

Safer Children in a Digital World

A summary
for children and
young people



Byron Review
Children and New Technology

I would like to thank all the children and young people whose voice helped shape this review.

The Byron Review is dedicated to all children and young people who have the right to enjoy these exciting new digital technologies safely, and to all parents, teachers, carers and organisations who are helping make this happen.

Dr Tanya Byron

Competition Winners:

'Netsmart' Winners:

Bailey Jones (Age 9); Paul Walmsley (Age 14)

'Gamesmart' Winners:

Samuel Cornwell (Age 7); Ben Tyrer (Age 16)

Front Cover Winners:

Faiza Qureshi (Age 13); Zakia Basson (Age 17); and Connor McCorquodale (Age 10)

Multimedia Winners:

Marcus Stevens (Age 13) and Jack Paskin (Age 12)

Runners-Up:

Craig Mackay (Age 10); Lauren Bain (Age 10); Ben Weager (Age 6); Courtney Rae (Age 10);
Mo Montgomery Swan (Age 12/13)

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Introduction from Tanya



In 2007 the Prime Minister asked me to carry out an assessment of the internet and video games, and how they might affect you. As these technologies are still quite new, my job was to find out what people felt the possible problems and risks are, and decide how the technology can be used safely.

For me, this is a really important review – the internet and video games are a major part of your lives and offer incredible opportunities for having fun, learning and keeping in touch with friends. It is vital that everyone knows how to enjoy the internet and video games safely, and knows how to manage the potential risks. That is why I agreed to do this review.

In my review I looked at:

- The kinds of things that people can see or experience on the internet and in video games that may affect them – for example extreme violence in games, or bullying over the internet.
- What research or evidence there is about how children and young people might be affected by these kinds of things.
- And, the different ways you and your parents can make sure you are safe when online or playing video games. This was to see whether more can be done to make them safer for you.

How I did this:

- I sent out a “Call for Evidence” to gather peoples views, and to collect all the research that had already been done in this area.
- I also spoke to lots of children and young people during the Review. Hundreds responded to my Call for Evidence and talked to me through my blogs and in discussion groups (I got more responses from children than from adults!).
- I held in-depth “discussion groups” with parents and children.
- I met over 100 organisations and individuals from children and parents organisations; and the internet and video games industries.
- I flew to America to talk to the big companies based there.
- I employed expert researchers to look at all the studies that have been done already and analyse them.
- I then held a huge conference to bring all these people together to discuss my ideas.

The Internet

Benefits of the Internet

Everyone is really positive about the internet and how important it is in your day to day lives – for education, networking and entertainment. It helps with learning and makes doing homework more interesting. You also love to use the internet to keep in touch with friends.

Nearly all of you have access to the internet either at home or at school. Those of you that are younger love to use it for games whilst 12-15 year olds use it for school work and for downloading music and movies or watching video clips. Older teenagers are more likely to use the internet for communicating with friends on social networking sites, uploading things and using blogs.

99% of children aged 8-17 access the internet

(Ofcom, 2008)

90% of children aged 5-16 now have a computer at home

(ChildWise, 2008)

What are the Risks on the Internet?

Some children and young people told me about their concerns when they go online. These included:

- worries about accidentally coming across scary or rude content and also not knowing what information you can trust online.
- unwelcome contact from other internet users: including strangers but also the problem of 'cyberbullying' and some advertising (like pop-ups).
- concerns about how people behave online, especially what younger brothers or sisters might do on the internet.



Competition Runner Up



Parents also told me about things they are worried about online. Lots of parents said that they don't always understand how to use technology as well as their children do. This means that they feel like they can't always help their children manage the potential risks.

Parents are also worried about how much time young people spend using technology, rather than doing other things.

