A parents' guide to new media technologies

GET WITH IT!

understanding and sharing the new media technologies with your children

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1. INTRODUCTON: The world of new media

This booklet is about helping you

The world of new media has come fast upon us. Things seemed a lot simpler twenty years ago. Back then there was just the television, the radio, the telephone and the stereo. Now a mobile phone tries to be all of those things at the same time.

Yet while some things have changed, some things remain the same. Children have the same desire to communicate, to socialise, to be entertained and to protect their privacy as much as they ever did. So when it comes to new technologies, such as the computer, iPod or the mobile phone, the same rules apply. The diary we kept under the mattress as a teenager has been replaced by text messages or e-mails and we need to respect this privacy.

This booklet gives you an overview of what new technologies can do. They are not something to fear but, rather, to embrace. They are no more difficult to use than other technologies when you first got them, e.g. a microwave oven or a video recorder. You did not need to know what every button did – just which buttons you needed to make things happen. It is the same with the personal computer, the internet or mobile phones. They can help you do things and they are playing a significant role in shaping your children's lives – just like the television did in our childhoods.

Like television in the 1960s, new media technologies can offer you and your family fresh opportunities and experiences. They can allow you to shop at a supermarket without leaving your house. They can allow you to pay your bills, check your bank balance and purchase books, music or films, all from the comfort of your home. They can teach you new things at the touch of a button. They can store your entire music collection. They can play your favourite film on demand. They can put you in contact with family and friends anytime of the day

anywhere in the world. Computers and the internet can make the world a smaller place – not a scarier one – because they offer people around the world the chance to talk, exchange ideas and learn.

Yes, they can be used by people whose intentions may be harmful, even criminal, but that is the same for all developments. In the case of new media, it is mainly the exception rather than the rule. Certainly, we worry that our children will meet the wrong kinds of people online. We are concerned that they will see inappropriate content online, but we can protect them best by sharing their new media experiences.

The risk from paedophiles has sometimes over-shadowed the other issues of child safety. Paedophiles remain a real concern, but when children are online they are at greater risk of becoming victims of marketing scams or of running up debt through premium services. This guide is not about making you, as parents, more afraid of your children's new media world. It is here to make you more aware of how new media technologies work and how you can help your children enjoy and explore them. While the focus of this guide is the internet, we also look at digital media, from digital television to mobile phones. The guide will help parents to ensure their children use and enjoy the wonders of technology wisely.

By taking an interest in the technologies your children use, you can learn with them and know what they are doing online.

The message is simple, get involved, **"Get With IT!"**

The opportunities of new media

Technology has helped to bring the world closer together. Airplanes can transport us faster. Communication technologies can put anyone, anywhere, in touch 24 hours a day. Geography, for day-to-day business and communication, is not the obstacle it once was. But this globalising effect has also brought difficult challenges. Some of our long-held social values are changing and sometimes breaking down. Certain types of pornography that are illegal in this country have become easier to access over the internet.

Now that media such as music, film and games have been digitised, they can be sent over the internet or a mobile phone with relative ease. They no longer need to exist in hard copy on a disc or a tape. New technologies have become more advanced: mobile phones offer access to the internet, while 'wireless' zones allow laptops to have mobile internet access. More and more young people use the internet as a mobile tool to communicate while on the move.

The internet's content is not as easy to regulate as the programming of radio and television. Irish television stations have to meet certain standards in broadcasting, especially with programmes aimed at children. The films you see in Irish cinemas or on DVD have been classified as suitable for particular age groups. But it is difficult to regulate the standards of content on the internet. This is because the internet is not owned or run by a single entity or governing body. It is simply a collection of computers around the world that are networked together and make their content available to each other. It is like a club that is open to all – all you need is a computer and an internet connection. The same is true of satellite television. Satellites can beam television programming from other countries and by-pass the regulation and standards of Irish broadcasting. Anyone with a satellite dish can pick up these programmes and little can be done to prevent it.

Whatever regulations are put in place regarding new media content, the best line of control rests with parents. You could decide not to have computers or tools with internet access around your children, just as some people prefer to bring up their children without television. But, for most of us, the advantages of having the internet as part of our lives far out-weigh the risks attached to being online.

So how does a parent make sense of all this? Start by talking to your children about how they use and enjoy new media technologies, from video games, DVDs and 3G phones to the home or school computer. **Ask them questions.** Find out what they know and let them share their knowledge with you. Talk about your concerns and let them tell you about their experiences. Often, children are the best technical support we have in the home. Let them guide you through their technology.

The more you know, the more you can support them.

If you do want to learn more, local colleges and community centres run computer courses for adults. All public libraries have free internet and computer access, and librarians are trained to help you with them.

Talk to your children about how they use the technology – whether it is a mobile phone, a computer, or a games console. Your children will enjoy the fact that they can teach you something and it is an opportunity to share activities with them. Don't take their word about a game being harmless. Play it with them and check it for yourself. Share the experience.

Encourage children to talk about anything in the new media world that makes them feel uncomfortable. Talk to them without being judgemental. Children have more opportunities than we did to see and hear things in the modern media-saturated world. By taking the time to discuss these things with them, you can help them handle some of the day-to-day media content they experience, whether violent or sexual in nature. As a parent, you will not want your

children to see anything disturbing. You can even create rules and boundaries to help that. But in the modern visual age, it is also good to make sure they are talking to you about everything they do and experience in the media, whether online or offline.

It is better to prepare them than to ignore the possibility that they may see or hear potentially harmful media content.

The real worry for parents is **not knowing** what their child is accessing when they are on the internet or playing video games. Do you know exactly what technologies are available in your household, in the internet café, or in friends' houses? Do you know what those technologies do? This booklet will help you to understand how they work, and will help you to use, enjoy, and sometimes monitor them.

There are simple steps you can take. Keep the computer in a busy room in the house, not hidden away in a bedroom, so you have an idea of how long your children are spending online. For young children, checking e-mails is wise. You can look at the computer's history files to check the suitability of websites and chatrooms they have visited. If a young child has a mobile phone, you should know who they communicate with and how much money they spend on call credit. Certain mobile phones have a feature that allows children to call only pre-programmed numbers, e.g. home or family numbers. Also, some mobile operators offer a service called dual access – parents are issued with a special password that they can use to get information on the calls and texts made and received on their child's mobile phone account. Check with the relevant mobile operator to see if they offer such a service.

As video games become more violent and sexual in content you can check their suitability by the classification on the cover. If it does not have a classification, you can check if the game title is suitable at **www.pegi.info**. However, this is a guide only and you should still monitor the games' content. Ask advice when you buy it. Check with other parents whose children have used the games.

Most importantly, you need to **set boundaries.** This can be done in consultation with your children so they understand the reasons behind the rules. Boundaries could include when and where the internet can be accessed and for how long. **Children should be warned never to give out personal information on the internet, especially their full name and contact details.** Neither should they agree to meet an online friend in real life without your permission and direct involvement. You should discourage young children from clicking on retail sites and warn them to ignore the scams that can appear in e-mails or pop-ups. Don't leave credit cards lying around; the temptation may be too much. Doing so could prove much more costly than your child taking money from a handbag or wallet for sweets. It is unlikely that a credit card company will accept any excuses if the product is delivered to your home address.

Generally, you need a credit card or a Laser card to shop online. Some companies have begun offering online payment services to teenagers who are too young to own a credit card. The system works similar to credit on a prepay mobile phone. The teenager registers with an online payments company, which issues them with a special customer card and account. The teenager can then bring the card to a shop and buy a voucher for the account, e.g. a €10 voucher. This tops up the account with credit, again much the same way as buying credit for a prepay mobile phone account. The teenager can use the credit to buy goods and services from an online retailer. If your children do use such services, you should monitor the types of goods and services they are buying online and the amount of money they are spending. You should also be aware that some companies charge a fee every time a user buys credit for an account.

