

Offensive internet sites

There is no central body that monitors or approves content or activity on the internet before it goes online. This means that some content may be against the law or it may upset people or cause other problems.

This sort of material could be on websites or in chat rooms or newsgroups. A very common way to receive offensive material is through **spam**. Spam means unasked-for emails sent to a large number of email addresses, often advertising illegal products or pornography. You can install software to filter out spam – see Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Pornography

Pornography is also known as **adult content**. It's against the law to publish some pornographic material in the UK if it's considered to be **obscene** or **extreme**. It's also a criminal offence to sell pornography over the internet with no means of making sure the customer is over 18. If you come across this, report it to the police. Otherwise, it's not against the law for pornography to be available online.

You can install software to prevent your children coming across pornography on the internet, for example, filtering programs, rating systems, safe search engines and monitoring systems. For more information about software, visit the BBC website - see Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

In many workplaces, there are policies that say that employees are not allowed to look at pornographic sites on a work computer. If you've got one of these policies, you can be disciplined or sacked if you look at pornography online at work.

Child pornography

It's against the law to take, possess, show, distribute or advertise indecent images of children. This mainly means any images of children who seem to be under 18 years of age and who are involved in sexual activity or posed in such a way as to be sexually provocative. It's against the law to download these images from the internet and also to store them or print them out. If you know someone has downloaded child pornography from the internet, contact the police. Or you can report them to the **Internet Watch Foundation** - see Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Grooming

Grooming is where an adult uses the internet to gain the trust of children or young people with the intention of abusing them sexually. Grooming is against the law. If you want more information about how to spot the signs of grooming, visit the website of the children's charity Action for Children at: www.actionforchildren.org.uk. If you think someone you know is being groomed or if you're the victim of grooming, contact the police or Childline - see Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Obscene content

Obscene content is against the law. Examples of obscene content could be images of rape or torture. Report obscene material to the police or to the Internet Watch Foundation - see Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Racist material

Racist material is against the law. It's a criminal offence to stir up racial hatred on the grounds of colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins. Report racist material to the police or to the Internet Watch Foundation - see Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Morbid websites

There are some websites based outside the UK that publish morbid material like beheadings. If you are disturbed by these images, you could consider complaining to the Internet Service Provider (ISP) in the country concerned. You could also install software onto your computer that would block out these sites - see Further help at the end of this fact sheet. If you download morbid images from the internet and show them to other people, this could be against the law.

Chat rooms

A chat room is an internet site where a number of different people can communicate at the same time. Chat rooms can be misused because you can't see the person you're chatting with. It's quite easy to fake an identity online, so you can't be certain who you're communicating with. When using a chat room, keep your personal details to yourself and don't give out personal details of friends or family either. Use a nickname when you chat online. Be wary of going to meet someone you've been talking to in a chat room. Also, it's not usually a good idea to send photographs of yourself to someone over the internet. If you witness or experience improper activity in a chat room, contact the police.

Children and the internet

If you're concerned about children's access to the internet, you can install parental control software. This monitors which websites your child can visit and also who your child can send emails to or get emails from. It can block access to all or some chat rooms. You may want your children to use 'moderated' chat rooms, where a specially-trained adult is present whenever the chat room is open. The adult will step in to stop any improper communications. For more information about software, visit the BBC's website - see Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Online bullying, harassment and cyber-stalking

Although it isn't very common to be bullied or harassed by email or in chat rooms, it can happen. Remember, it's not your fault if you get unpleasant messages. If you're a child or young person, make sure you tell someone you trust about these messages, for example, your parents or a teacher. Make a record of the dates and times you receive any threatening emails and report them to the police. Change your email address if you keep getting nasty messages. Also, you can report the emails to the Internet Service Provider (ISP) where the email came from. Address the complaint to abuse@ISPname, for example, abuse@yahoo.com.

If you are concerned about online bullying, Bullying UK has a useful website with lots of information to help you (www.bullying.co.uk).

Online gambling

It's against the law for online gambling websites to allow anyone under 18 to gamble. It's also against the law for someone under 18 to gamble with money, credit cards or debit cards. However many online gambling websites do not make the necessary checks to stop under-18s from gambling. If you're a parent whose child has lost money by gambling under-age, you can report it to the police. However, the police won't be able to take any action unless the website is based in the UK – and many of them aren't. There's parental control software that can be installed to prevent under-18s from gambling online - see Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Some people may feel their online gambling is out-of-control. There's a useful website which may help with further advice and information about problems with gambling (www.gamcare.org.uk).

Further help

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Citizens Advice Bureaux give free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to help you solve problems. To find your nearest CAB, including those that give advice by e-mail, click on [nearest CAB](#), or look under C in your phone book.

The Internet Watch Foundation They work with the government, the police and internet companies to have illegal content removed from the internet. You can report illegal material on their website at: www.iwf.org.uk. You can make a report without giving your name.

Childline If you're a child or young person who's being groomed or abused through the internet, contact Childline on: 0800 1111.

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

If you're concerned about a child being abused through internet, in England and Wales you could contact the NSPCC at: www.nspcc.org.uk or phone 0800 800 500. In Scotland, you could contact the child protection information line at www.infoscotland.com/childprotection or phone: 0800 022 3222.

Action for Children This children's charity produces a website with useful information for parents about children and the internet at: www.actionforchildren.org.uk.

The BBC They have useful information about software programmes to safeguard children's access to the internet and to filter out unwanted emails (spam) at: www.bbc.co.uk/webwise.

The Home Office They have produced a website for children about safety and the internet at: www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

The police - Search for details of your local police force in England and Wales at: <http://local.direct.gov.uk> and in Scotland at: www.scottish.police.uk.

Other fact sheets on Adviceguide that might help

- The internet – using other peoples material
- Fraud on the internet
- Buying over the internet

This fact sheet is produced by [Citizens Advice](#), an operating name of The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as a full statement of the law. The information applies to England, Wales and Scotland.

This fact sheet was last updated on 7 January 2011 and is reviewed on a monthly basis. If it is some time since you obtained this fact sheet, please contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau to check it is still correct. Or visit our website - www.adviceguide.org.uk - where you can download an up-to-date copy.