<u>Searching the internet</u>

With a world of information at their fingertips, it's easy for young people to actively search for material that might be inappropriate for their age, or stumble across things that might upset or disturb them.

The internet can provide young people with unrestricted access to adult material. At an age where they are developing socially and sexually, it is natural for young people to be inquisitive. The internet can support natural exploration of sex, relationships and identity; however, there is the risk of exposure to material that could be detrimental to their development.

One of the ways to help manage what your child is exposed to online is the use of parental controls. These are a good tool available to you; however, they are not a substitute for talking to your child about what they see online.

Pornography

It is likely that in adolescence your child will be curious about sex. They may well seek to explore this by looking at Pornography. Pornography is big business online. It is quick to find, often free and has no age restrictions

 Pornography has always played a part in adolescent sexual development; however, the internet has significantly changed the type of content that young people are accessing. There is no top shelf on the internet and at the point at which young people are developing sexually, they can be exposed to material of an extreme nature – such as degrading, violent and dominating behaviours. This can result in: negative attitudes towards women, dysfunctional sexual attitudes and behaviours and unrealistic expectations of sexual relationships.

Difficult though it may be, you should talk to your child about pornography when you talk to them about sex. Emphasise that sex is part of healthy adult relationships, however, within pornography people are playing a role and the

depictions of sex are unrealistic and potentially unhealthy.

If you are concerned about your child's use of pornography you can seek advice from your GP. The Brook Advisory Service also provides help for under-25's with a range of sexual issues. 0808 802 1234 www.brook.org.uk

Unhealthy Networking

You can use the internet to find out about anything you are interested in and meet people interested in the same things, no matter how niche. Although this provides fantastic opportunities, it can also reinforce vulnerabilities. For example, some young people suffering from eating disorders have used the internet to promote these conditions to others as a lifestyle choice. Through these networks young people encourage each other to engage in unhealthy behaviours. This can reinforce their opinions about the illness and make it seem normal.

If you are concerned, visit B-eat www.beat.co.uk, who provide information for young people, parents and practitioners.

Extreme Opinions

Anyone can create a website, it's easy and even the most extreme view can find an audience. At a time when young people's opinions are being formed, exposure to sites which convey extreme viewpoints may influence their views if not counterbalanced with other perspectives.

Encourage your child to talk to you about the things they read or see online. It's important to help your child understand that, just as national newspapers have their own political perspectives, websites may, and often will, have their own agendas. Just because it is online, it doesn't mean that it is true.

Inaccurate Content

A lot of online content has been created by people like you and me. Websites like Wikipedia are written entirely by their users and this provides a great online

resource. However, it is important for young people to know that not everything they read online is true. It may be a distorted opinion, or simply factually incorrect. 100% of people know this. Encourage your child to check facts from other sources and also to think critically.