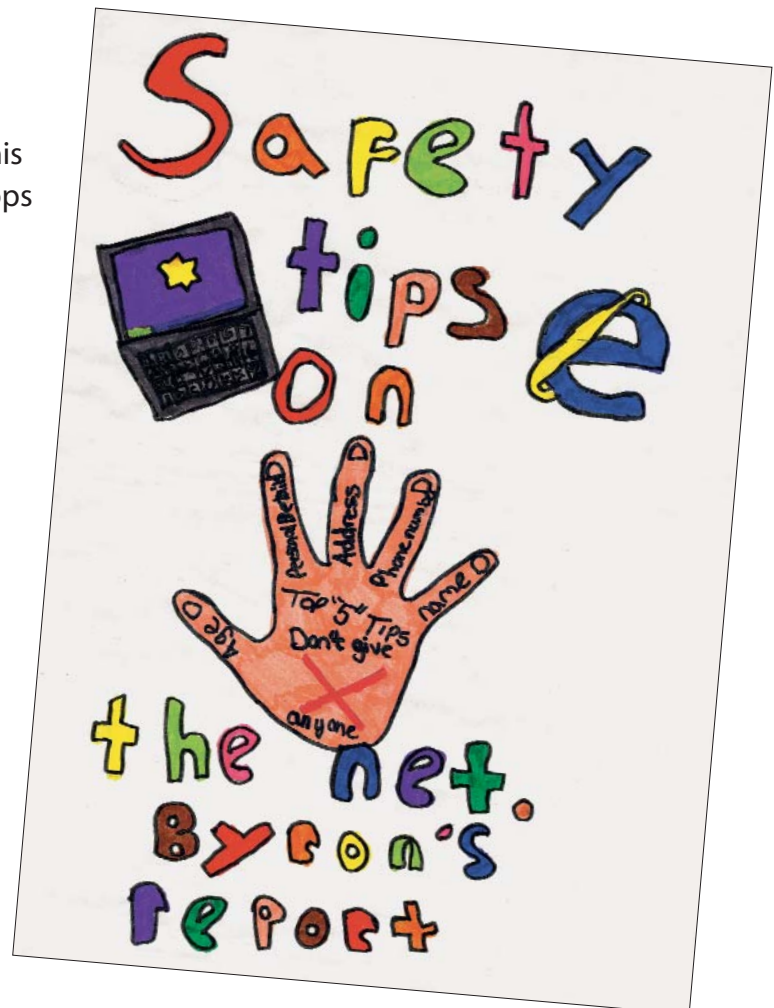
I also looked at lots of research about the risks and benefits of using the internet – although this is really difficult because the technology develops so quickly that it can be hard for researchers to keep up.

“I'm worried I'll get lost on the internet and find I've suddenly got a job in the army or something.”

(9 year old boy)

“It's easier to say horrible stuff about people on [the internet]. It got really horrible in Year 10. Lots of people were being bullying over [the internet]. It gets brought into school. When friends do this, it's horrible. It makes you really upset. You don't want to go into school again.”

(15 year old girl)



The research shows that:

- Some of the best things about the internet can also be some of the worst things about it – for example, it's great that you can meet new people, but you have to be careful about who those people are.
- The internet has led to more children and young people having access to some kinds of content that might not be appropriate for their age (e.g. sexual material). There isn't strong evidence on what the long term effects of this might be, but it can be quite upsetting.
- Although children and young people are really confident using technology they don't always know how to judge what information they can trust and what they can't. You know more about technology than some adults, but at different ages and stages of your development you may not always be able to understand and deal with risks – this is because our brains are still developing throughout childhood. At different ages and stages of your development, you may not always be able to understand and deal with some risks.
- Unwanted contact by strangers is also a problem and children are still meeting up with people they first met online, even when they know about the risks.
- Bullying can change online, especially because it can be anonymous, and people

can be meaner. It can also be viewed again and again, by lots of people, which can be really upsetting.

- Sometimes people behave differently online than they would offline, and don't always behave well.
- Children and young people often upload things about themselves or others without necessarily understanding or thinking through what the long term effects might be – for example, the wrong people getting hold of your details or seeing you in a way that you wouldn't want them to.



Internet Recommendations

To help address some of these problems, whilst making sure you can get the best from the internet, I am recommending things that can be done by the Government, the internet industries, organisations that work in the area of children and safety and also schools, to help you be safe online. Above all I think you and your parents and other adults in your lives need to be given the tools and information you need to use the internet safely and that you are helped to manage the risks. I have emphasised that your opinions should always be listened to.

It is difficult for the British Government to control what happens on the internet because so many of the people involved are not in the UK. But lots can still be done when the Government sits down with businesses and the different organisations that look after children's welfare.

So, I am recommending that the Prime Minister sets up a new Council where the Government and others involved in the internet and child safety can get together to make sure that everyone is working with each other to help you be safe online.

UK Council for Child Internet Safety

I have made clear that this Council needs to listen to what you and your parents think. I am asking the Prime Minister to meet them every year to make sure they are working hard on your behalf.

This Council will have three main jobs:

- Make sure enough is done to teach children, young people, parents and other adults about the risks of going online and what they can do about them.
- Work with technology experts, people who understand how children develop and different companies to make sure that there are proper technical tools and support (for example, to help you and your parents decide which sites are safest for you to use).
- Agree sets of safety codes about the ways companies look after children and young people on their online web spaces.

Children and young people told me a lot about all the tools already out there to help manage what is seen on the internet and how it is used. Parents say that they often don't know how to set these up or if they do, children can get round them easily. I am recommending that:

- Search engines should make sure it is easy for parents to set 'safe search' on permanently and put links to child safety online information on their front pages.
- All computers sold in the UK should have the best standard of 'parental controls' and families should be given free 'parental controls', (for example, when they get a new internet connection).
- Different companies should work together to decide the best ways to manage sites where internet users post their own content (photos, videos etc.). This could include:
 - having clear rules for using the site,
 - agreeing that users can report rule breaking, and
 - agreeing how long it will take websites to remove content that breaks the rules.

