we can to prevent a flood of synthetic and partially synthetic content joining the already record quantities of child sexual abuse we are battling online." The IWF has urged the Government to implement binding regulations to ensure the safe development of AI technologies. The report also highlighted that over 1,000 of the videos were classified as Category A imagery, the most extreme type, which includes depictions of severe abuse.

#### Tech giants face age check crackdown

#### The Guardian

Melanie Dawes, the chief executive of Ofcom, has said that the upcoming age verification checks will mark a "really big moment" in safeguarding children online. These checks, mandated by the Online Safety Act, are set to be implemented by the end of this month. However, campaigners, including Ian Russell, whose daughter Molly tragically died after viewing harmful online content, express concerns that the new regulations may not sufficiently prevent access to dangerous material. Russell described the act as "timid" and urged Dawes to push for stricter enforcement against technology companies. Critics also highlight gaps in regulation, particularly regarding misinformation, with Chi Onwurah, chair of the science and technology committee, asserting that the Online Safety Act "just isn't up to scratch."

#### Misleading Age Ratings

Whenever I'm talking with parents there are some core bits of advice I give and for years one of those pieces of advice has been to be very careful with age ratings. On app/game such as the Apple Store and Google Play stores they're supposed to be helpful, to give one piece of the jigsaw puzzle as to whether that app or game is appropriate for their child. But there is one problem, they're often wrong and interestingly I've just seen an article from the 5Rights Foundation who have submitted a formal complaint to the Competition and Markets Authority (see HERE).

#### For example:

- Candy Crush Saga, a hugely popular game, is marked as PEGI3 in the Google Play store and 4+ in Apple. They're both wrong, the terms and conditions requires users to be 13+ specifically because of the monetised functions within the game.
- In Google Play, Snapchat is rated as 'parental guidance'. That's misleading, you are required to be 13+ in most countries, 16+ in others.
- Even worse, WhatsApp is rated at PEGI3 on the Google Play store and it's not even a game, it's a messaging app which again requires users to be 13+.



From deepfake videos to romance scams powered by chat bots the tactics are getting more convincing – and the consequences more serious. If you're looking to help children and young people navigate the online world with confidence and caution, this guide offers key insights and practical advice to keep them safe

#### **For Parents - Holiday Conversations**

The holiday period is an ideal time for parents to sit down with their children, play their games and use their apps to get to know the endless fun but also the potential risks. Conversations can be difficult, especially if the parent isn't a user of tech, but conversation is the most powerful risk mitigator of all. So where do parents start?

The NSPCC have put together a fabulous page full of information such as:

- Age appropriate conversations taking into consideration different ages.
- Resources such as tips and quizzes.
- An understanding of some of the risks.
- And tackling difficult conversations.

You can find the page **HERE**.

#### Content children encounter on YouTube raises concerns

#### **The Sunday Times**

Stephanie Thomson in the *Sunday Times* explores the troubling content children encounter on YouTube, particularly through algorithmically suggested videos. Thomson recounts a disturbing experience where her daughters watched a video that promoted unhealthy body image, leading her to question the platform's family-friendly image. Michelle Neumann, a professor at the University of Sheffield, highlights that many seemingly innocent channels contain problematic content. Michael Robb from Common Sense Media notes that while some videos are educational, many are shallow and consumer-driven. Thomson concludes with a call for government intervention to ensure high-quality content for children, as parents struggle to navigate the platform's vast offerings.



Tablets have transformed the way children learn and play, but are they always a safe choice? Phis #WakeUpWednesday guide focuses on the ever-popular iPad and how to use it responsibly with younger users. We explore key concerns such as exposure to harmful content O, data collection by apps A and the possibility of screen addiction.

This guide also offers practical advice on using Apple's own tools to limit screen time, filter content and prevent unwanted purchases. With expert insights and clear recommendations, it's essential reading for parents and educators keen to make iPad use safer and smarter.

#### **Adult Content - Age Verification**

At last, after all these years, age verification for access to adult content sites (and apps that allow adult content) comes into force on 25th July as part of the Online Safety Act. When you consider that 8% of children aged 8 to 14 have viewed online adult content this really can't come soon enough. Is this a solution? No, far from it, it definitely won't stop those who are determined or curious, but it's a step in the right direction, a step we've never had before. But there's more, this part of the Act also requires providers to prevent children from accessing (or being recommended) legal but potentially harmful content.

