

# PROTECTING CHILDREN ONLINE



## AT A GLANCE:

- Young people make up one in three of today's 3.5 billion internet users, and we must ensure that they enjoy the same protections and privileges online as they do offline.
- New technologies such as artificial intelligence, increased connectivity, augmented and virtual reality will continue to change the way children interact in society in the future.
- Digital technology and connectivity provide powerful and exciting learning opportunities, helping to build knowledge, global citizenship, empathy and creativity.
- However just like in the offline world, potential risks - addiction, cyberbullying, inappropriate content, identity theft, reputational damage - exist, and technology alone cannot provide 100% protection.
- Our activities focus on education and empowerment among children, parents and teachers.
- We are collaborating with governments, industry peers and NGOs to set standards, create content and provide training, while also integrating child protection tools into our products.

## Defining the issue and why it matters

As our digital world continues to expand at breakneck speed, it is our children who are at the forefront of change: young people make up one in three of today's 3.5 billion internet users. Starting their digital journey before they can even walk or talk, our children are now society's most connected age group.

To them, there's no distinction between an offline and an online life. Their world is a single, seamless, hyperconnected flow. Consequently, those of us with the power to do so must make sure that our children enjoy the same protections and privileges online as they do offline; because the potential risks – addiction, bullying, sexualized behavior – exist in both realms.

We all want our kids to play and learn in safe places and our online playgrounds should be no different, especially when so much that's good is at our children's fingertips. These are digital spaces where our future leaders can develop knowledge, global

citizenship, empathy, critical thinking, creativity and a sense of community.

## Our point of view and approach

We believe the internet is the greatest invention ever created. But it's how we use it that really counts – especially when it comes to protecting the next generation. Parents, educators, policymakers and our industry all have a shared responsibility to empower the digital citizens of the future. If we can help our children grow up empowered, digitally respectful and confident citizens, it is our whole society that will benefit.

To make sure everyone can fulfill their responsibility, it's crucial that we're able to raise awareness of today's biggest digital challenges. Technology alone cannot provide 100% protection from the risks. Education plays a critical role in ensuring that parents and teachers have the right knowledge and skills to guide children appropriately.

Through our twin focus on empowerment and awareness, we align with the European Commission's Digital Single Market strategy to create a Better Internet for Children This aims to make the Internet a place to gather knowledge, develop skills and improve job prospects by providing access to the relevant resources.



## Steps we are taking

Our strategy focuses on educating and empowering children, parents and teachers. We provide online parental controls and safety educational materials while taking an active role in the development of self-regulating practices that ensure children's privacy and safety.

We build privacy and protection into the foundation of every new technology product. Our 'Privacy by Design' process introduces a range of protective measures, from stringent vulnerability checks to built-in prevention against hacking. Our Horizon TV HD+ box, for example, includes configurable parental controls to stop children accessing certain content.

Since 2007, we've supported the annual **Safer Internet Day** campaign that promotes safe and responsible use of online and mobile technologies in over 100 countries. From the same year, we began working with European Schoolnet to create toolkits for families, educators and children of all ages to keep children safer online. To date, we've produced and distributed more than 1.8 million of these toolkits.

We're also a founding member of the **eSafety Label** project, an accreditation scheme helping schools review and implement eSafety practices. The associated portal, used by over 4,500 teachers in Europe, provides resources like suggested lesson plans and classroom policies. This scheme gives us the opportunity to reach up to 1.6 million children who are attending schools already signed up to the eSafety Label project.

In the UK, Virgin Media's **Switched on Families** site offers parents, grandparents and caregivers practical guidance about staying safe online. Additionally, Virgin Media have joined forces with other industry members to support **Internet Matters**, the UK-based organization offering advice and information on tackling e-safety issues.

Meanwhile, Virgin Media Ireland has begun a three-year partnership with the National Parents Council Primary to deliver internet safety sessions. So far, the combined initiative has delivered almost 800 sessions to more than 12,500 parents.

Our determination to help formulate self-regulating practices that ensure children's privacy and safety online meant that in 2017, we joined our industry peers and NGO'S, in the European Commission's Alliance to **Better Protect Minors Online**. As part of signing up to the Alliance, we took the opportunity to publicly state our commitment to protecting young people in the digital world.

## OUR LONG-TERM AMBITION

In a rapidly evolving digital landscape, our ambition is to protect children from any potential risks while encouraging them to explore and enhance all that is positive within their online world. We intend to integrate child safety features in all our new products at the same time as we help to create a better internet for children by empowering them to be digitally respectful and confident citizens.

## What's next?

Continuing to integrate child protection tools into our products will form a significant part of our design process, and our drive to educate adults and empower young people to make informed choices online will remain at the heart of our wider approach. As such, we'll keep working with governments and NGOs to create materials that help young people stay safe in a rapidly developing world of new technologies and applications. The internet is one of the greatest inventions the world has ever seen, and we want our future digital citizens to feel safe online, so they can focus on harnessing its power for good.

