Live Streaming- advice for parents from the Internet Watch Foundation

The release of the Internet Watch Foundation's new online live-streaming research, titled Trends in Online Child Sexual Exploitation: Examining the Distribution of Captures of Live-streamed Child Sexual Abuse may have concerned some parents. In this research the author worked with over 2000 cases where (she believed) children had been either groomed or coerced into live-streaming videos of themselves, via their webcam, mobile or tablet. Most of the illegal videos she saw had been recorded by offenders, who viewed the live-streamed abuse and then redistributed it. In many cases, the children appeared to be completely unaware a recording was being made.

This research highlights the need for us all to be aware that although the internet can be a great place for young people, there are some potential dangers posed by technology.

Top tips to help children to be safe online whilst live-streaming

1. Talk regularly with your children.
   Talk regularly with your children about how they use technology and find out what their digital life is like, including what services they are using. If in doubt, talking PANTS from NSPCC is a good way to teach children how to stay safe from abuse – offline and online. Our suggested conversation starters for parents and carers, are also a useful resource.
2. Before you stream, protect your personal information.
   Live-streaming is becoming a very popular way for young people to broadcast themselves on many different apps, to communicate with their friends or wider community, just as their favourite celebrities and Vloggers do. Make sure your children understand the risks of live-streaming. Live broadcasts can't be edited, and you can't erase what people have already seen. Remind them that personal information might be given away by things said during the stream, things shown on camera or even in the background. Importantly, live-streams can be recorded by others, who can then keep a copy even after the stream has ended or expired. The Net Aware guide from the NSPCC includes the most popular social networks young people use, and tells you which services include live-streaming, or allow young people to connect with people they only know online.
3. Make an agreement about device usage.
   Livestreaming can both allow your child to watch live broadcast and also broadcast themselves, and there are risks to be aware of in both activities. Live video can be faked, so encourage your child to think carefully why an unknown person might want to video chat with them. If a site has privacy settings, always make sure your children use them to control who can contact them.

Parents can make a family agreement, where the whole family can be involved in making promises about whether to use streaming services at all, who to use them with, or where in the house it is OK to use them. Parents may decide that devices that can be used for live-streaming and video chatting (such as tablets, phones, webcams connected to computers and laptops) should not be located in bedrooms or more private areas of a house. For further advice, check our video chat and webcams guide.

4. Teach your child when to say no.

Children may be groomed or coerced into appearing naked on camera or performing suggestive acts over webcams, as the IWF revealed on their latest research. This content can be also recorded and used to threaten or blackmail young people. It's therefore crucial for parents and carers to be aware of children's use of technology and to educate them on the dangers posed to them by offenders.

Tell your child that if he or she is ever asked to say or do something online they don't feel comfortable with, they can always say no, end the chat or broadcast, and talk in confidence with you or another trusted adult. Remind them that it is never too late to tell you about something which has happened online. These SMART Rules will help your children keep themselves safer online.

5. Report abusive content.

Show your children how they can report offensive or abusive material on the service they use to watch live-streams. You can find more information about how you can help your child stay safe online by using features such as privacy settings on social media and understanding how to make a report on a range of apps, games and services.

If you, or your children, ever stumble across child sexual abuse material online, you can also report it to the Internet Watch Foundation. Reporting takes less than 2 minutes and can be done completely anonymously.

6. Use the tools available to help you.

There are lots of tools to help you manage the devices used by your family. For example, knowing how to activate and use parental controls can help protect your child from seeing inappropriate content online. For advice and guidance on how to make use of parental controls and other safety features on devices, check out the UKSIC's free Parents' Guide to Technology.