### Police alert schools over WhatsApp groups

#### **BBC News**

Humberside Police have issued a warning to schools regarding two WhatsApp groups: "These Guys Are Bad" and "All The Bad Guys", which contain racist, violent, and pornographic content. The police expressed "great concern" over the groups, stating that "a number of unknown paedophiles are also using these groups to gain access to children." Superintendent lain Pottage urged parents to discuss the risks of social media with their children, highlighting the importance of creating a safer online community. Meta, the owner of WhatsApp, stated that users have controls to block unwanted content and can report any violations of their terms of service. The police are collaborating with schools to promote safe digital practices among young people.

### Teens self-diagnosing ADHD and autism

#### **The Times**

Increasingly, teens are self-diagnosing conditions like ADHD and autism, often influenced by social media platforms such as TikTok. Dr Beth Mosley, a consultant clinical psychologist, notes that "young people are coming into the therapy room having really well researched what they think is wrong with them." The trend raises concerns about the accuracy of self-diagnosis, as much of the information online can be misleading. Parents are encouraged to engage in open conversations with their children about their feelings and the reasons behind their self-diagnosis. Mosley advises that while some may genuinely identify with these conditions, it is crucial for diagnoses to come from qualified professionals to ensure appropriate support. She comments: "It takes a lot of collecting information and picking out the nuances of that person's challenges and presentation."

#### Regulator halts sale of gummies for children

#### The Guardian

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has ordered Sally Westcott, an NHS manager, to cease selling magnesium glycinate gummies for children due to concerns over undeclared levels of melatonin, a prescription-only substance in the UK. The gummies, marketed as a natural sleep aid, were found to contain approximately 0.53mg of melatonin per gummy, exceeding the recommended dose for children. The MHRA is investigating the matter after two mothers raised concerns, leading to an independent analysis by Supplement Factory, which confirmed the presence of melatonin. The gummies remain available on eBay despite being removed from Amazon.

## Obesity 'difficult to alter' after age five

#### Daily Express Daily Mirror

Researchers from the Academy of Medical Sciences and its Italian counterpart have published a new report calling for more action to tackle early signs of childhood obesity - warning that trajectories on weight "appear difficult to alter after the age of about five", while the period from pregnancy through the child's second birthday represents an "important window of opportunity to set children on a healthy trajectory for life". The report calls for more support for women who are pregnant or considering having children, noting that childhood obesity "has become an urgent public health challenge that is affecting lives today and storing up problems for the future".

#### Youth courts tackle knife crime crisis

#### **London Evening Standard**

Teenage knife crime is a pressing issue in London, with youth courts striving to prevent first-time offenders from escalating into serious criminals. In a poignant case, a 16-year-old boy was caught with a Rambo knife, prompting his distraught parents to express feelings of failure. Magistrate Aneeta Prem emphasised the dangers of carrying knives, warning: "If you carry a knife, that makes you the perpetrator." Referral orders are often used to guide young offenders away from crime, with statistics showing a 25% re-offending rate among those given such orders. However, tragic outcomes still occur, as seen in the case of Kelyan Bokassa, who was murdered by two teens with prior knife convictions. The Government aims to halve knife crime in the next decade, but the reality remains grim, with 83% of teenage homicide victims being stabbed.



Please see attached advice and guidance leaflet on using E-Scooters.



# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

# ENABLEDSCAM

**WHAT ARE** THE RISKS?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is quickly becoming a widely used tool, with lots of positive applications being discussed and developed. Sadly, however, as with most technology tools, there are those who will seek to use it for malicious and dishonest practices, with children and other vulnerable groups particularly at risk.

## PHISHING EMAILS: **BETTER & QUICKER**

Phishing scams – emails designed to trick people into handing over login details or money are not new, and do not rely on AI; however, AI has made them far more dangerous. Criminals can now generate highly convincing emails at speed, mimicking an organisation's tone, branding and language with ease. This makes phishing attempts harder to spot, especially for young people who may not yet know what to look out for.

