



NEWS RELEASE



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Children's Charities Demand Internet Safety For Children This Christmas



Computers will be high on the present list of thousands of the UK's children this Christmas. Many of them will be excited by getting online, emailing their friends, surfing and playing games. But will they or their parents know of the possible dangers lurking on the net? Today seven leading children's charities – NCH, Barnardo's, ChildLine, NSPCC, NCVCCO, National Children's Bureau and The Children's Society – have joined forces to launch a campaign to call on both the internet and computer industries to make children's safety their top priority.

To improve child safety on the Internet the Children's Organizations believe that a partnership between Government, the Internet industry and the children's charities is needed to:

- Mount a major advertising and awareness campaign in the New Year.
- Establish a new and wholly independent body with representation from parents, children, young people and other consumers to tackle concerns and issues about the development of the Internet in the UK
- Ensure that any staff employed to supervise Internet Chat Rooms have been fully trained and police-checked.

Over the next year the charities will be speaking to government and the IT industry to encourage them to take seriously their responsibility for keeping children safe on the Internet. The group are calling for the Internet industry to implement the following measures:

- Internet Service Providers (ISP) that allow children onto their networks should have safety messages prominently displayed on their home page.
- ISPs that allow children on to their networks should prominently advertise the availability of child-friendly search engines.
- Every ISP that gives access to chat channels should also provide and promote the availability of moderated chat.
- Current ISP procedures should be reviewed to include the recording of chat room conversations and participants, as happens with premium rate telephone services.
- Minimum standards should be established governing sign up procedures for new Internet accounts and greater efforts should be made to verify both the age and the identity of account holders.
- Any newsgroups containing child pornography should be blocked.

NCH's Internet Consultant John Carr explains

“Parents buy their children computers with Internet access because they know they are essential to their education, as well as for fun, and games. Unfortunately many parents remain completely at sea when it comes to the Internet. Children need help and advice if they are to use the Internet wisely and safely. We believe this should come not only from parents and teachers, but also from the companies selling the technology.”

The children's charities are looking to companies who market computers for educational and family use to pre-install safety software, and to provide parents with written safety guidelines with every computer sold. In the meantime NCH has produced a *Parents' Guide to the Internet* available at www.nch.org.uk which contains a series of *Netsmart Rules* including the following advice:

- Never tell anyone you meet on the Internet your home address, or your telephone number unless your parent or carer gives you permission
- Never arrange to meet anyone in person without first agreeing it with your parent or carer. Make *sure* they come to the first meeting, which should always be in a public place.

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For further information or to arrange an interview with John Carr, Annie Mullins, or Chris Atkinson, please contact Helen Crow at NCH's Media & PR Office on 020 7704 7106. (Out of hours number 01802 806679)