SCHOOLS ICT

Technology in bedrooms

E-Sussex, E-Safe

Safeguarding all children in East Sussex all the time

East Sussex County Council

Provided by **East Sussex County Council**
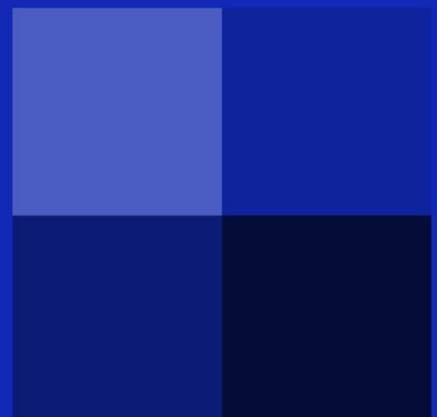
With the cost of technology falling, and the size of equipment becoming ever-more portable, more and more technology is being installed in multiple rooms in the home.

Children increasingly want their own TV, Satellite or cable TV, games consoles and mobile phones in their bedrooms. With the advent of tablet PCs and ipads, even more powerful, portable devices can be taken (or smuggled) into any room in the house.

Parents might like to take a view as to what technology is safe or unsafe to allow private access too.

My child wants the whole set-up. All her friends have it, so what's the problem.

This is a very complex question to answer. Perhaps it is better to do it in sections. The first is that when you provide connected technology in your child's bedroom, it is not only the equipment you are inviting in, it is also what, and more importantly who that equipment is connected to.

i) **Computing devices.**
If you give your child a computer in his/her bedroom, it will probable have internet connectivity. If so, they can invite anyone on their social networking friends list into the privacy of their bedroom – whether you know them or not. They will also have access to the internet and therefore could well see material that you would rather they didn't. If you don't have parental controls enabled, you can count on it. Again, unless you have enabled time restrictions, there is nothing to stop them surfing away until late into the night. With headphones connected, you wont hear them. Some (most) laptops have webcams built in. We know that webcams can be remotely activated. We also know that cameras can be activated without any outward sign of them being on. You can prevent this by not connected the computer in their bedroom to the internet.

ii) **Comminicating devices.**
Mobile phones, text systems etc– all of these send messages, and may be able to do so without needing your internet connection to do so. Remember, that your neighbours may also have wireless networks and children are quite capable of joining them, especially if there is no encryption, and/or they know the passcode. (It's written on the back of some wireless routers!) Don't assume your child isn't on the internet using next door's connection! Many home hubs now work as Access Points for the general public. So in this case, if your child knows their email account and password, they can just hop onto any available wireless connection.

iii) **TV.**
Televisions are getting SMARTer! SMART TVs connect to the internet, offer a host of online material including box sets, (some of which incur a charge) and thanks to the new digital, free-to-air channels, there is a lot more choice than the main four channels now. It

is also possible to access games through the TV – again, some of these incur charges either at the start or during the game.

iv) **SKY and Cable.**

SKY and cable TV offer a huge rang of programming from sport to adult material. While some adult channels only become active late at night, unless you lock out channels (and make sure your child does not know or learn the lock out code) they can see material that is unsuitable for them, again, with no time restriction.

v) **Games Consoles**

Games consoles are now multi-player and many games are able to connect with users worldwide. Some of those users are more interested in your child or your money than the game. It is known that paedophiles, identity thieves and fraudsters all target young people through the gaming world. Unfortunately, some games have sought to glamourize offenses such as rape. Violent games often give rise to violent behaviours. Ask any teacher about crazes on TV that have resulted in aggression in schools. There are many examples. One aspect we are seeing lately is the rise in the number of children who a) play age inappropriate games, and b) play them at all hours of the day and night. **It is known that children can become addicted to online games in the same way that a drug addict becomes addicted to their drug of choice.** The only difference in becoming addicted to heroin than becoming addicted to adrenaline, serotonin and dopamine, is that these three chemicals are manufactured in abundant supply by our own bodies.

Is it really that bad?

The problem is that its impossible to tell. Some children manage their lives very well and do not use the privilege of having all this technology in their rooms badly. Others, it is clear, cannot manage to self-monitor, and the results can be tragic for all concerned. If you are going to allow your children access to this equipment, then it needs to be with some form of limitations. (And monitoring!)