# ONLINE MARKETPLACE

Online marketplaces are now a common way to buy and sell everything, from second-hand clothes to cars. Criminals are exploiting this by using AI to enhance or completely fake product photos and videos, and pressure buyers into paying deposits or full amounts upfront. These tactics are becoming more advanced, making it vital to pause, check, and verify the sale before parting with any money.

## VOICE IMPERSONATION

Al can now realistically impersonate a person's voice when given a small sample of someone's speech patterns. This is especially concerning where voice has been enabled as an alternative to password-based logins. One such example was the use of AI deepfake audio as part of a fake kidnapping scam: the criminals used an AI voice clone of a 15-year-old to convince her parents she had been kidnapped and elicit a ransom.

## **EMPLOYMENT SCAMS**

Using AI, criminals can create fake online profiles that seem completely real. These synthetic identities can chat with young people about fake job offers, asking for money to secure a visa or paperwork. In 2025, The Guardian reported a scam targeting young people with promises of quick cash, posing as TikTok staff.

# INFLUENCER & INVESTMENT SCAMS



Al tools now make it easy to manipulate video and audio, with technology available that can generate entirely fake content using the likeness of celebrities or influencers. Criminals are using this to create convincing videos of well-known figures promoting fake products or services, which young people can be particularly susceptible to. Cryptocurrency scams are a common tactic, luring people into investing in schemes that do not exist. Once payment is made, the criminal simply disappears with the money.

# ROMANCE SCAMS & SEXTORTION



Al chat bots can now mimic real conversations, often accompanied with realistic fake photos and videos, which makes it easier for criminals to build trust with young people – among other things, this can lead to fraud or sextortion. In 2024, the NCA's CEOP Safety Centre received 380 reports of sextortion. Alarmingly, in the first five months alone, police received an average of 117 monthly reports involving under-18s, showing how serious and targeted this threat has

# Advice for Parents & Educators

Email.

## THINK CRITICALLY

The key to addressing the increasing growth of AI-enabled scams is to think critically and show caution. Inform children that if something is too good to be true, then it probably is. Encourage them to stop and carefully consider what they are seeing and reading before taking any action. For example, if a social media post expresses urgency, proceed with caution; if content seems unusual, even from a known person, it may be that their account has been hacked.

## **USE TRUSTWORTHY SITES AND SERVICES**

Online marketplaces are useful when buying and selling items; however, where possible, encourage children to use reputable companies and their online shopping sites. These companies are likely to have more sophisticated cyber-security safeguards in place, underpinned by consumer legislation, enabling them to control how products and services are displayed and traded on their sites.

## SEEK TO VERIFY

Criminals may breach an influencer's account or spread misinformation and fake content; however, their approach will generally be limited to a single account, site or service. Where possible, show children how to verify information to check its legitimacy before proceeding. Small actions, such as phoning the person who is the subject of a suspicious email, or checking content via an individual or company website or social media sites can make the difference. The greater the risk, the more effort we should expend to confirm whether the information presented is true or false.

## REPORT IT

As the sophistication of scams increases, the likelihood of being tricked by them also increases, especially when not paying attention or acting quickly

It is important that young people know how to report incidents as they happen. Show children how to report their concerns to the social media site, Action Fraud, banks, and other individuals or organisations linked or involved. If you are unsure of the most effective reporting channel, contact Action Fraud.

## Meet Our Expert

Gary Henderson is the Director of IT at Millfield, a large independent boarding school in Somerset, as well as a member of the Digital Futures Group, Vice Chair of the ISC Digital Advisory Group and an Association of Network Managers in Education (ANME) Ambassador.





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## What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

# APPLE IPADS

WHAT ARE THE RISKS? Tablets remain a staple of children's digital lives – and Apple's iPad is by far the most popular model. According to Ofcom, over half of younger children regularly use a tablet to play games, watch online content or access apps. With their broad functionality, iPads can be helpful tools, but without supervision, they may expose children to risks ranging from inappropriate content to screen overuse.

## **COSTLY TO REPAIR**

Unlike some child-friendly tablets, the iPad is not built for rough handling. Its slim design and high cost mean that a drop or spill can result in a costly repair. If a child is using the device regularly, a sturdy case and screen protector are strongly recommended to help prevent accidental damage.