Digital media holds many exciting opportunities for children. But, to act safely online, children should be told about the reality of how, sometimes, things can go wrong. Ask questions and share their technology **know-how.** Children are used to playing safe on the street and knowing what hazards are there. It is not that different online.

In this booklet, when we discuss young children we mean age ten and under. Older children can develop more responsibility for their own media use. However, children are different so a parent's own judgement is vital. The advice in this booklet should be taken simply as a guide.

If you do come across content on the internet that you suspect to be illegal, please report it using the confidential www.hotline.ie service.

Get involved. Share their new media world and find out how they are using the internet, the mobile phone, digital games or DVDs ... Get with IT!

2. NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

- Convergence
- DVD players and recorders
- The personal computer
- The internet
- The games console
- The mobile phone
- Digital television
- Other technologies

CONVERGENCE

You may have heard some people talk about 'convergence' in media technology. Convergence means a 'coming together'. As media technologies become more powerful and sophisticated, they can do many jobs. A few years ago, you would have needed separate devices to listen to music, take a picture, surf the internet, watch a video clip, and make a phone call. Today you can perform all of these functions from a single device. That's convergence. The chances are you may have such a device in your pocket right now. It's called a mobile phone.

Mobile phones aren't the only devices that are being affected by convergence. A portable games console can now play music and films. Portable digital music players such as the iPod can play video and are gaining the ability to connect to your television through a

device called iTV. Modern PCs can play DVDs and music, connect to the internet, allow you to send text messages and make voice calls and even act as a television if you buy a special 'TV tuner' device.

Parents should be aware of convergence in media technologies because it affects what their children can do with them. If your child has a digital music player, you will want to know that the music they play on it is suitable for their age group. But will you know to check that the video content is suitable as well? Similarly, mobile phones can take and store photographs that mightn't be appropriate for young children. Children can access instant messaging services through their mobile phones, which can make it more difficult for parents to monitor with whom they communicate.

As you read through this booklet, you should remember that the boundaries between media devices are breaking down. A device's main function may be to play music; but if you don't know that it can also store and play video, you won't be in a position to check that your children are using this function in a safe and suitable way.

Educate yourself about your children's media technologies. Find out what exactly the technologies do and how your children are using them.

DVD PLAYERS and RECORDERS

The video recorder is a common device in the home. Although they are considered analogue or old technology nowadays, they were one of the first media technologies that people found difficult to master. The average video recorder has many functions beyond play, rewind, forward and record. Through the remote control, users can set the time and pre-record programmes of their choice. For many, this is where the difficulties start. How many of us still have those flashing zeroes on our video recorder? How many of us have left the instruction manual in the box where we found it? DVD players have emerged to replace video recorders, but similar problems remain.

A DVD player is the digital equivalent of the video playing function of your video recorder. Instead of tape, the film is "digitally" recorded onto a **Digital Versatile Disc** (or DVD). The word versatile – the "V" in DVD – gives you a clue as to what makes DVDs so different from video tapes. DVDs are "versatile". As well as being able to play a film, you can pause it without a shake or jitter. You can select scenes immediately without having to forward or rewind. You can watch DVD extras and see out-takes, deleted scenes, alternative endings, listen to voice-over commentaries or watch documentaries about the film; all of this from one small, shiny disc.

Some DVD players are also recorders. Like a video recorder, they allow you to record television programmes or home videos onto blank DVDs. Some DVD recorders have another recording device called a **hard drive**. This is located inside the DVD recorder and cannot be taken out. You record programmes directly onto the hard drive, watch them when you are ready, and delete them when you are finished. Deleting old programmes frees up space to record other programmes. The hard drive has a memory, in the same way that a computer hard drive has memory. The size of the memory limits the hours of programming you can record, e.g. an 80 gig hard drive could let you record 125 hours of programming. The hard drive is a re-usable recording device. You can record, watch, and delete programmes as often as you like. You don't have to buy anything else to keep recording. It is not like the video recorder, where you needed a steady supply of blank cassettes. With a hard drive, the only limit on recording is the size of the memory, e.g. you cannot record more than 125 hours of programming. Of course, if you reach that limit, you simply delete programmes you no longer want and you'll have space to record again.

Blu-ray and HD DVD

The VHS video cassette was a format used mainly to play films and television programmes in the home. In the late 1990s, the DVD emerged as a format to replace VHS. Now, two new formats are emerging with the potential to replace DVD. They are called Blu-ray and HD DVD (Hi-Definition DVD).

Blu-ray and HD DVD are separate formats and they are engaged in a format war. This means they are vying with each other to replace DVD and become the standard format for watching films at home. They work more or less the same way as a DVD. They store films on discs. The disc is inserted into a player and the film is viewed on a television. The main difference from DVD is that they hold more information on each disc. This allows Blu-ray and HD DVD to produce a sharper picture than a normal DVD and to hold more content, e.g. film extras and commentaries.

The rivalry between Blu-ray and HD DVD echoes a famous format war from the late 1970s, between Betamax and VHS. Both were a type of video cassette, but you couldn't play a Betamax cassette in a VHS machine, and vice versa. VHS won the format war and its video cassettes became the standard way to watch films at home until the DVD came along.

There was no format war around DVD, because the big technology companies agreed a single format and the Hollywood studios agreed to release films on it.

However, no agreement was reached for the next generation of DVD, which is why we have a format war between Blu-ray and HD DVD. Both are new technologies to the market, so there is no way yet to tell which format will win. But be aware that the formats are incompatible. Many people saw their Betamax machines and tapes become obsolete when VHS won the video format war. Something similar could happen with the new generation of Blu-ray and HD DVD, although a company called LG has developed a machine that will play both types of disc.

Of course, you don't have to buy either of these formats at this early stage of their development. Your DVDs will continue to work for years, just as your old video cassettes did.

But if you do go with one of the new formats, you will need a **Hi-Definition** television to appreciate the improvement in picture quality. Hi-Definition televisions work in a similar way to standard or analogue televisions. The key difference is they produce sharper pictures because they can fit more detail into the images on the screen (they have a higher resolution).

THE PERSONAL COMPUTER

The personal computer (or PC) is of great educational benefit to you and your child. It can help with homework. It can offer a world of knowledge through educational CD-ROMs and the internet. It can let you keep in touch with friends and family abroad. It can help young children with their literacy and numeracy.

For older children, it can develop their interests in a range of subjects, from music to sport, astronomy to marine life. It can keep them occupied and entertained playing games or writing stories.

The PC can be used for both business and entertainment. In some ways, the PC is like a television, a games console, a jukebox, a personal organiser, a library and a filing cabinet all rolled into one. This is what makes it so exciting and so baffling.

PCs are also becoming much smaller and portable. A portable PC is called a **laptop.** There are also pocket PCs, which are about the size of a large mobile phone and are used mainly by business people.

Most PCs (equipped with speakers) can play music CDs, store music digitally, play video games and DVDs. They can also connect to the internet and download and play digital music, films and short cartoons. **E-mail** and **instant messaging** services can give your child access to other children and offer them the chance to have a pen-pal anywhere in the world. In short, it offers them experiences that we could only have dreamed of in our childhood.

But as a parent, even without an internet connection, you need to be aware that inappropriate content, film and music can also be used on the computer. You need to be involved in what your children are watching, listening to or playing.

THE INTERNET

The **internet** is a collection of computers spread over the world and connected to each other to exchange information. It is not unlike the telephone network, but it can do a lot more than just voice calls. It comes from the combination of the words "**Inter**national" and "**Net**work". When your child goes **"online"**, they are connecting to the internet. Although the World Wide Web is, strictly-speaking, just a part of the internet, the terms "web", "internet" and "Net" are often used to describe the same thing. In reality, the **web** is a vast and constantly expanding collection of **websites** on the internet. It contains knowledge and information spanning every possible theme or subject.