Someone independent should check if companies are keeping to this agreement, so parents, children and young people can be reassured and make informed decisions about which services they want to use.

There is already lots of information available about how to stay safe online. But lots of children, and especially parents, told me they were confused by some of this information and didn't feel confident about what they should do. In order to make sure that all children and parents have knowledge, skills and understanding to use the internet safely, I am recommending that:

- Government and industry work together to create a huge campaign to make parents aware of the risks online and what can be done about them – for example, through newspaper adverts, information on TV and radio etc.
- A website is set up where people can go to get information or if they have a problem online. This website will make it easy to find the good advice that is already out there.
- The Government works with schools and other services for children to make sure that they are doing their best to help children and young people stay safe online. This includes having rules about using the internet and making sure that teachers and other staff understand enough about internet safety.
- There is support for parents who want to learn about helping their children to stay safe online (for example through schools).



I believe that if children and their families have the right tools and the information they need to make the right choices, everybody should be able to enjoy the internet safely.



B Netsmart!



To be Netsmart you need to know how to stay safe when you use the Internet.
I am going to help you to be Netsmart! ☺

B SAFE

- First you should place the computer in a family room. So when you do things on the Internet your family can see.
- Never give strangers any information about you. ☹ Don't share with others your name, address, age, phone number and school. Never send out a picture of yourself!
- Don't spend long periods of time on the computer otherwise you can get a headache and when you come off the computer you can get spots in your eyes.

B ALERT

- Always tell an adult if some thing is suspicious while you are talking to someone on a chat.
- Only use a web camera when you are talking to close friends or family not strangers.
- Don't forget that some people are not who they say they are!!!!

B CLEVER

- Never arrange to meet up with anyone that you don't know.
- NEVER click randomly always read the description while searching.



The Internet is lots of fun when used safely. I message and play games with family and best friends.
Have fun and B Netsmart!



Video Games

Benefits of Video Games

During my Review, children, young people and their parents were very positive about gaming, and thought there were a number of benefits – including fun and relaxation and developing new skills. Those of you that are younger mainly play through consoles. You enjoy educational games and can see how these can help you with learning. As you get older, many of you also enjoy the fact that gaming helps you keep in touch with friends, as more of you play online.

As such a huge number of children are eager to engage with playing video games, I am asking Government to look at what opportunities there might be for using 'video games' for learning.



What are the Risks of Video Games?

The amount of time spent playing games was a worry raised by children and parents. A recent report found that over a third of 10-year-olds in England said they were spending more than three hours on school days playing video games. But some are positive about new games which can be used by all the family, playing together.

“My little brother, you cannot take his Nintendo DS from his hands a lot of the time, he will find it difficult to go to sleep because he’s away from it.”

15 year old girl

Some parents are worried about levels of violence, saying that it might make violent behaviour seem more acceptable, but others are less concerned about this.

However, even concerned parents sometimes still buy adult games for their children – either for a ‘peaceful life’ or because it is ‘only a game’. Some parents are just not aware that some games are only suitable for adults. In my discussion groups, it was quite common for children and young people to have played 18+ age rated games, even when their parents would never let their children watch 18+ rated films.

My research showed that it is very difficult to tell what effect playing certain video games may have on children. There is some research that suggests violent games may make some children feel more aggressive in the short-term, but there is no proof that these effects last a long time or make violent adults.

Because we know that young children learn by copying what other people are doing, and can’t always tell the difference between what is pretend and what is real, they should not play games meant for older children. Also, when older children are still developing what they think and feel about the world, and are forming their own relationships, it is not appropriate for them to play video games that are designed just for adults.

It is very difficult to carry out an experiment that can tell us what effect violent video games may have on children and young people, as it would mean giving children games that may not be appropriate for them. We therefore have to judge carefully which games are okay to play and which games are just for adults, to make sure children and young people stay protected.



Video Games Recommendations

The Classification System

There are a number of ways to help make sure children play video games that are appropriate for them. One of the most important ways is by using the classification systems, which tell you what age you should be before you play a game.

There are two classification systems used in the UK, which have different symbols to indicate the ratings – there are the 'BBFC' symbols (like the ones you find on films) and the 'PEGI' symbols that are just found on video games. I thought both systems did a really good job at deciding what ratings to give video games. However, many people told me that having two different sets of symbols can sometimes be confusing. And, sometimes it made parents think that some symbols related to how skillful you had to be, rather than how old you had to be.