I think my child knows the SKY lockout code.

Then you need to change it. By the way, your child may also know the PIN number for you bank card too, and for that matter, may know many of your own passwords! (Ask them.) Children are absorbent and pick up all kinds of information. It's one thing them knowing a PIN number or password, and another to use it. Ideally, parents and carers should change their bank card PIN, SKY lockout PIN, online shopping account and social media passwords every 90 days. (This also prevents hackers and fraudsters from accessing your accounts too.) Also, having the same password for multiple online accounts is not a good idea either. Guess one, get them all!

It is possible to use one word as a core word for all your passwords, and then make changes to it.

In this example we will take the core word **PASSWORD.** (Please don't use this as a password – ever!)

Let's say you have four accounts that you want to use this for. You know the core word, but to make this work, we need to make changes. It **IS** possible to write those changes down if you have to, but experience shows that people tend to remember their special characters more easily than the word upon which they are based.

Like this:-

Account	password	written clue
Amazon	p@ssworD	*@******
Facebook	Pa55w0rd	**55*0**
Ebay	P@55w0rd	*@55*0**
Primary email password	pAs5WoRd	***5****

Note that the underscore shows where capital letters have been used.

This sounds complicated, but it really is unavoidable if you want to retain control of your online world. Sadly, there is now software that can be run to determine passwords, and changing them every 90 days or so goes a long way to keep you ahead of the hackers – especially if the hackers concerned are your own children!

Things to watch for.

If your child has a lot of technology in their rooms, then it is good to keep an eye on:-

i)   How tired they are in the mornings
ii)   How their language is developing (any swearing?
iii)   Are you seeing any sexualised behaviours?
iv)   Are they talking about "friends" who you do not know in the physical world?
v)   Has the school commented on their lack of progress, or a change in progression rate?
vi)   How are their social skills in the physical world with real people? (We all expect teenagers to become monosyllabic from time to time, but this is different, more prolonged)
vii)   Are they getting outside enough?
viii)   Keep your own log for a week on how much time they spend alone in their rooms online. (You may well be surprised at the result of this one.)
ix)   How do they react if, for whatever reason, they can't have their technology, or that favourite game? Can they just go and happily do something else, or is it the end of the world?

(Sometimes children can become really upset, angry, tearful if they can't play their game. If so, it is time to wean them off it and onto something else.

x) Has anything like learning an instrument, or dance classes been dropped in favour of watching TV all the time?

Can the online world really affect my child's behaviour?

Yes, undoubtedly. Children are learning far more than maths and English. They are learning their own value set which may or may not coincide with yours. They learn how to behave only in part from watching you, they learn it from the TV too, and the TV isn't real! Here are some real life examples of the impact of TV on children's behaviours.

i) **The Power Ranger Effect**
This series shows a group of teenagers who fight monsters sent to Earth by a witch-like character called Zelda. The Power Rangers use a form of martial arts. The result of this highly popular craze was that children started to copy the moves on the playgrounds. This resulted in some broken arms and legs.

ii) **The Superman Effect**.
When Superman wishes to stop a car, he stands in front of it. This resulted in the game of "Chicken" where children run out in front of cars. There have been deaths and serious injuries as a result.

iii) **The Batman Effect**.
Some children thought Batman could fly. Some attempted his trick of walking up buildings. This led to the series creator having the actors announce, before each show, that they could not do these things in the real world.

Monkey see – monkey do.

There is no doubt among psychologists that the media in all its forms has a deep and profound effect on young people. On the other hand, there are many good things to be had from connected technology – **providing we remain in control.** As adults, we are better placed to maintain that control, however…..

There was a man in China recently who played an online game for 52 hours with no breaks. He suffered multiple organ failure and died as a result.

Children look to parents to see how to behave. What do they see when they watch you? Are you watching TV a lot (all the time?). Do they see you undertaking a variety of activities?

There is nothing wrong with giving children access to technology, but at the same time, there is nothing wrong in placing limits on it.

Sometimes, "**No"** isn't used enough.

Technology in bedrooms