Online: when you are connected to a network, usually the internet.

Some computers connected to the internet contain (or host) websites with information about a particular subject. A website is a site on the World Wide Web that holds information. For example, the website for the Internet Advisory Board is www.iab.ie. This is its **web address**. By typing the web address into your PC, you will be brought immediately to the Internet Advisory Board's website.

Confused?

Perhaps think of it this way. If you can imagine a group of houses in a village where all the front doors are linked together by a string, that string would form a "web" around the village of "connected" houses. If Mr. O'Brien in Number 10 knew something that you wanted to find out, you would follow the string to his address. Likewise, the Web consists of a "web of sites" (or websites) that are connected together by a string called the internet. By typing in a certain address, you are brought to the website that lives at that address and you can view the information available on that website.

Surfing the Net

You may have heard the phrase **"surfing the Net"**. "Surfing" is the term used when you look at or "browse" various websites on the Net. Literally, you are surfing over a tide of information. The main program for exploring the Web through a personal computer is the "browser". The most popular **"browser"** used on PCs is **Microsoft's Internet Explorer.**

However, there are other "browsers", such as *Safari* for Apple Macs, the *Opera* web-browser, and Mozilla's *Firefox.* It is in a "browser" that you type the address of the website you want to visit. Website addresses you may have heard of are the Irish government's Information on Public Services website (www.citizensinformation.ie), the Aer Lingus website (www.aerlingus.com), or the government website (www.irlgov.ie).

Broadband

Broadband is a high-speed internet connection that allows you to connect to the internet and to stay online all the time. With a broadband connection you can stream (watch) videos, download music or large email files, send instant messages, and play online games. Broadband opens up a whole range of activities that would be difficult or impossible over a slow internet connection.

Before broadband became available in Ireland a few years ago, most internet connections were known as 'dial-up'. The computer used a device called a modem to 'dial' telephone lines and connect to the internet. Only a small amount of information could be carried at a time. You were generally charged for the amount of time you spent online.

Broadband carries information across different technologies, such as Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL), fibre, wireless or satellite. Broadband carries more information faster and so allows you to do more sophisticated things online. Unlike dial-up, you are usually charged a flat-fee for broadband access. If your broadband subscription is

€30 a month, you pay that amount regardless of how much or how little time you spend online.

Broadband is available in most urban areas in Ireland, although it can still be difficult to get in rural areas. For information on the broadband services available in your area, you can check www.broadband.gov.ie.

Search-engines

A common method of surfing the internet is to use **search-engines.** Among the more popular search-engines are Google (www.google.com) and Yahoo (www.yahoo.com). Both have child-friendly search engines that can filter out adult orientated content. These engines are like a phone book of web addresses. If you are looking for certain information – for example, dinosaurs or a recipe for chicken soup – you just type these words into the search-engine, click **search**, and it will search out the Web addresses on the Net that may have the information you are looking for. These will come up as a list of websites containing the words you searched for. In the **Parents' questions** section, we deal with precautions that you can take to protect your child from coming across inappropriate material. The **Useful websites** section has a list of child-friendly search-engines.

E-mail

One of the most popular uses of the internet is e-mail. E-mail stands for Electronic Mail and is a way of sending messages from one computer to another over the internet. Messages are composed in special e-mail programs (such as Microsoft's *Outlook Express* or Apple's *Mail*) or on websites such as www.hotmail.com. To send an e-mail, you will need a special e-mail address, such as paul@ireland.com or paul@eircom.net.

The easiest types of e-mail addresses to obtain are webmail. When you sign up to these websites, they will give you an e-mail address such as johnsmith@gmail.com. The @ symbol stands for "at" – it means johnsmith at the gmail.com address. Once you have an email address, you are ready to send and receive e-mail. Check

and compare costs and mail box storage on e-mail accounts before signing up for one. Above all, make sure you have virus checking software on your computer and your e-mail account. See also segment on viruses and spyware.

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is the term being used to describe a new wave of internet applications. The emphasis of Web 2.0 is on people communicating with each other online and creating their own content. In the early years of the internet, most people used it as they did the traditional mass media of television, newspapers and books: they would go to a website and simply view what someone else had created. The main way people interacted online was through e-mail.

Viewing websites and sending e-mails remain important parts of internet activity, but the newer Web 2.0 applications put the user on the centre stage. If the users are not communicating or creating content, there is nothing to do or see. This can be seen from the two main activities to emerge from Web 2.0: **social-networking** and **user-generated content.**

Social-networking websites encourage communication among a community of users online. People register with a social-networking website and add profiles of themselves. The profile gives details on their age, gender, education, job, and hobbies. Users can post photographs and videos and keep blogs (like an online diary) to give a flavour of who they are as a person. They then begin to communicate with other people in the social-networking community. Profiles can be made public, so they can be seen by anyone who uses the website. Or they can be kept private, so only invited friends can see the profile. Two of the most popular social-networking websites are Bebo and MySpace, especially among younger people. Other websites, such as Plaxo, are geared towards social-networking among adults.

User-generated content websites are where users create and publish content online so other people can see it and make comments. On traditional websites, e.g. Ireland.com, media professionals create the majority of the content. You can read the content, but you have little ability to change it or add material of your own. On user-generated content websites, such as YouTube, the community of users create the content. You or your children could make a video and post it on YouTube. Then other people could view it and make comments.

Such websites are made possible because the technology to create content has become cheap and accessible, e.g. digital camcorders and camera phones. A few years ago, only media professionals would have had access to the technology to make a high-quality video. Today, such technologies are available to the public at relatively low cost.

Social-networking and user-generated content websites are popular among children and teenagers. For the most part, they are a fun way for young people to be creative online and to communicate with their friends. But parents should be aware of the risks attached to such websites.

Social-networking websites, like chatrooms, have attracted online predators – grown-ups who try to make contact with children, often by pretending to be children themselves (See messaging and chatrooms below). If your child has a profile on a social-networking website, you should check how much personal information they have put online. You should also find out with whom they communicate online. As a general rule, children should be discouraged from giving out personal information online. They should also talk to you immediately if a stranger online tries to communicate with them, **especially if the stranger tries to meet up with them in real life.**

If your child uses a user-generated content website you should look at the kinds of content that they publish on it. They could, for example, be breaking copyright law if they take a clip from a television programme and post it online. With camera phones and digital camcorders, your child could be making videos and posting them online. Check that they are appropriate.

Reputable social-networking and user-generated content websites will try to stop young children from registering as members. This could mean that you have to be 13 years or older to register. But registration systems are not fool-proof. There have been many cases where younger children have been able to register as users. **While most websites will try to eliminate users who are too young or who post inappropriate content, you should not depend on this to keep your children safe.** Know what they are doing online. If a young child wants to use such a website, get them to explain why. If you allow them to register, check their online activity regularly.

Instant Messaging and Chatrooms

Because the internet connects PCs, it allows people to "chat" by using programs such as Yahoo *Messenger* and Microsoft's *Instant Messenger*. It is similar to **texting** except it is done on the PC and the text conversation can be followed on the screen. These programs offer a cheap form of communication for people – especially young people.

There are also certain websites that have **chatroom** forums. These allow people to "post up" messages and converse with each other. These forums are often dedicated to certain topics or themes, such as "movies" or "soap operas". Conversations are called "threads". When a conversation or "thread" becomes personally abusive, it is called "flaming".

Do's and don'ts of chatrooms for children: Never reveal name, address, phone number or password. Never reply to nasty or suggestive messages. Never meet anyone offline without your parents being with you.

Chatrooms have also become the mainstay for *"internet dating"*, where individuals make contact online and may decide to meet in real life. Young children should be discouraged from using chatrooms without direct parental supervision. A real danger in recent times has been the threat of paedophiles/sex-offenders luring children to a real life meeting.