## **DATA PRIVACY**

While Apple is known for strong privacy protections, a recent study found that many iOS apps aimed at children still share personal data. Over 40% of the tested apps sent at least one piece of user information to third parties, raising concerns about advertising and analytics being targeted at underage users.

# INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

The App Store and Safari browser provide almost unrestricted access to online material. Children may stumble upon age-inappropriate content, whether through apps, advertisements or online searches. Even recommended content algorithms can surface unsuitable material.

## BYPASSING RESTRICTIONS



Siri – Apple's voice assistant – can potentially override restrictions, especially with the newer text-based commands introduced through Apple Intelligence. Without safeguards in place, children may inadvertently access inappropriate topics simply by asking a question, bypassing certain filters previously set by adults.

## **SCREEN ADDICTION**



# REDUCED ATTENTION & COGNITIVE IMPACT



Prolonged use of tablets has been linked with reduced memory, slower processing speeds and difficulties in concentrating. Research shows that children who spend excessive time gaming or consuming media on tablets may struggle with language development and executive functioning over time.

# Advice for Parents & Educators

## **ENABLE FAMILY SHARING**

Family Sharing allows you to create a dedicated Apple ID for your child and manage their activity. You can approve purchases, control what content they can access, and set time limits – all done remotely from your own device. It's a simple but powerful way to maintain oversight.

## FILTER APPS, WEBSITES & IN-APP PURCHASES

Parental controls in iOS let you block explicit content in Safari, restrict app downloads, and manage in-app purchase permissions. You can also filter websites automatically to prevent access to adult material and disable the installation of certain app types completely.



## USE SCREEN TIME FEATURES EFFECTIVELY

Tools like Downtime and App Limits can reduce device overuse. Downtime allows you to block access during key times – such as before bed or during homework – while App Limits sets daily time caps on specific games or apps. Alerts help children anticipate when their time is almost up.



## PREVENT UNAPPROVED SPENDING

Children can accidentally (or intentionally) make purchases within apps.
Activating Ask to Buy under Family Sharing ensures you receive a notification to approve any app or in-app purchase. This stops surprise charges and allows you to discuss purchases together before they're made.

## Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is a seasoned technology journalist with over a decade of experience. Formerly a senior cybersecurity reporter at TechCrunch, Carly now writes for publications including WIRED, Forbes, TechRadar, and Tes. With a deep understanding of online safety, she brings a valuable perspective to parenting in the digital age.



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## The rules

Electrically powered scooters are classed as a mechanically propelled vehicle, which means the same rules apply to e-scooters as other motor vehicles. These rules also apply to other personal electric transporters, with the exception of mobility scooters. Electric scooters are treated the same as any other motorised vehicle, this means they must have MOT, Vehicle Excise Duty ("tax") and insurance.

In order to obtain an MOT and insurance to be used legally in public, an e-scooter must be approved by the Vehicle Certification Agency for its construction and use for transport on the public highway.

No such approval exists for privately owned e-scooters. If you are using a private e-scooter on public roads, or footways, the police can seize it and you could be liable for prosecution for traffic offences, and even receive points on your licence.

#### **Risks include:**

- Lack of maintenance affecting braking and tyre performance.
- Charging of devices in the home introduces fire risk, especially if batteries have become damaged or wet.
- Scooters can easily over balance on bumps or holes due to their small wheels.
- Handling can be unpredictable, especially when reacting to hazards.
- There can be a temptation to ride while intoxicated or distracted.



## Renting

A number of rental schemes have been set up in towns and cities in the UK, including Basildon, Chelmsford, Braintree and Colchester in Essex. These schemes allow people to use rented e-scooters legally.

## To use these schemes, you must:

- Be aged 18 or over.
- Hold a UK driving licence.
- Only ride on roads and cycle-paths within the hire scheme areas, pavement riding is not permitted.
- Not carry passengers or allow others to use a scooter you have hired. Wearing a helmet is highly recommended, and riders have the same responsibility to obey traffic laws as anyone driving a car.

E-scooters are motor vehicles, so must not be used by children.





