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Online Safety

A Guide for Parents and Guardians

Discussing eSafety with a child

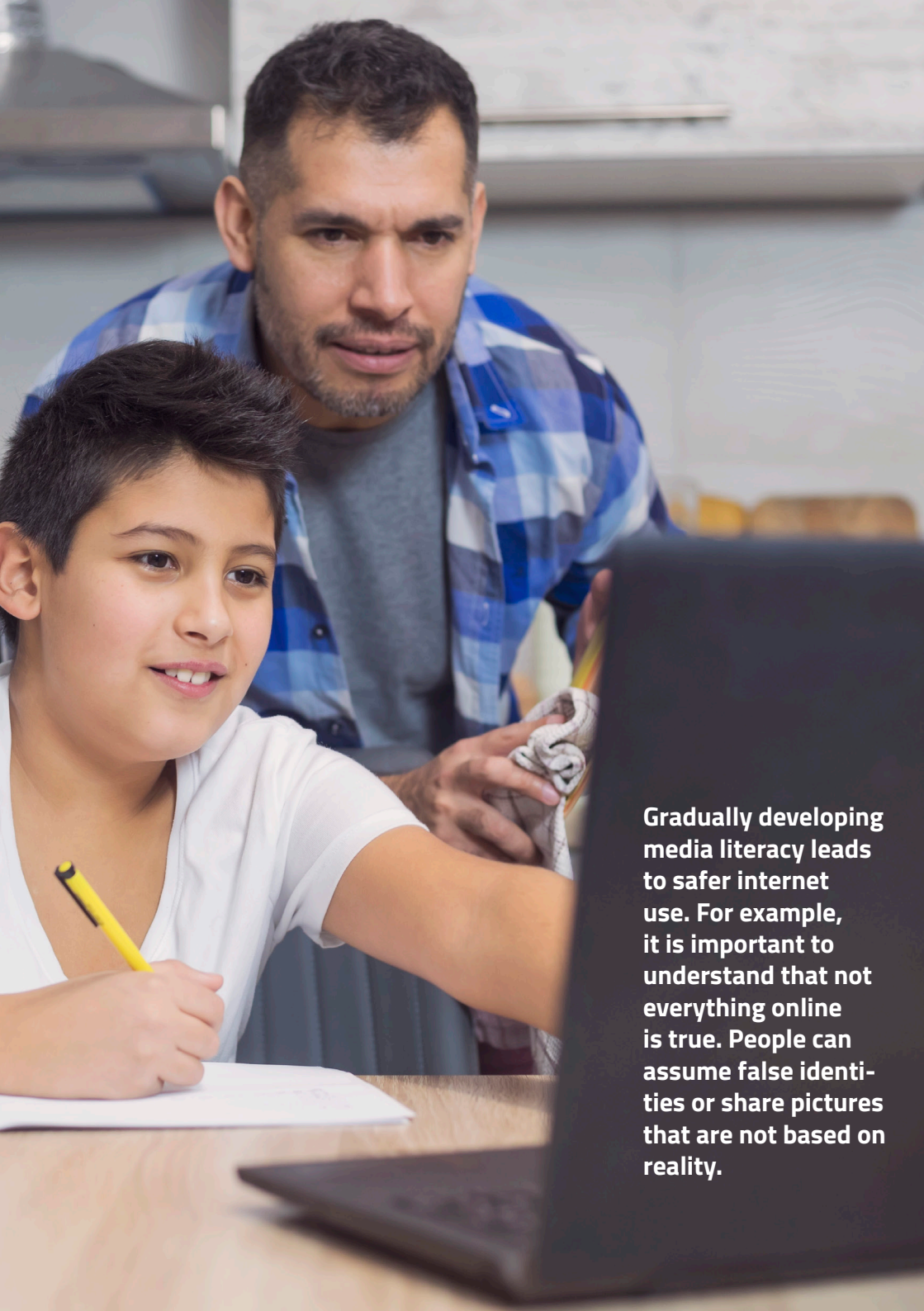
Nearly all school-aged children in Finland use the internet and most of them have their own smartphone. The internet is also used outside home and school. Internet use is an important part of children's culture, communication and learning.