Blogging

The term **"Blog"** comes from a combination of the words Web and Log. They are basically online diaries and the act of maintaining one is called "blogging". Certain websites allow you to set up a blog for free. Why would anyone set one up? Many newspaper journalists have their own blogs to get their articles into the public domain immediately and get feedback from members of the public. Young children, under ten, should not be encouraged to keep blogs. Older children should work with you if they maintain a blog. Talk to your children about the pros and cons if they decide to keep one. The same considerations should apply if your children also decide to design and maintain their own personal websites. The more involved you are the better, but give them space to learn, be creative and discover. As they grow up respect their privacy.

Peer-to-Peer

Another popular use of the internet is called **"peer-to-peer"** file swapping. These programs allow you to swap or share files from your own computer to another over the internet. There are also some commercial peer-to-peer applications that allow users to buy music and video content over the internet. In 2000, a high-profile case was brought against Napster, a free peer-to-peer program provider in the US, because its many users were downloading music illegally.

The court ruling shut down Napster, but it later re-emerged as a legal music file-swapping site. However, many more peer-to-peer program vendors have sprung up since. Recently, video files are increasingly being swapped (including files of whole films).

As a parent, you should explain to your child that they are breaking the law if they use peer-to-peer programs to download copyrighted works such as music or films. Make them aware of the risks.

Viruses and spyware

Viruses are malicious pieces of software that can stop your computer working properly or may delete information off it. Many computers are infected with viruses from other people's disks or memory sticks, or when users open the attachments of **spam emails** (unwanted emails, the digital equivalent of junk through the post). Viruses can be downloaded onto computers when users visit certain websites, e.g. pornography websites. You should protect your family computer with anti-virus software and make sure your subscription to it is kept up to date. Some examples of anti-virus software are Norton Antivirus, McAfee, and BitDefender.

Computers can also be infected with **spyware**, which will try to collect personal information from your computer without your permission. Some spyware (or adware, in this case) can use the personal information to target advertisements at your computer. This can be annoying and disrupt the normal working of your computer. More serious forms of spyware can try to collect financial information from your computer and send it to someone else's machine.

Spyware often presents itself as a useful piece of software – e.g. a program to make web-browsing faster – to trick people into downloading it. As a general rule for internet use, you should never download any program or content unless you are sure it comes from a reliable source.

Some anti-spyware programs are available for free on the internet and they work well. But be careful when downloading any such program. Some of them are fake: instead of protecting your computer they will actually infect it with spyware. Your first step should be to check if your anti-virus software also has features to protect against spyware.

Phishing

Phishing is an online fraud that tries to trick people into giving out their financial information. It usually works as follows: you will receive an email that pretends to be from your bank or another financial institution. The email will ask you to verify information such as your bank account number, access code, or PIN number. The email will often say that if you do not supply the information your account will be closed or frozen after a certain date.

People who have replied to phishing emails with their financial information have lost thousands of euro from their bank accounts, or had money charged to their credit cards.

As a general rule, banks and reputable financial institutions will **never** contact you by email or phone and ask you to verify your financial information. If you receive such an email, ring your bank or financial institution.

Internet cafés

An internet café is a public place where you can use a computer with internet access for a small fee, e.g. €1 per hour. It is a cheap way of gaining computer and internet access for people who do not have them at home, or for people who want to use the internet while travelling. Internet cafés are also popular among people who want to play 'networked' or 'online' games. A networked game is where people sitting at different computers in the same room or building play against each other across a private network (Local Area Network, or LAN). Online games are where people play against each other across the internet.

Internet cafés are a useful way of letting your children surf the Net if they cannot do so at home. But there are a number of things to bear in mind. First, internet cafés are public places and are most commonly used by adults. Your children should stick to the same safety rules that they would in other public places.

Because adults routinely use internet cafés, the computers there may not be set to block content that would be inappropriate for children. Also, the networked games offered at some internet cafés can be violent and inappropriate for children. You should check with an assistant at the internet café to find out if there are rules for computer use by children.

THE GAMES CONSOLE

Video **games consoles** are hugely popular in Ireland. The current generation of consoles include the Sony PlayStation 3, Microsoft's Xbox 360 and Nintendo's Wii. These consoles allow you to do many things, such as watch films, listen to music, and connect to the internet. But their main job is to let you play games. These games can be bought on discs that look like a CD or a DVD. New titles can cost anything up to €75. Titles range from sporting games such as football, golf or grand prix racing to more violent, action-orientated games. Players control the action on the screen through a controller – a handheld device with buttons. On older consoles, such as the PlayStation 2, the controller was connected to the console by a wire. The latest consoles have wireless connections, which means there is no physical wire running from the controller to the console. The controller allows the player to manoeuvre their character or vehicle on screen. Two controllers allow two players to play at the same time. Other attachments are also available for games consoles, such as toy guns, dance mats, headsets and cameras.

Unlike a personal computer (which has its own special television called a "monitor"), consoles are plugged into a television. The new generation of consoles are designed to work best with hi-definition televisions, though they will still work fine on a normal television.

Games can be an addictive distraction. This can frustrate some parents who may worry that their child is spending far too much time on them. Games consoles also have a loyal following in the 18-35 year old market – a generation who have grown up with computer and video games.

The newer consoles encourage players to go online. This is called "online gaming". It allows people to play each other over the internet through a **broadband** connection. This means that they can play a friend living down the road or even in another country over their games console. If they wear a headset, they can talk and listen to each other while they play. This is a new, fun and exciting form of entertainment. It has become extremely popular in Asian countries. It is likely to become increasingly popular here as more homes get broadband connections.

Parents should note that players can buy content when they go online through their console. This content could be new games or extra levels or characters for games they bought on a disc in a shop. You should monitor the amount of money your children spend online. Make sure the content and games they buy are suitable for their age group.

Handheld games consoles are also popular among children. Nintendo makes a number of handheld consoles, including the Gameboy, Gameboy Advance and DS. Sony offers the most powerful handheld console, called the PSP (PlayStation Portable). Handheld consoles allow you to play games on the move. Games come on small cartridges or discs and can cost up to €55 each. As handheld consoles have become more powerful, the games available for them have become more violent and mature. Play the games with your children to make sure they are suitable.

However, the main threat to your child from video games is their **addictive nature.** Children should be encouraged to limit the time they spend playing video games to maintain a balanced healthy

lifestyle. Obesity and other health problems are a risk if your child is not gaining enough exercise. As a parent, you should set boundaries with your child about the length of time spent playing video games. Chat with them about why it's good to have a balance between all their activities, whether swimming or football and video games.

See the **Parents' questions** section if you want to know more about violent games.

THE MOBILE PHONE

Like the video recorder, the mobile phone started off as "analogue" or old technology. You may remember the size of the first mobile phones. They were big, clunky, brick-like objects that rarely could get a signal.

Modern mobile phones are smaller, reliable, and allow you to do many other things besides make calls. They are hugely popular among adults and teenagers alike, to the point where there are as many mobile phones as there are people in Ireland.

Mobile phone use is growing among children, who are beginning to get handsets at younger and younger ages. Children under ten have become mobile phone users. Used properly, a mobile phone can be a good security device for a child. You can contact your children in a hurry (or simply to arrange routine family activities), and your children can contact you.

But if you do allow a young child to use a mobile phone, there are a number of things to consider. Safety is first among them. A mobile phone is a powerful communications device. Because it is small and portable, it can be difficult to monitor how your children use it:

most importantly, to know who they call and text. As a parent, you decide how much privacy your children should have. But certainly for children under ten, it is unwise to give them free and unrestricted use of a mobile phone. Some mobile phones have a feature that allow children to call only pre-programmed numbers, e.g. home or family numbers.

