

SHOCKING STATISTICS REVEAL BRITISH PARENTS STILL UNAWARE OF INTERNET DANGERS TO CHILDREN

Submitted by: EHPR

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§ 59% of British parents do not agree with the statement, 'The Internet is dangerous for children'

§ 64% of British parents admit that they allow their child to use the internet at home always, often or sometimes unattended

§ 56% of the parents surveyed felt it was 'safe enough for their child to use the internet at home unattended'

§ 63% of British parents say they have not installed parental control software on their home PCs

A survey of over 1,200 British parents carried out for leading electrical retailer, Comet and NCH, the children's charity, has revealed that there is still a huge mountain to climb when it comes to educating British parents about the dangers of the internet. The research coincides with the launch of a month of intensive internet safety awareness activity by Comet including a nationwide programme of free in-store seminars. Comet is the only retailer to pre-load its IT Works computers with a 14 day fully functional trial subscription to CyberPatrol, the market-leading parental control software.

Shocking statistics

The survey shows that a massive 59% of British parents do not agree with the simple statement, 'The Internet is dangerous for children'. Only 31% of the sample agreed with the statement and a further 9% strongly agreed.

It was found, however, that parents with younger children were more likely to agree than those with older children – 49% of respondents with children aged four to six felt the internet was dangerous for children compared to 39% of those with children aged 13 to 15.

Furthermore, almost two thirds of the parents questioned (64%) admit that they allow their child to use the internet at home always, often or sometimes unattended. More than half (56%) of the parents surveyed felt it was 'safe enough for their child to use the internet at home unattended.' Three per cent of the parents questioned went as far as to say they felt it was 'entirely safe' for their child to use the internet unattended at home.

Lack of supervision

Only 17% of British parents questioned said that their child never uses the internet at home unattended. The percentage of children using the internet unattended increases with the child's age – around 17% of children aged nine or under always or often use the internet unsupervised, compared to 35% of those aged 10 to 12 and nearly two thirds of children aged 13 to 15.

John Carr, Internet Adviser for NCH, comments: "The results of this survey show that we still have a long way to go to reach parents and convince them of the dangers of the internet. On the other hand, a very healthy 77% say they think that internet safety software should be pre-installed on every new computer sold to families so clearly, at another level, parents are looking for solutions."

Just over one third of British parents (35%) said they have internet safety software on their home PC but actual sales of safety products suggest that parents may simply be confused about whether or not such software is in fact on their children's machines.

Of the remaining two thirds (63%) who have not installed internet safety software, the most common reason parents gave (38%) for not having installed it was because their child 'knows how to be safe on the internet.' Many other reasons were cited for not installing the software including

'it doesn't really work' (8%), 'I can't afford it' (6%), 'my child would be able to disable it' (6%) and 'I wasn't aware it existed' (6%). One quarter (25%) of the parents surveyed said that they trusted their child not to do anything dangerous on the internet.

These statistics contrast sharply with the number of people who could identify the greatest risks to children using the internet. Almost all (94%) of the parents questioned said that they knew pedophiles could have direct contact with children through chatrooms or other online services. Nine out of 10 parents surveyed also said that children could easily be exposed to pornography through websites and email.

Comet's commitment to internet safety

Comet is the only retailer to pre-load its computers with CyberPatrol, the market-leading parental control software. CyberPatrol, the most comprehensive parental control software available, is relied upon and trusted by parents and schools worldwide to protect children online. All Comet IT Works computers have a free 14 day trial of CyberPatrol installed as standard so that customers can try out the software for a month and then decide whether or not they would like to subscribe. There is also a 10% discount for Comet customers taking up the subscription.

In conjunction with its chosen charity, NCH – the children's charity, Comet is launching a nationwide programme of internet safety seminars which will take place in selected stores throughout September and October.

Look out for a seminar near you:

LOCATION DATE TIME

Glasgow – Paisley Tuesday 7th September 1pm

Edinburgh – Maybury Wednesday 8th September 1pm

Liverpool – Speke Tuesday 14th September 1pm

Stockton on Tees Wednesday 15th September 1pm

Swansea Tuesday 21st September 1pm

Birmingham – Castle Vale Thursday 23rd September 1pm

Bristol – Cribbs Causeway Wednesday 29th September 1pm

Norwich Thursday 30th September 1pm

Maidstone Tuesday 5th October 1pm

Southampton Wednesday 6th October 1pm

In addition, Comet will be distributing free CDs in every store containing guidance on internet safety from Parents Online, an organisation which specialises in helping parents understand the role of Information Technology in learning. To find the location of your nearest Comet store, information on internet safety seminars or to download advice on internet safety, log onto www.comet.co.uk/internetsafety.

Bill Moir, Comet's Head of Computing, adds: "Given the number of terrifying cases just this year of youngsters being lured away from their homes, it's amazing that parents are not exercising more caution when it comes to the internet. Children are naturally inquisitive and this curiosity of all things new, when added to a child's naivety, can be deadly. All parents should think seriously about the dangers that the internet can bring into the home and take steps to ensure their children are properly protected."

In the interests of safety online, Comet and NCH have put together a simple 'Digicode' for parents to share with their children to help keep them safe.

Kids - Follow the Comet Digicode and stay safe on the net:

Don't give out personal details

If someone asks your name, always get the OK from your parents/carer

Guard your passwords, keep them secret

It's important to tell your parents/carer anything that worries you

Check with a trusted grown-up before entering chatrooms

Online friends are fab but take a grown-up along if you're meeting up with them

Delete emails from anyone you don't recognize, especially attachments

Enjoy the internet but be safe!

- ends -

For more information, please contact Valerie Rushton, Robin Smith or Fiona Hardman at EHPR on 07000 425 425, email comet.pressdesk@ehpr.co.uk

For information on NCH, please contact Grant Imlach in NCH's press office on 020 7704 7111 or out of hours mobile 07802 806 679, email grant.imlach@nch.org.uk

Note to Editors:

- Survey of 1338 British adults carried out by YouGov in May 2004 for Comet and NCH
- Comet has more than 250 stores throughout the UK which offer a wide range of the most up to date home electricals at 'Every Day Low Prices'. On average 34,000 competitor prices are checked every week to ensure that the lowest prices are maintained.
- Comet customers can also shop by telephone on 08705 425 425, online at www.comet.co.uk or log on to the UK's first major retail auction website at www.clearance-comet.co.uk.
- NCH is one of the UK's leading children's charities, working in partnership to run over 500 projects

for the UK's most vulnerable children, young people and their families and in doing so supporting over 140,000 people. For further information visit www.nch.org.uk

· CyberPatrol is the market-leading parental control software from SurfControl, the world's number one web and email filtering company. For further information and news on CyberPatrol, please visit www.cyberpatrol.com

· Parents Online has been created by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to promote home school links by helping parents understand the role of Information Technology (IT) in learning.