ADVICE FOR WEBSITE CREATORS

As a website editor you may be thinking of placing photos of children or young people on your website. However, there are important safety concerns to consider before doing so. Some of these may sound pretty obvious, nevertheless, it is vital that all those involved in designing and maintaining websites are vigilant and aware of the potential dangers associated with the posting of photos online. Schools and youth groups, for example, have a duty of care for their children - in other words it is their duty to ensure that every child in their care is safe. In the context of setting up a website this means that they must ensure that no individual child can be identified or contacted either via, or as a result of a visitor using the website[1].

BENEFITS OF SHARING PHOTOS

There are benefits as well as safety concerns in putting pictures of children on a website. For example:

- Web pages can be enhanced by photographs, and including photos can both enliven a page and make something appear more 'real'.

- Children and teenagers will be very excited to see a photo of themselves displayed on the Web. A picture of children, for example, together with references to their own achievements can boost the self-esteem of those photographed, allowing them to gain recognition for their achievements from their friends, family or other interested parties.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Placing photos on the web opens you or others portrayed in the photograph up to potential dangers such as from those wishing to exploit young people.

The key safety concerns here include:

- **Contact:** Children may be placed at risk by the provision of information on what they look like, which certain individuals may utilise to seek to identify and contact them in person.

- **Bullying:** Photos placed on the Internet have the potential to lead to bullying, which is harmful to children, lowering self-esteem and leading to higher levels of stress and anxiety. This may particularly be relevant to sites where visitors can post images

- **Distorting images:** Photos that have been put online may be altered and distorted. This could range from an image being altered in an unflattering way as a cruel joke (common with online bullies), morphed with another image to misrepresent or mislead or even used to create pornography (including child pornography)[2].

CHILDNET'S VIEW

In developing your own website serious consideration needs to be given to the types of images you will include, the information accompanying these images and the legal issues surrounding the posting of photographs on the web. Attention needs to be paid to issues such as site security, permission to use the photos, the appropriateness of the photos and 'contactability' of the subject/s, and the moderating of images posted by visitors to the site.

Below is a checklist of issues to consider when thinking about putting photos of children on a website. It is important to consider these issues before putting the images online. Once an image is put online you lose control of it - it can be copied and sent to others very easily and very quickly.

1. http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk/schools/document.php3?D=d72
2. http://www.wiredsafety.org/safety/chat_safety/online_discussion_safety

CHECKLIST FOR PUTTING PHOTOS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ONLINE

- **Appropriateness of the photo:** If you decide to post photos online, it is important to be careful about how the individuals in it are portrayed. For example, pictures of children swimming or doing gymnastics are probably inappropriate.

- **Limit information accompanying the photo:** Posted photos should not be accompanied with any information which might allow the individual child to be identified. If a photo is posted, avoid identifying information including full name, or first name and class name etc. Similarly, if there are moving images then attention should be paid that identifying information is not include in the sound. Possibilities include providing just a first name or nickname, or a full name without the photo, and group photos are preferable to those of individual children.

- **The issue of contactability:** Individual contact details for children, especially email addresses and phone numbers should never be given out on a website and in no circumstances be displayed under a photograph of the child.

- **Permission to Use Photographs:** Parental permission should be obtained before publishing any photographs of children on the website. The UK Department for Education and Skill's SuperHighway safety site gives some sample parental consent forms for using images of young children, see http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk/schools/document.php3?D=d75.

  The permission of the children should also be obtained.

- **Withdrawing photos:** As web editor, you should immediately remove all material relating to an individual on your website if requested by the legal guardian of the individual or by the individual themselves.

- **Moderation:** If people can upload content (including photos) to your site, then you need to ensure that users are aware of your guidelines and that you take a responsibility to filter/review this content and take down images where necessary.

- **Private access:** Consider using a photo-sharing package that offers password or other security protection. Some websites, for instance, create online photo albums that aren't visible to the public, and you can even choose the specific albums that you want to allow your friends and family to view.

- **Check the legal requirements:** Many countries have regulations in place for the protection of 'data' which are relevant here, for example the Data Protection Act 1998 in the UK.

For further information surrounding good practice and more guidelines for the creation of a safe website, there are some useful links listed below.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- For further guidelines regarding the setting up of school websites see:
  http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk/schools/document.php3?D=d72

- For more advice on the safety issues associated with the creation of websites see:
  www.wiredsafety.org/safety/chat_safety/online_discussion_safety/

- For United States related information concerning the creation of web pages see:
  www.deblogan.com/plan.html

- Some very clear and comprehensive guidelines for schools for the online publication of student images are provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, see:
  www.tki.org.nz/r/governance/curriculum/copyguide_e.php#four

- Further information regarding the Data Protection Act in the UK can be found at:
  www.dataprotection.gov.uk