New mobile phones are capable of more than just talk and text. They can let you surf the internet, play music and games, and watch video clips. Learn exactly what your child's mobile phone is capable of. As with any media technology, knowledge is power. The more you know about the device, the safer you can make your child's experience of using it.

Texting

Texting has become one of the most popular features of the mobile phone. The technical term for texting is **Short Messaging Service (SMS)**. Above the numbers on the phone are letters of the alphabet. These allow you to type a "text" message and send it, instead of ringing the person. The "message" will then appear on their phone display for them to read.

Texting has become an alternative form of communication among children and adults. It has even developed its own language. This language developed due to the length of time it took to write a text message. Also, the space in a text message is limited to 160 characters (or letters), so text language was a handy way to make messages shorter. Children began to abbreviate their messages as follows: "RU IN 2DAY?" ("Are you in today?"), "TXTME L8R" ("Text me later."), "C U 2NITE" ("See you tonight?"), and "10s ne1?" ("Tennis anyone?").

However, most phones now have **"predictive text".** This is a program that guesses the word you are trying to type. It makes text messages easier and quicker to write, although abbreviations are still used widely. As well as texting on your phone, you can play games, carry personal details, take digital photographs, record small videos, and play music.

Text abbreviations:
:) = Happy face
:D = Super happy face
:(= Sad face
;) = Wink
:/ = Wry face
:P = Tongue out for just kidding
((hug)) = A hug
<g> = Grin
ALL CAPS = Yelling
4VR = Forever
YER = Your, you're
B4 = Before
CUZ = Because
LOL= Laughing out loud
B4N = Bye for now
BCNU = Be seeing you

Ringtones
One particularly popular pastime for children and teens is downloading **"ringtones"**. Every phone has a number of pre-recorded ringtones to let you know that someone is calling. However, users can download different ringtones by ringing or texting certain numbers on their phone. These ringtone numbers are usually advertised in newspapers and magazines and, increasingly, on television. A ringtone can cost €2 to €3, but some are more expensive. If you are on a "bill-pay" phone, the price will be debited from your bill. "Pay as you Go" phones automatically debit the price of the ringtone from the call credit which has been loaded onto the phone.

Ringtones have become big business. In the United Kingdom, ringtones based on popular songs have actually outstripped music chart sales. As a parent, you need to be conscious of how much your child is spending on these **premium services**. A premium

service (e.g. buying ringtones or subscribing to a text "joke of the day") charges more than a normal phone call. They are much like the premium numbers on your landline, such as Weather Dial or 11811. Children can easily rack up debt using these type of services.

Picture and video-messaging

As mobiles become increasingly sophisticated, more premium services will be offered. Many phones have the capability to take and send digital pictures. The mobile phone operators charge more for these kinds of services because there is more "data" to send than in a normal text message. Mobile phone operators charge for either the length of a call, the amount of "data" used in the call, or a combination of both. Pictures and video contain more data; hence they charge more. Many children download their pictures and photographs to their personal computer and send them by e-mail. Be aware that video mobile phones have been linked with some negatives, including school bullying, harassment and intimidation. We discuss some of these issues in **Parents' questions.**

Gaming

Another premium service is **downloading games**. Mobile games cost anything between €3 and €6. They are usually simple in content and are similar to the early arcade games. While they are generally harmless, downloading a lot of them can be expensive.

What is 3G?

3G is the generic name for the next generation of mobile phone networks. These networks are able to deal with a lot more data. This means that the mobile phone can send and receive information on a similar scale to the internet. However, the operators do charge more. At present, most phones can only "surf the Net" in a limited way. 3G makes it much easier to surf the Net, view videos, and send and receive large e-mails. Vodafone and 3 offer 3G services in Ireland, and 02 will begin to offer a service soon. As competition develops, more people are likely to switch their mobile phone service to 3G. As such, it will be something your children will want to use (though some

may already have 3G phones). The likelihood then is that your child will have constant access to the internet. Although mobile phone operators may have filtering programs to protect younger children from unsuitable content, there are no guarantees that these will be 100% successful. Also, there are no filters to stop your child from running up high credit costs. Therefore, you should monitor your children's use of the internet on 3G. **Awareness and information are again the best protection.**

Wireless

Wireless was the old term for a radio receiver. Now it means a lot more. Simply speaking, it allows information to be transmitted "without wires". A wireless connection means that certain laptops or PCs can connect to the internet without plugging into the wall. They pick up the signal through the air over a radio frequency. In the future it is likely that all devices will be able to connect to each other "without wires". Why would they want to be able to do that? Well, a car with a wireless connection would be able to get traffic information or route maps. An oven could be switched on and off remotely while you are at work.

There are a variety of technologies that allow devices connect to each other. Two of the main ones are **infra-red** and **Bluetooth**. Infra-red needs "line of sight". For example, it is an infra-red signal that is used in a TV remote control. Bluetooth is a more powerful means of wireless connection. It can detect another device with Bluetooth within range and can connect to it automatically. Phones with Bluetooth can swap pictures and other information without paying for the call.

Another means of connecting to the internet through wireless is **Wi-Fi**. Laptops commonly connect to the internet using Wi-Fi, e.g. through a Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN).

A danger with wireless technologies is that, if the proper security is not in place, they can be "hijacked". There has been a recent phenomenon called "blue-jacking" where someone steals information from your phone or sends offensive messages and pictures when they detect

your Bluetooth connection. Children should be encouraged to switch off Bluetooth unless they are using it for a specific reason. If you have a wireless internet connection at home for your laptop or Pocket PC, you should ensure that the proper security is in place to protect your wireless connection from being used by others in the vicinity.

DIGITAL TELEVISION

With a population in Ireland of more than 4 million people and growing, there are nearly 1.4 million television households. In many homes there are two or more televisions. We all know the television aerial, from the old "rabbit ears" on top of the television to the large aerial on the roof. This is analogue television. It picks up the television signal through the aerial, allowing the viewer to watch three or four local Irish channels.

Those with cable television – where the aerial was replaced by a cable plugged into the wall – can receive more channels. This service was completely analogue until a few years ago, when the cable operators started introducing digital services. The two big cable operators in Ireland, NTL and Chorus, offer customers a choice of either the old analogue or the new digital service. Over time, everyone will move to digital.

Digital television is a recent phenomenon. Like the mobile phone, it means that the analogue signal has been replaced by a digital one. This gives more versatility. In the case of television, it gives more channels because more "data" can be put into the signal when it is "digital" than when it is analogue. There are a number of different types of digital television available in this country – but the two main types are cable and satellite. The main providers of digital television in Ireland are NTL, BSkyB Satellite, and Chorus, although there are other smaller players emerging.

Set-Top Box

If you have digital television there is probably a set-top box attached to your television. This is a box that reads the digital signal and puts it

on to your television screen. The set-top box has become increasingly important as digital television develops. It does a lot more than just decode the digital television signal.

Using your remote control, you can look at a **programme guide** on the television and see what programmes are coming up. You can also set reminders for your favourite programme or film.

If you have a Sky Digital set-top box, you may be familiar with the "red button". Often television programmes will encourage you to "press the red button now!". When you press the red button on your remote control, you can interact with the television programme – finding out more information, watching alternative camera angles, or voting. You may even be able to record many hours of your favourite programming or surf the internet. Digital television is rapidly becoming an exciting window on the world.

With the number of channels available – especially on satellite – there is a greater chance of your child coming across violent or obscene programme content. Most digital set-top boxes offer you a function whereby you can "lock" certain inappropriate channels. However, as it is possible that your children will know how to unlock these channels, it is wise to talk with them about these issues and set boundaries as to what he/she can and can not watch. Think it out before you agree to very young children having a digital television and DVD player in their own bedrooms. Even with locked out channels, you create an environment where they may gain access to unsuitable material. **Watching the television in a family environment, particularly with children under ten, means you can put a context on what they see.**

OTHER TECHNOLOGIES

Many other digital devices are becoming popular. Here is a selection:

Digital music players

Digital music players play music that has been converted into special digital files. A well known type of digital music file is MP3 (which is why some digital music players are called MP3 Players). MP3 isn't the only type of digital music file. The most famous digital music player, the iPod, uses its own digital file format to convert music.

