

THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNET CONNECTION

TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE ONLINE

- Only share information on social media that you are happy for both friends and strangers to see.
- Keep personal information private.
- If you see anything online that you do not like or you find upsetting, tell someone you trust.
- Choose passwords carefully so they are not easy for other people to guess. Do not use the same password for lots of different websites. Do not tell other people your passwords. Keep your passwords safe.
- Never go alone to meet someone you have only met online.

PEOPLE

OPPORTUNITIES

- Social media websites let people share their interests, photos and life events with each other, even if they live in different parts of the world. These relationships can provide support and encouragement.
- In many parts of the world the internet is a good way to communicate with lots of people at once. For example, it can be used to promote community action, gender equity and the inclusion of people with disabilities.

CHALLENGES

- Social media can give a false impression of people's lives, making them look better and more successful than they are. This can cause depression and low self-esteem if people are constantly comparing themselves with others.
- People might be less respectful of each other online than they would be face to face, leading to conflict and bullying.
- The internet has made it easier to produce and share sexually explicit material that exploits vulnerable people.
- Children and young people might meet adults online who are lying about who they are. This puts them at risk of abuse and exploitation.

ACCESSIBILITY

OPPORTUNITIES

- People who have traditionally had fewer opportunities because of disability or gender, for example, can interact online as equals. They may also be able to find work that they would not be able to do otherwise (eg home-based computer work).

CHALLENGES

- People who do not have access to the internet may be left behind.

EMPLOYMENT

OPPORTUNITIES

- Being online offers opportunities to find suitable work and develop skills and ideas to start new businesses.

CHALLENGES

- Big corporations can sell goods and services cheaply online, taking business opportunities away from local retailers.

LEARNING

OPPORTUNITIES

- Learning used to be limited to schools and libraries. When this is difficult because of conflict, disability, gender, poverty or other reasons, learning online can bring many new possibilities.
- The internet allows people to learn about life in other parts of the world, understand global issues (such as climate change and plastic pollution) and follow national and international politics and events.

CHALLENGES

- Not everything on the internet is true or helpful. Information may be changed for political reasons, or because a company wants to sell something.
- Promises of qualifications or employment associated with an online course may be untrue.

CONNECTED

VOICE

OPPORTUNITIES

- The internet allows people to join their voices together and call for change locally, nationally and internationally. This can have a big influence on decision-makers.

CHALLENGES

- Online campaigns may not always be positive. Rumours and false information can add to discrimination and prejudice. Sometimes people might be encouraged to respond to issues with violence.

WARNINGS

OPPORTUNITIES

- The internet can be used to warn people to evacuate if a storm is approaching or there is a risk of flooding etc.
- Information can be provided to help people prepare for disasters, eg evacuation procedures, location of shelters and how to reduce the risk of disease.

CHALLENGES

- Not everyone is connected to the internet (and there may be no internet connection during or after a disaster) so other forms of communication are also needed.

SOME DEFINITIONS

Social media

Websites and computer programmes that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone. Examples include Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram.

Internet

The large system of connected computers around the world that allows people to share information and communicate with each other.

The Unicef report Children in a digital world explores this theme in detail. See the resources page for more information.

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