# VISION ZEROS NO ROAD DEATHS

Visit our website to see the latest information, stories and press releases.

saferessexroads.org/visionzero



## Please get involved

- Learn more about safe road use on our website saferessexroads.org
- Like/follow/share on our social media channels

  @saferessexroads
- Talk to family, friends and people in your community about Vision Zero
- Share ideas about how to make improvements where you live with your local elected representatives
- Subscribe to updates from us at: saferessexroads.org/news/
- Submit footage of road traffic offences to our Extra Eyes campaign: saferessexroads.org/extra-eyes/
- To share any ideas you have about how you might be able to help achieve Vision Zero in your community, please contact us at: <a href="mailto:SaferEssexRoads@essexhighways.org">SaferEssexRoads@essexhighways.org</a>

Sign the Vision Zero pledge at saferessexroads.org/visionzero/pledge/

# 10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators

# STAYING SAFE AROUND WATER

Enjoying time in, on, and around water plays a vital role in a young person's overall development, offering a healthy and exhilarating way to have fun. This guide outlines essential safety advice, based on the Royal Life Saving Society UK's Water Safety Code, to help ensure children can enjoy swimming and similar activities safely and responsibly.

LIFEGUARD

# STICK TO LIFEGUARDED AREAS

It's never advisable to enter unsupervised bodies of water, especially alone. Instead, it's considered best practice to accompany children to places with lifeguards, as they will be trained to respond swiftly in emergencies and provide first aid when needed.

# LEARN SIGNS AND FLAGS

When going to a new environment, it's important to research the local area and make children aware of safety signage before entering the water. If visiting the seaside, make sure children are always supervised by an adult and that they know what different beach flags mean, so they're knowledgeable of where and when they can enter the sea.

## STOP AND THINK

Young people should be cautious before entering water, as it's difficult to know what hazards could be underneath. Use the Water Safety Code and encourage children to ask themselves questions such as, "Is the water too deep or too shallow? Are there currents, tides, or underwater objects?" Make sure children know never to enter water from a height, as what lurks below could cause serious injuries.

# CONSIDER WATER TEMPERATURE

Even on hot days, water can be deceptively cold. Tragedies strike when young people experience cold water shock. Never let children enter water quickly; instead, ensure that they enter slowly and carefully to allow their bodies to adjust to the temperature or exit easily if needed.

Although inflatables may seem like a fun idea when visiting locations like the beach, they can float further out from shore and into more dangerous water. It's advisable only to use inflatables in spaces like appropriately managed swimming pools, where they're used in more controlled and supervised environments.

# SUPERVISION IS KEY

For young children, and particularly those under the age of five, it's important for them to be supervised at home, outside and at the pool at all times. It's essential for parents and educators to understand that young children can drown quickly and silently; therefore, anyone supervising them must maintain

constant watch in case they get into difficulty.

When swimming, especially in open water, it's best to teach children to stay within a safe depth. Share advice with them such as only entering water up to a standing depth, and in the case of visiting the beach, swim parallel to shorelines. This will allow a child to stay in control and get out of the water easily.

# KEEP POOLS AND TUBS DRAINED

For parents of young children, a simple way to protect them at home is to keep outdoor spaces and bathrooms tidy after playtime. This includes removing water from paddling pools after use and turning them over, returning lids to hot tubs and taking toys out of baths, so all water can be fully drained from the tub.

# FLOAT AND CALL 999

If a child gets into difficulty in the water, they should try to float on their back, stay calm, and call for help. If a young person sees someone else in trouble, they should dial 999 or 112 immediately, then shout to reassure their friend, encouraging them to float on their back, and letting them know that help is on the way. Children should never enter the water to attempt a rescue or retrieve belongings.

## **TEACH WATER**



Beyond swimming lessons, children should be educated in school on water safety. Use RLSS UK's accredited programme, 'Water Smart Schools', which offers free lesson plans and resources on how to be safe on, near and around water by following the Water Safety Code.

## Meet Our Expert

The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) is a national water safety charity that gives children the chance to enjoy a lifetime of fun in the water, safely. Water safety education provided in schools is vital and, in some instances, could be a child's only opportunity to learn about the



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