To solve this problem, I have recommended that there should be just one set of classification symbols for video games in the UK. I have also said that this needs to be backed up by law, so that games with '12' ratings and above cannot be sold to someone under those ages. I am suggesting that the two organisations (BBFC and PEGI) work together to decide what the age classifications should be, but what you see on the front of the box would be the same labels as you see on films. Government will need to consult everyone on how these changes can be made.

I also want there to be a big information campaign – with posters in shops, so that everyone knows to take the age ratings more seriously.

Advertising: I am also saying that advertising and video games businesses should work together to make sure adverts for games (posters, television, online etc.) do not include material that may not be suitable, and that they are not aimed at those too young to play the game being advertised.

Games Consoles

Most games consoles and computers allow parents to create settings that will not allow children and young people to play games that are not suitable for their age. They all work in slightly different ways – but some are better than others and offer more options. For example, some allow parents to set time limits for children playing, or allow different settings for different children and also allow safety settings to be decided depending on the classification symbols. I found that those that combined these features and make it simple for parents to set up are easier to use than others.

I think that these 'parental controls' could be a really good way of making sure that children don't play games that they are not supposed to – especially in families where there are children of different ages. But at the moment, some people are not aware they even exist.

I am therefore suggesting that all of the main game consoles should have good, clear safety information set out for parents. I am also suggesting that they should offer as many options as possible, so that parents can decide what is best for their children. I am also recommending that more needs to be done to make sure parents are aware that these 'tools' are there, that they know how important they are and they are encouraged to use them.

This can be done by having better information on the box; having a warning sticker on the disc drawer and having a prompt appear on the screen when you set the console up.



Competition Runner Up

Online Gaming

Playing games online is becoming increasingly popular, particularly the big 'Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games' (MMORPGs) and games played online through consoles.

Gaming online brings a number of benefits – for instance, it means children and young people can play with friends, family, or people they meet online, whether other players are just down the street, or on the other side of the world. However, as with the internet in general, with these benefits come possible risks, including:

- Material in games created by other players – which may not be suitable for some ages (as these aren't included in the original age rating).
- Giving away personal details to people you don't know in the real world. For example, through instant messaging & chat functions in games.
- Links to other websites, or adverts that may not be appropriate.
- Bad behaviour of unknown/anonymous players (e.g. abusive or threatening comments, or bad language) that may not be appropriate for younger players.
- Playing for too long – especially for games that are ongoing, with multiple users, as it is more difficult to get away from playing.

There are a number of ways that these possible 'risks' can be managed. For example, many online gaming sites have people monitoring players' behaviour and looking out for anything suspicious. Many also offer 'report buttons' to use if your opponents are being abusive.

But 'online gaming' is still relatively new compared to the way games have traditionally been played – on consoles and computers, 'offline'. So, to make sure that enough is being done in games aimed at children, I have said that the different industries and the Government should work together to help make online games safer (e.g. by having clear and easy to use 'report buttons'). I have also said that the new Government Council, which is looking at safety on the internet (see page 7), should also focus on online games.



GAMESMART.



- G**ive your child safe games and web sites to use.
- A**void war and fighting games.
- M**ake sure your computer is in a place you can see, not the bedroom.
- E**nsure the games are good and fun.
- S**et up the computer so they cannot load games or go on web sites without your permission.
- M**ake sure the age rating of the game is okay.
- A**lways get your child to ask before using the computer.
- R**egularly check what your child is doing.
- T**ry not to let them play for too long.



Conclusion

My Review has never been about stopping you from having fun or taking advantage of the many different opportunities in games and on the internet. It is about making sure you can still do everything that you really enjoy, in the safest possible environment and in ways that are right for your age. I just want to make sure that all the protections that are available in the real world to keep you safe are present in your 'virtual worlds' too.

For example, when you go swimming in the real world, there will always be a number of safety measures to stop you getting injured or drowning – there will be clear signs around the pool; arm bands for beginners; shallow ends for younger children; and lifeguards on standby to assist. This is just how it is online where websites are sometimes tailored for younger users, so there is nothing inappropriate in them. So, they may check your age before they allow you on the site, and instead of lifeguards there may be 'moderators' to keep checking everything is alright. And, just as you are taught how to swim, you will be taught by your parents and other adults in your life how to stay safe online, especially if you find yourself in difficult digital waters.

We're all encouraged to have balanced diets in order to grow healthy and strong, and in the same way we should think about having healthy and balanced media diets. This means we should think about the amount of time we spend playing video games and going on the internet and make sure we still spend time with our families and friends, having fun in other ways.

We need to make sure that you and your parents have all the support you need to make the most of these new technologies with confidence, and be 'NetSmart' and 'GameSmart'.



Byron Review
competition winner



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