

How to help your child balance their online and offline lives during isolation

Zeeko is an Irish company based at Nova UCD whose mission is to teach Internet Safety to Children, Parents, Teachers and Corporate Ireland, creating a world where young people can safely benefit from Technology and the Internet. They have come to the school over the past few years to help us communicate to the pupils about internet safety.

During the week they held a webinar about how we can help and support children to balance their online and offline lives during this period of isolation. Here are some points you might find useful:

- Take the time to sit down and talk to your child (not always successful!!) and find out what they are doing when they are online- this can be positive or negative.
- Find out what they are viewing- You Tube, Netflix, gaming, Social Media, Tik Tok. Get them to tell you about them. Let them inform you.
- Teach your children safe internet skills.
- With there being a lot more use of the internet in homes at present there can be too much of a good thing. It's important the digital world does not replace the real world. This could be the child undertaking 5 things in the real world before they undertake 1 thing on the Internet.
- Sit and engage in the positive side of their digital world. If a child is involved in gaming they can be very proud of this so celebrate it with them.
- Use the Internet to communicate with grandparents, cousins, wider family through the medium of Zoom and the like.
- Can be used as a family pursuit- Joe Wicks P.E. morning workouts or Dublin Zoo virtual tours.

Signs of too much time online

- When the child becomes bored, starts to show negative emotions, temper and emotions become externalised.
- **Blue light**- the light that comes from the screen which tricks the brain into thinking it is day time. This in turn stops the brain producing a sleep hormone which allows us to fall into a deep sleep. No device 1 hour before bed is highly recommended. When a child is rubbing their eyes it's time to turn off the device.
- Comparison sadness- research has shown that after 30 mins of looking at other people's lives we will feel sad as everyone puts up only their good stuff!!
- Be aware of passive behaviour- just flicking through photos/ images and not engaging, jealous talk. Ask questions and always check in.
- Pupils have themselves reported that they suffer from insomnia, headaches, inability to focus, sore eyes, like they are wasting their time, frustration or anger.

Our role as adults

- We live in a smart phone culture so it's important we look at our own behaviour. I know myself I can be too dependent on my phone. We must lead by example and try to break the habit of resorting to our phones any time we can. Children respond to our own habits.
- Avoiding the news is no harm either. It can actually make us feel worse so leave it to the evening news and a brief review.

- Create free screen bedrooms. This is where children are more vulnerable to stranger danger and bullying.
- Take an interest and have conversations with the children.
- Model good behaviour. You are the digital leader!!
- iKydz app can turn off the internet on a phone.
- Put the blue light filter on in the phone.
- Use this time in a positive way and try and strike a healthy balance between online and offline tacks- exercise is so important so get those walks in!!

I hope some of the points mentioned will be of benefit to you and please stay safe.