Digital music players are a bit like Walkmans – except they don't require tapes or CDs. The music is downloaded from a personal computer. Users can transfer music from their own CDs – via their computer – onto their digital player.

Parents should be aware that some digital music players can also store and play video files. These can be music videos, films, or television programming. If you child's digital music player has this ability, you should check that their video content is suitable for their age group.

Growth in downloading music and films

As digital music players have become popular, so has buying music for download instead of on a CD. This involves going to an online music store (iTunes is the most famous) where you can buy music either per song or per album. You pay by credit card and the music file is downloaded directly onto your computer's hard-drive. You can then play the music file on your computer (if you have speakers), put it onto your digital music player, or copy it onto a recordable CD.

There will be certain copyright restrictions on how you use the music file. This is called **Digital Rights Management** (DRM). It will limit the number of computers or digital music players on which you can play the music file. It will also limit the number of times you can copy the music file onto a recordable CD. Remember, you are breaking

copyright law if you copy the music onto a CD for someone else, or transfer it onto their digital music player.

It is becoming possible to **buy films and television shows online** in the same way. In America, you can buy a film online and download it onto your computer's hard-drive. You can then watch it on the computer, transfer it onto a portable media player, or copy it onto a recordable DVD. The film file is subject to similar DRM restrictions as a downloaded music file.

Film download services are likely to become easily available in Ireland in the coming years. You will need a broadband connection to download films.

Personal Video Recorder

The **Personal Video Recorder (or PVR)** is another device to digitally record television programming. It is popular in the United Slates where it is marketed under the brand name TiVo. In Ireland, it is available on subscription from BSkyB and is built into their Sky Plus set-top box. The personal video recorder is a bit like a small personal computer, except it looks like a box that sits on top of your television. This box allows you to record many hours of programming while you are watching the television. You can then go back and look at programmes you may have missed. This type of recorder "personalises" your television viewing. You can set the box to record the programmes that you want throughout the day, week or month. You are then free to watch them at your leisure. In a few years, as digital television becomes more popular, most homes will have this kind of technology.

Memory Sticks

These are small compact devices – often on key rings – that plug into a slot at the back of a computer called a USB port. They are also sometimes called Flash memory devices, USB key rings, or USB sticks. They can be used to store information from a computer so that you can bring it to another computer. They are replacing the traditional floppy disks because they perform the same function but store hundreds of

times more information and are easy to carry about. They are viewed as a security threat by businesses and schools because people can easily remove sensitive information from computer hard-drives or place offensive or illegal information on them.

Digital Camcorders

Many of you may have camcorders that you use on holidays or at birthdays. Your child may take an interest and it can be a means of self-expression – just like digital cameras and their ability to shoot video clips. With the recent phenomenon of Reality TV shows like "Big Brother", older children are increasingly using digital camcorders to record video diaries and personal films. Some children post videos on social-networking or user-generated content websites. If you become aware that your children are doing so, check the nature of the videos to ensure they are suitable and do not give away private information online.

Digital Radio

Although radio is generally an "analogue" technology, this is beginning to change. In the UK, they are already transmitting digital radio, which is much more versatile then its analogue counterpart. Also, radio stations across the world are transmitting over the internet and on digital television sets (including Ireland). Parents need to know that radio (whether digital or analogue) has no 9pm watershed and day-time radio shows can have mature content. Most children have easy access to radio. Parents need to be conscious of what kind of stations and shows their children are listening to, particularly online where radio stations can exist outside broadcasting regulation and controls.

3. PARENTS QUESTIONS

Q: What's so dangerous about the internet for my child?

A: The internet is rapidly becoming the best captured source of human knowledge. However, it is also becoming a dump for some of the worst content – such as pornography, exploitation, piracy, hate literature, misinformation and libel. Equally worrying has been the development of sites promoting violence, terrorism, and even youth suicide and self-harm. Many people take for granted that what they read on the internet is true. Unlike a newspaper or book, many websites have no editorial filter with someone legally responsible for that content. Material can be published on the internet without anyone checking the facts.

This is why parents should monitor their children's use of the internet. Parents should look out for warning signs such as offensive e-mails, improper conversations in chatrooms, or inappropriate content. You know what is best for your children. You need to know what information they are pulling from this vast global communications network. It can enrich family life and learning, but the freedom to exchange information through the internet can mean lots of untrue statements ending up in the public domain. Make children aware that they should trust information only from reliable sources.

Q: How do I protect my child from seeing offensive material on the internet?

A: The Internet Advisory Board has published a parents' guide to filtering software. It is available for download at www.iab.ie.

Filtering software can help protect your children by blocking inappropriate content before it appears on the computer screen. However, such software is not guaranteed to block 100% of inappropriate content. You still need to take an active role in making sure your children are accessing only websites that are suitable for their age group.

Even with filtering software and close parental supervision, your child may accidentally stumble across inappropriate content online. Talk to your child about what is out there so they have a context for anything they come across. **Information is power. It can help children to protect themselves as they begin to explore new media on their own.**

Supervise your child's use of the internet and set boundaries for what is appropriate and what is not. This should start at a young age. The boundaries may expand as the child grows and develops his or her own maturity, judgment and independence. It is crucial for children to become independent, but boundaries allow them to have an expanding safety net as they grow into adolescents and young adults. If your child does see inappropriate content online, you should encourage them to come to you about it. It is important to keep the lines of communication open so you can gauge what kind of material is upsetting them and how to handle it.

Many people surf the internet on their mobile phone. The same rules should apply for your children using mobile internet. **When buying a mobile phone for your child, ask the retailer about its level of internet access.**

Q: What are the risks if my child uses social-networking and user-generated content websites?

A: Social-networking and user-generated content have been the most prominent online activities to emerge from a recent trend of web-applications broadly labelled Web 2.0. The emphasis of Web 2.0 is to move beyond static websites and encourage users to communicate with each other and create their own content.

Without doubt, the applications have become extremely popular among Irish children and teenagers in a short space of time. The applications are a fun way for young people to communicate with friends and be creative online. They can act as a beneficial part of

young people's digital lifestyle as they grow up in a world where digital technologies and applications – and the ability to use them – are becoming increasingly important.

However, like many new online activities that are popular among young people, the benefits have been accompanied by risks. The main risk to children of using social-networking websites (or chatrooms) is that they will give away too much personal information online, e.g. name, address, phone number. This information could be used by people whose intentions are harmful, such as bullies or even online predators. Because so many young people and children use social-networking websites, online predators have been drawn there. They can try to make contact with children by pretending to be children themselves. If your child does use a social-networking website, you should discourage them from revealing personal information online. It is a good idea to draw up a 'buddy list', e.g. friends from school, that young children can communicate with online.

On user-generated content websites, your children could be breaking copyright laws if they take clips from television programmes or music videos and post them online. Reputable websites will try to make sure their users don't publish inappropriate content. But the sheer volume of content posted on popular websites every day makes them difficult to monitor. There is a risk that your children will see inappropriate content if they are allowed to view these websites unsupervised. Many children and young people use their camera phones or digital camcorders to make videos of themselves, which they then publish online. If your children do this, make sure the videos are appropriate.

Q: What are the dangers of my child using free peer-to-peer (P2P) file swapping software?

A: Parents should be aware of a number of issues in relation to free peer-to-peer. One is that your child may be breaking the law if they are downloading copyrighted music or film content. Second, these free peer-to-peer networks are completely unmonitored. Children are at risk of downloading computer viruses, pornography, or other unsuitably graphic or offensive material.