A child needs information and skills to use the internet safely. It is the responsibility of their parents and other educators to offer the child protection, help and support. Internet use should be learned and practised together. Various issues related to internet use may be topical in different families.

This guide will help you to talk about three very important issues with a child aged 6–12: **bullying, sexual harassment and sexual violence, as well as privacy protection.**

A warm relationship between a child and their significant adults provides the best safety.

- Reinforce the child's experience of being respected and accepted.
- Be interested in what the child does online and talk about it as part of day-to-day conversations. Get to know the services and apps the child uses together with them.
- Don't assume that the child knows everything about social media. Often, the child wants to believe that they are more mature and knowledgeable than they really are.
- Encourage them to ask for help and offer it actively yourself.
- Be worthy of the trust when the child turns to you in the event of a problem or emergency: Stay calm and thank the child for telling you about it. Help to clarify or resolve the situation.



Gradually developing media literacy leads to safer internet use. For example, it is important to understand that not everything online is true. People can assume false identities or share pictures that are not based on reality.



Bullying

Bullying can take place wherever there are people. Online bullying can take the form of, say, the sending of mocking or threatening messages, the unauthorised dissemination of pictures, impersonation or exclusion from a shared group. Bullying of this kind is as real as bullying at school. Bullying can also be a criminal offence.

If a child tells you about bullying, believe them. Do not belittle the issue.

The child needs guidance on how to behave with other people online. Messaging doesn't usually allow you to see other people's facial expressions or hear the tone of their voice. This can easily lead to misunderstandings, arguments and hurt feelings.

It may be difficult for a child to understand that other internet users or celebrities are real people with feelings. This is why they may make comments on other people's pictures or videos with what seems like insensitive cruelty.

Provide a good example and treat other people with respect, also online.

Tip

Guide the child on how to take a screenshot of a phone or computer screen. It is an easy way to store messages before they disappear from an app. Storing messages can help prove the bullying

Topics of conversation

- Have you been bullied? If so, what happened? Is the issue still topical?
- Do you know what to do if someone bullies you online? You can start by trying to respond to a nasty message with something like "Stop that, it's not nice". If the bullying continues all the same, there is usually no point in dragging out the conversation. Keep the messages and show them to an adult, so that they can help you.
- Do you know how to block an unwanted person from the online services you use? If not, let's find out how that happens.
- What kind of behaviour do you consider good online?
- Have you seen nasty behaviour or bullying online? If so, where and what kind of nasty behaviour or bullying?
- If you comment on someone else's pictures and videos, what kinds of things is it polite to say? What kinds of thoughts would you be better off keeping to yourself?
- Did you know that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to permanently delete a message or picture published online? You should always think about what you publish. If you're angry, for example, you may want to write something rude to another person, but you usually regret it later.
- Have you behaved towards someone online in a way that wasn't fair or that you regretted later? Has the issue been solved already?
- Have you seen situations in which someone's feelings got hurt online because of a misunderstanding? Was it solved?



Sexual harassment and sexual violence

When a child uses the internet without an adult, you should tell them that there are also people online who hurt other people. Sexual harassment is unfortunately common in popular social media services. A small part of children have also become the victims of sexual violence. The perpetrators can be adults or minors.

Online sexual harassment can take the form of sharing sexually charged comments, pictures, page links and videos, for example.

Sexual violence, on the other hand, means acts which violate a child's sexual integrity. Such acts can include harassment, sexual advances, touching and coercing or forcing the child to perform sexual acts.

Online, the sexual acts may take place through messages or webcams. The child can also be persuaded into meeting the perpetrator. Persuading the child to talk about or perform sexual acts can begin immediately or after lengthy messaging.

It makes no difference if the child has agreed to the acts. The responsibility always lies with the perpetrator. Shame is nevertheless a common reason for children not telling an adult what they have experienced. It is the adult's responsibility to give the child the words they need to talk about the matter and to remove the unnecessary shame by creating a safe conversational atmosphere.

Always contact the police if you become aware of children being approached with sexual intent. Such persuasion is in itself an offence. Even if your own child gets off with a just a scare, the perpetrator is likely to approach other children too.

