New Survey Reveals: Danger of Children Falling Through Safety 'Net'

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British parents haven't a clue what their children are getting up to on the home computer, according to a new survey.

A whopping 76 per cent of parents admit they regularly leave their children – sometimes as young as FIVE years old - alone when they are on the internet. In fact, the average child is left alone online for more than TWO HOURS every week, giving them plenty of time to access pornography and graphic imagery, adult chat rooms and sites promoting violence and other unpleasant material.

The poll of 2,000 parents was conducted by CyberSentinel, a new software solution that uniquely offers customisable features, available to parents for the first time in the UK. Rather than just blocking unsuitable websites, the easy-to-download software offers a unique 'screen-grab' feature and monitors keywords that signal danger, which encourages parents to talk to their children about any potential threats or mis-uses. The software also allows you to add words, phrases or numeric information such as your credit card number or child's mobile number so parents are aware if these are used online by the child.

The poll revealed that 63 per cent of parents believe that they are ultimately responsible for their own child's internet safety, but worryingly parents seem to be in the dark about the potential risks to their child online.

More than half of parents believe that by being in the next room they are close enough to hear and monitor what their child is doing on the computer. But over a third (37.1%) admit they usually have no idea what their child is looking at while online, and one in five would not know how to check what sites their child has been accessing once they had logged off. On average, most parents claim their child had to be at least 12 years old before they were trusted to be alone with the computer 100 per cent of the time.

Leading educationalist Jacqueline Harding MA, Cert Ed says: "British parents seem to have absolutely no idea that by leaving their children alone online, they are exposing them to a number of risks. Without parental controls and appropriate e-safety software in place, most children could accidentally access unsavoury websites and become vulnerable to a range of risks - from cyber bullying to gambling; suicide to self harm and grooming by online predators. For instance, if your child accidentally typed 'Cboobies' instead of 'Cbeebies' they could be directed to a number of websites which featured topless women – hardly appropriate viewing for young children."

CyberSentinel has won the support of Professor Tanya Byron PHD, PsychD, Msc, Bsc who presented the government with an independent review of the risks to children from exposure to potentially harmful or inappropriate material on the internet and in video games.

Professor Byron confirms: "This poll has shown that 63 per cent of parents recognise that they are responsible for protecting their children online, which is a great start. Whilst parents may be tempted

to prohibit the internet use of their children, this is not the answer and may be counter-productive by causing family arguments and underhand behaviour. Using an effective internet safety package combined with having open discussions with your children on e-safety, helps to maximise your child's online freedom – within safe boundaries, set by you."

Key findings from the research additionally showed that:

 75% of parents believe their child fully understands the dangers associated with talking to strangers online while 49% said they worry that their children may be talking to people they don't know
 61% said that their child definitely does not use a social networking site and that the internet is mostly for homework
 In fact, the poll showed that over 60% of children never tell their parents who they have been talking to online
 While 70% of parents said that they were concerned about their children using a virtual character as an alter ego online, 46% admitted that they didn't know whether their child used one

Two thirds of parents know they could do more to protect their children online – indeed, a fifth of parents admitted that their child has complained of accidentally accessing an unsuitable site. 49 per cent of parents also admitted that although they know that if a word is mistyped on a search engine, it could direct their child to an inappropriate website – yet they wouldn't know what to do about preventing this.

Ellie Puddle of CyberSentinel says: "As a parent myself, I know what it is like to presume that your kids will transfer the rules and guidelines you stipulate for them in the real world to the cyber world. But this does not happen automatically – parents need to be prepared to talk to children about their online world, to guide them on what is appropriate or not.
"CyberSentinel allows you to safeguard your child, just as you would safeguard your five year old in the park or insist on your teenage taking precautions when they go to a party. The software can be personalised for each user, based on their age and your concerns. In the same way that we teach our children how to cross the road, we should also teach them to navigate their way safely online.

She continues: "Innocent or deliberate mistakes can be made by children that direct them to online material that is potentially negative. But for the first time, parents in the UK can now take advantage of e-safety software that will help their child continue to enjoy the many learning and development opportunities that the internet has to offer."

ENDS

Notes to editors
How CyberSentinel Works
Simple to download, and managed by CyberSentinel's technical team (which includes a help desk), the key product features include:
- Time management and access control – this feature sets times when a child can access the internet and can be used to prevent children from accessing the web late at night, which in turn can prevent arguments between parent and child

- Filtering of web sites (white and black lists)
- Logging of web sites (recording all visited)
- Monitoring chat usage (all sides)
- Word and phrase analysis (detecting those on the black list)

Remote access using the web based console allows parents to see at a glance what children are doing online. Settings can also be changed from the console, giving the ability to suspend internet access remotely if the child is accessing something inappropriate or is potentially in danger.

A summary is produced for the parent to see all internet activity that has been visited by each child. But reporting can also be accessed remotely by parents 24/7. This means they can log to their control panel remotely from any PC with internet access and see what their children are doing online at home at any moment – with the ability to change the settings immediately.

For interview opportunities with Professor Tanya Byron, educationalist Jacqueline Harding or CyberSentinel director, Ellie Puddle, or for further details please contact:

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Please note: audio and film footage are also available from the CyberSentinel press office