A common problem on these networks is that the files available for download can be inappropriate content disguised with innocent-sounding names. For example, a file offered for download could be described as a famous Hollywood film. But once the file is downloaded and played on a computer, it could turn out to be something else entirely, such as pornography.

As a parent you need to be aware of these applications and if your child is using them. Talk to your child about this type of software. Get them to explain to you how and why they use it.

If you become aware of illegal content downloaded through a peer-to-peer service, please report it using the confidential www.hotline.ie service.

Q: What should I do if my child is playing a lot of video games?

A: Many parents worry that their children are not getting enough exercise due to playing games consoles. The same can be said of television. Recent research studies have shown that games consoles can increase dexterity and intellectual development among children because many games encourage lateral thinking and problem-solving exercises. However, too much of anything is a bad thing. It is wise that children get a healthy balance between game play, television and exercise. Boundaries should be set that limit their indoor digital media time. It is important that children get exercise to maintain a healthy balanced lifestyle.

Q: How do I know what kind of content is on a video game?

A: One worry in relation to video games is the increasing level of violence and horror in them. Many titles are aimed at an older audience and have the same level of violence and sexual content as an over-18s film. Often the games become more violent or graphic as you go through the different levels. Such games carry an age classification on the cover, e.g. 16 or 18. This should tell you if the game is suitable for your child's age group.

If you are unsure, check the suitability of the game for your child with your video games shop. It is a good idea to ask other parents. Alternatively, you can check if the game title is suitable at the following web address: www.pegi.info. However, this is a guide only and you should still check the games' content for yourself.

Q: How can my child experience bullying through a mobile phone?

A: As many children in the school yard have mobile phones, they have become a vehicle for bullying through offensive texts, photos or calls. You should be aware of your child's reaction to texts or calls. Encourage them to talk to you if you feel that they are receiving disturbing texts or calls.

The Irish Cellular Industry Association, which represents the Irish mobile operators, has issued a code of practice on bullying and malicious communication over mobile phones. Further information is available on the association's website: www.ibec.ie/ibecweb.nsf/wvBusinessSectors/Irish_Cellular_Industry_Association?OpenDocument#InfoCentre

Q: How do I keep my child safe from unwanted calls or texts over the mobile phone?

A: This is a potential danger as mobiles become more sophisticated. There is the risk that offensive, pornographic or bullying material can be sent or accessed through the mobile phone. It is difficult for the mobile phone operators to monitor all the traffic over their network. So it is up to parents to monitor their own child's use of their mobile phone. Encourage them to talk to you about any unwanted pictures, texts or calls that they might receive. Discuss the dangers, set boundaries for their use of the phone, and explain that you are doing this to look after them rather than to limit their freedom. **If you set down rules without explanation, your children will use their phone in secret or ignore the rules when you are not around.**

The benefits of mobile phones far outweigh the risks. The mobile phone means that you can keep in contact with your child wherever they may be. **Most parents see the phone as an added source of comfort and protection.**

Q: What are the dangers in regard to digital television for my child?

A: One of the issues with digital television is the sheer amount of programming. It is hard to drag a child away from the television when there is so much on it. Boundaries need to be set by adults to limit the amount of time that children spend watching television. But digital television offers much more educational programming then we would have had otherwise.

A risk may be inappropriate programmes and content. Non-Irish channels on digital television – especially through satellite – are outside the regulation of the Irish state. As such, your child can be exposed (even before the watershed) to offensive or inappropriate content. It is a good idea to become familiar with the channels and schedules that your child likes. Certain set-top boxes allow you to block channels.

Some digital television providers also offer parental controls. Contact your provider to see if such a service is available.

For younger children, a more pervasive threat is commercial advertising, especially on the digital children's channels. Irish broadcasting regulation does not dictate the amount or type of advertising that can be permitted on these channels. However, Irish domestic TV channels, RTE, TG4 and TV3, face significant controls over advertisement in children's programming. It is worth looking at the rules protecting children in relation to television content. Check out RTE's website (www.rte.ie) and the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (www.bci.ie).

4. A-Z of New Media

2.5G:
This name designates the type of internet access on a mobile phone. A 2.5G connection can offer limited amount of internet access.

3G:
This is a more robust connection for mobile phones. It offers the opportunity to surf the internet and send and receive large e-mails and attachments. It will also allow you to make video calls.

A

Analogue:
Analogue is everything before digital. Vinyl records, tape cassettes, music stereos, the telephone, etc. These all use analogue signals to convey information. The radio frequency is an example of an analogue signal.

Anti-Virus Software:
This is a type of software that prevents your computer from getting a virus. The main software vendors are Norton's Antivirus and McAfee. There are also free downloads available.

Attachment:
This is a file that can arrive with e-mail. An icon of a paperclip will appear with the e-mail if there is an attachment. If you are expecting an attachment such as a Word document, then it is safe to open. However, do not open attachments from strangers as they are likely to contain a **virus**.

B

Blog:
This is a web log or online diary. It offers readers the opportunity to reply to opinions and link to their own blogs.

Broadband:
A broadband connection means that you can download information from the internet much faster and will be connected all the time. As broadband becomes increasingly popular, people will use the internet to send or watch video.

Browser:
A piece of software that allows you to "**surf**" the **World Wide Web**.

C

CD-ROM:
A CD-ROM is the same as a CD except that some of the information on the disc can be read only by a Personal Computer.

Chat:
Chat is real-time conversation on the internet between people using a program like MSN Instant Messenger. It's useful and it's free, and it can help keep down phone costs.

Controller:
This is the device that allows a player to control the actions in a video game. A two-player game requires two controllers.

Convergence:
"Coming together", which means that a single device can do many jobs.

Cyberspace:
This is another term for the internet.

D

Data:
This refers to digital information and how it is stored. A CD-ROM will store digital data that can be read by a computer.

Digital:
Digital is different to analogue in that the information is stored not as a signal but as either "on" or "off". In this sense, it is not unlike Morse Code. A personal computer, a mobile phone or any other digital device will read the information and know whether to display it as music, video or text.

Digital music player:
A small portable device that plays music converted into special digital files, e.g. MP3.

Download:
This term refers to the transfer of information from one computer to another over the internet.

DVD:
Digital Versatile Discs (or DVDs) look like CDs but they can only be played on computers or on a **DVD Player**. They are mainly used to play films. If you look at a DVD in the light, you will see that the

data is stored like grooves on a vinyl record. However, unlike a video tape or a vinyl record, this information is digital and can only be played back by a digital player.

E

E-mail:

This is short for electronic mail and is a method of composing, sending, and receiving messages over the internet.

F

Flaming:
This is when an online conversation ('thread') in a chatroom becomes abusive.

G

Games console:
These are the devices on which video games are played. The larger ones are plugged into television sets to display the game. Smaller handheld consoles have their own screens.

H

History files:
These are the recorded files of what was viewed on the internet. In the case of inappropriate content, these files are important to prove that such content was viewed. Your computer will offer you a 'history' option.

I

ICT
Stands for **Information and Communications Technology**. In other words, it can mean almost anything that's **new** and relevant to **communications**. This includes the internet, mobile telephony, satellite communications and digital television over cable or aerials.

Instant Messaging:
This is an application that allows instant text communication or "chat" between two or more people through a network such as the internet. There are many types of these applications such as MSN Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger and Skype.

Internet:
The internet comes from the words "international network" and is a network of computers sharing information all over the world. This network became commonly known as the internet in the mid-1980s. The internet is sometimes confused with the **World Wide Web.** In fact, the **World Wide Web** is just a part of the internet, as are e-mail, instant messaging and peer-to-peer networking. The internet is the network that enables all these different types of communication.

L

Laptop:
A laptop is a portable personal computer that is small enough to sit on your lap.