Topics of conversation

- Have you received messages from an adult you don't know or a young person clearly older than yourself? Always tell such things to an adult you trust, so that you can check it together.
- Always tell an adult if someone whom you haven't met before suggests that you meet outside the internet. You can talk about the situation and the adult can come with you if the meeting sounds nice.
- Do not contact strangers yourself before asking your family's adults for advice.
- If you receive messages of a sexual nature, do not delete them. Show them to an adult immediately. Messages like this can include pictures of other people's bums, penises or vaginas, someone asking you to send a photo of yourself without any clothes on or questions on what you know about sex.
- It is never too late to tell an adult. Even if you've already been chatting with a suspicious person, you should tell an adult about it as soon as possible. You should also tell an adult if a previously nice person starts behaving oddly or disturbingly.
- Do not send any messages, pictures or links related to sex to other people. Even if you consider such a message a joke, the other person may feel like it's harassment. Spreading nude or revealing photos of other children online can be a criminal act.
- If you hear that a friend has come across unpleasant sex things online, tell an adult about it and encourage your friend to tell about it too, at home or to a teacher, for example.
- You do know that if a child has become the victim of harassment or violence, the blame never lies with the victim but with the doer?



Data protection and privacy

It is important to learn to protect data and privacy online. If the child does not understand the difference between private and public, the risk is that they may share personal data or secrets in public by accident.

Are the settings okay?

Check that the apps used by the child do not collect or share any more data than is necessary. Many apps, for example, send information about the user's location, if this is not prevented. The webcam of a computer or mobile device should always be covered when it is not in use.

What are our rules on publishing pictures and video online?

Families may have different rules. You should never publish information or pictures of other families' children online without asking permission from both the child and their parents. Publishing information and pictures online always involves the possibility that someone re-shares it. So if there is something that you would never want outsiders to see or get their hands on, do not publish or share it online.

What can you tell others about yourself?

If the child uses messaging apps or gaming chats, are you aware of the members of these messaging or chat groups? You should never give personal data that may help identify you to strangers. Such personal data include full names and home addresses.

Respect your own and other people's privacy!

Do not give your passwords to others and do not try to get other people to give you their passwords. You should always ask for permission before publishing a picture or some other information of another person. You may not publish any lies or such information, pictures or videos of anyone which could cause them trouble or make them the target of mocking.

Can I read a child's messages?

You may sometimes feel tempted to check on a child's messaging. Be that as it may, the secrecy of communications also applies to children. Open discussion and voluntary showing must be the principal way of finding out what the child does online. However, if a guardian is seriously concerned about the child's well-being and there is no other way to investigate the matter, the child's private messages may be read without permission. Even in such cases, however, you should not go about it in secret, but be frank about your justification for doing so.

Adult, protect your own data as well

Do the family's adults and children use the same device? It is worth checking that an adult's credit card or Google account, for example, is not connected to a user account used by a child. Otherwise you run the risk of children making – either by accident or on purpose – unauthorised purchases or comments under your name on, say, YouTube videos.



Stay safe!

Free help and support

The phone and online services of the **Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL)** also provide confidential and anonymous support in matters related to eSafety. You can contact these services over the phone or by writing or chatting. All contacting will be responded to by volunteers trained by the MLL and supported by a trained professional of MLL.

For parents and caregivers: www.mll.fi/vanhemmille, tel. 0800 92277 (in Finnish)

For children and youth: www.nuortennetti.fi, tel. 116 111 (in Finnish)

Save the Children provides information and support on questions related to children and the digital media:

www.pelastakaalapset.fi/lapsetnetissa

www.pelastakaalapset.fi/digi

The Hotline is a service which allows anyone to report online activities related to the sexual abuse or mistreatment of children.

www.pelastakaalapset.fi/en/our-work-in-finland/child-protection-and-finnish-hotline/

If a child has become the victim of a crime, contact **the police** at:

www.poliisi.fi/en

Information, videos and tests on eSafety:

www.vaestoliitto.fi/nuoret/turvallisuus/media/ (in Finnish)

General information and tasks on media literacy and media activities is available at:

www.mediataitokoulu.fi (in Finnish)

This brochure was produced by the **National Audiovisual Institute**. Our statutory duties include the promotion of media education and a media environment safer for children.