Link:
A link is how you navigate around a website or go from one website to another that may have related information. Linking has opened up a whole new way of presenting information.

N

Net:
An abbreviation of "internet".

O

Online:
If you are online, you are live on the internet.

P

Personal Video Recorder:
This is a box that connects to your TV and allows you to record television programming without the need for tapes or DVDs.

Pocket PC:
This is a small, handheld PC about the size of a large mobile phone. It is also called a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA).

Predictive text:
This is a program on mobile phones that helps you compose text messages quickly by "predicting" the word you are typing.

Premium services:
These are services that you can access through a mobile phone that provide content at premium rates (or more than a normal call would cost).

Programme guide:
On a digital television, this is an electronic programme guide whereby you can access

extra information about other channels and programming through the remote control.

R

Remote Control:
The remote control is a device that wirelessly controls devices such as the television, video recorder, DVD or music system.

Ringtones:
These are digital music files that can be used on mobile phones as ringing tones. All phones come with pre-programmed ringtones but you can also download ringtones at a price.

S

Satellite dish:
A satellite dish is a round, plate-like object that acts as an aerial for digital television. It is usually hung on the side of the house or on the roof.

Search-engine:
Search-engines allow you to search the World Wide Web for relevant text, images, audio and increasingly video. If you are looking for something on the Net, use a search-engine such as Google.com or Yahoo.com.

Set-top box:
A set-top box is a box that connects to your television and allows you to receive digital television either through cable, satellite, an aerial or through the phone line. It literally translates the digital information and displays it on your television screen.

SMS:
Stands for "Short Messaging Service" but is generally known as texting.

Social-networking websites:
These are websites that encourage communication among a community of users. The users often load profiles of themselves and post videos, photographs and blogs.

Spam:
Unwanted e-mail. These are often marketing scams or unwanted advertisements, occasionally of a sexual nature. They increasingly contain malicious viruses. Children should be encouraged not to open e-mails from people they do not know and certainly not to open any attachments. Also, never reply or unsubscribe to spam – this just tells the sender

that your address is active and you will get more spam. There is filtering software available. But this sometimes sends wanted e-mails to the junk mail box. Always check your junk mail box for e-mails that may have been put through there by mistake.

Surfing:
This is the term used to describe moving around the Web.

T

Texting:
This is the means of sending a written message from one phone to another.

TiVo:
This is the brand name of a type of Personal Video Recorder. It has become in the US a generic name like Hoover.

U

User-generated content websites:
These are websites where the users create and publish the majority of the content.

V

VHS:
This stands for Video Home System, and is the technical name for a video cassette that plays in a home video recorder.

Virus:
This is a malicious piece of software that can do great damage to a personal computer. They are often sent through e-mail attachments or contained on disks. It is important that you have **anti-virus software** to deal with the threat. You should be always careful when opening an attachment or putting in a disk from a stranger.

W

Web 2.0:
This is the term to describe a new wave of internet applications, which puts the emphasis on users communicating with each other and creating their own content.

Web address:
This is the address that tells your computer the location of a website, such as www.ireland.com or www.iab.ie.

Web cams:
These are small digital cameras that are plugged into a PC. They allow you to do things such as video conference or send video mail.

Website:
A website is a site on the World Wide Web where information is held. A website sits on a computer that is connected to the internet.

World Wide Web:
The World Wide Web is a collection of websites held on computers all around the world and connected by the internet.

5. GENERAL INFORMATION

USEFUL WEBSITES

Please note that these links are intended as assistance and the Internet Advisory Board does not accept responsibility or endorse any of the websites listed nor the information that is contained within them.

CHILD-FOCUSSED SEARCH-ENGINES

Yahooligans: www.yahooligans.com

SAFETY SITES

There is a large number of "safety sites" on the internet. Some repeat the same information. Others specialise in certain aspects of internet safety. Below is just a small example of some sites worth visiting.

www.chatdanger.com
Aimed specifically at children/teens and provides safety tips and advice about using chatrooms.

www.cyberangels.org
Comprehensive international site offering practical advice and lists of suggested safe sites and child-friendly search-engines.

www.watchyourspace.ie
Advice on managing children's profiles on social-networking websites.

www.childnet-int.org
Excellent example of a good all round safety site for children.

www.netfamilynews.org
Provides useful information and links for families, teachers and guardians of kids who go online.

www.makeitsecure.ie
This website provides information on how to protect your computer and how to safely enjoy the benefits of connecting to the internet.

www.childline.ie
Child safety issues.

www.thinkuknow.co.uk
The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (based in the United Kingdom).

www.safekids.com
A family guide to online safety.

www.eukidsonline.net
A European project to promote research into children's use of the internet.

www.blogsafety.com
Advice on how to blog and use social-networking websites safely.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

The Media Awareness Network's study
www.media-awareness.ca: a study of Canadian students. It explores what young people do online, how they perceive the internet, and what they know about it.

Prof. Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics
www.children-go-online.net: a project exploring the nature and meaning of children's internet use.

www.saferinternet.org: Contains the European Union's initiatives on promoting safer use of the internet. Comprehensive and informative, it provides a wealth of information on internet safety.

www.bullying.org

USEFUL SOFTWARE

Filtering software information

CyberPatrol (www.cyberpatrol.com)

Net Nanny (www.contentwatch.com)

Cybersitter (www.cybersitter.com)

ICRAplus (www.icra.org/icraplus/)

AGENCIES AND SUPPORTS

National Initiatives

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
(www.justice.ie)

Hotline
(www.hotline.ie)
Irish hotline for public reports of child pornography.

Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland
(www.ispai.ie)

An Garda Síochána
(www.garda.ie)

Scoilnet
(www.scoilnet.ie)
Provides information, advice and support to schools on Information Technology.

Barnardos
(www.barnardos.ie)

NetSecure
(www.netsecure.ie)
This is the official website of the National Awareness campaign on Computer security.

Broadband.gov.ie
(www.broadband.gov.ie)
This website offers information on broadband technology and broadband availability within Ireland.

NCTE
(www.ncte.ie)
The **N**ational **C**entre for **T**echnology in **E**ducation is an Irish Government agency established to provide advice, support and information on the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education.

Irish Cellular Industry Association:
www.ibec.ie/ibecweb.nsf/wvBusinessSectors/Irish_Cellular_Industry_Association?OpenDocument#InfoCentre

Webwise
(www.webwise.ie)
Is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Node managed by the NCTE. Webwise provides parents, teachers, and children with educational resources, advice and information about potential dangers on the internet. It empowers users to minimise or avoid these risks. Webwise shares best practice, information and resources with European partners through the European Commission's Insafe network.

Data Protection Commissioner
(www.dataprotection.ie)
The Data Protection Commissioner is responsible for upholding rights of privacy in regard to the processing of personal data.

International Initiatives

INHOPE
(www.inhope.org)
The Internet Hotline Providers in Europe Association facilitates the work of European hotlines in responding to illegal use and content on the internet.

Virtual Global Taskforce
(www.virtualglobaltaskforce.org)
This is made up of police forces from around the world to fight online child abuse.

ICRAsafe
(www.icra.org)
The Internet Content Rating Association has developed a system for the labelling of content on web sites.

Insafe
(www.saferinternet.org)
A network of national groups that coordinate internet safety awareness in Europe.

30-01 08/07 10,000 Brunswick Press Ltd. (19298)

GET WITH IT!

This booklet is about helping you

Parents worry about the dangers of new media for their children from accessing unsuitable content to being exposed to predatory adults. But the internet and the new media world, from mobiles to digital games, is also one of fun, learning, communications and creativity. This booklet is intended to increase awareness of all aspects of the new media world and to help parents navigate the often confusing maze of new media technologies and tools which their children are using. It is intended to help parents know more about the internet and digital age so that they can best keep their children safe – enjoying the wonders of the digital landscape and avoiding its downside.

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