Children and new technologies

Have your say

The closing date is
17 December 2007

Your comments must reach us by that date

Byron Review
Children and New Technology

Contents

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What's the review about?

What's the review about?

The Prime Minister has asked me to carry out an assessment of video games and the internet, and how they might affect you. The aim of my review is to make sure you can play video games and use the internet safely.

There are three things I want to do:

1 I want to find out whether your safety and wellbeing is affected by unsuitable material on the internet and in video games.

2 I also want to look at the rules and the different things that can be done to protect you from harmful or inappropriate material. I want to look at how well they work, and whether they need to be changed.

3 Finally, I want to help you and your parents understand any risks involved in playing video games, and in using the internet. And I want to show you how to deal with them, so you can use the internet and video games safely.

Dr Tanya Byron

I am a mum, and an expert in children and young people's behaviour.

I have presented television programmes about child behaviour, like – *Little Angels; Teen Angels; and House of Tiny Tearaways*.

I have also written books about child behaviour and articles for the Times newspaper, and lots of different magazines.

How am I going to do it?

I am going to try and answer these questions by talking to everybody who knows about video games and the internet, and asking them to give me all the information they have. I am going to talk to the experts that make and sell video games; internet businesses; parents and teachers; people in Government and the people that make and enforce the rules for video games and the internet.

But what is really important to my review, is to be able to hear from you – the children and young people who play video games and use the internet. I really need you to help me and tell me what you think.

Once I've spoken to everybody, and decided what I think needs to be done, I will write a report to the Government. I will be doing this in March 2008.

You are at the heart of this review

Video games and the internet are a really important part of growing up. They offer you loads of really great stuff – they help you to learn, they help you keep in touch with your friends, and they are fun!

However, there are also some risks involved, and this can be a cause of concern – for example, when young children come across pictures on the internet that are not suitable for their age, or play video games that unsettle or upset them.

Risks are a part of life, and it is important that you understand and learn from them. For example, when you cross a road or ride a bike for the first time, you risk hurting yourself. But as you grow up you learn to think about and understand the risks you take.

With many risks, you know what they are before they happen, and you can prepare for that. For example, when you ride a bike, you know there is a chance you might fall off, so you are careful with your learning. So:

- At first, you start off by having stabilisers on your bike.

- Then, when you take your stabilisers off, your mum or dad may hold the bike for you.

- You might then start off by practising in parks, where it's quiet.

- Eventually, you will be good enough to take your cycling proficiency test, and ride on the roads.

- And you will always wear a helmet!

This is how you become a safe bike rider, who can deal with the risks of riding a bike.

It is similar when you use the internet, or play video games – some risks you know about, whereas others you may not. This review is about looking at what those risks are, and working out how everyone can work together to make sure you can explore the internet and play video games safely, and at a level that is suitable to your age.

Some Questions you may have

What is a call for evidence?

The 'Call for Evidence' is a way for me to ask the public what they think, and what evidence there is that can help me understand the issues, and suggest ways of dealing with them. It might include facts and figures, research or reports, but can also involve people just saying what their experience has been, or what their opinions are.

Who can respond to this call for evidence?

This 'Call for Evidence' is for children and young people under the age of 18 to respond to. But it's fine if you want to get help answering the questions from your parents, carers, teachers or other people. There's also another call for evidence for everyone else, which is on my website: www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview.

Do I have to answer all the questions?

No, you don't. It would be really helpful if you could just answer as many questions as you feel you are able to. You can leave the other spaces blank.

Why are you doing it?

Having a 'call for evidence' means I can get the best possible information, so I can understand the issues before I write my report. It:

- Provides me with evidence to use, and stops me from repeating studies that other people or organisations have already done.

- Shows me what the issues are – so I know what to focus on.

- Gathers opinions from children, young people, parents and all those who know about video gaming and the internet.

Why do you want to hear from children and young people?

This is a review about you. It is about the video games you play and how you use the internet. This is your chance to say what you think and really make a difference. I need to know what your experiences have been, in terms of what you enjoy and what benefits you get from video games and the internet. But I also need to know what you think the risks might be – so I can make sure you stay safe, but can still enjoy and learn from playing video games and using the internet.

How do I respond?

This call for evidence closes on Monday 17 December.

You can go on my website, and fill in the form online www.dcsf.gov.uk/byronreview/yoursay or post your views to:

Consultation Unit, First Floor, Area A, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ

You can also email your views to me or ask any questions about the consultation at: byronreview.yoursay@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

What to do if you have experienced abuse over the internet or need help

If you are upset or worried about something that has happened to you on the internet or when you play video games and you need help, you can call Childline's free 24-hour helpline on 0800 1111. Childline also provide an online advice service for 12-16 year olds: www.there4me.com

If you want to report abuse experienced over the internet, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre has a special website for children and young people, where they can report abuse or a problem: www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Key Words and Phrases

Inappropriate or harmful material and experiences

This can be images or information you see, that may not be suitable for your age, such as images of violence. It can also include experiences which might upset you. For example, when you are contacted by somebody you don't feel comfortable about.

Risks

A risk is about the possibility of being in a situation that may cause you harm. Risk can mean many things to many people, and what some people may think of as a risk, may not worry other people as much. Risks are a part of everyday life and it is important that children and young people learn to think about and understand risks as part of growing up. However, some risk are not acceptable and there are things we can do to avoid them.

Cyber-bullying

This is where technology, especially mobile phones and the internet, are used to deliberately upset someone.

New technologies

This includes video games and the internet (whether you get them on your computer or on your mobile phone) and video games (whether shop bought, downloaded or played online).

Filters

These are devices in your computer or mobile phone that can block certain pictures or websites, but allows you to see others.

SECTION 1 – Video games

Playing games is an important part of childhood and teenage years, and should be healthy, happy and fun.

It is easier now than it has ever been to buy and play video games. You can buy them on the high street and on the internet; download them or play them on-line and play them with other people across the world. This gives you a wider choice of games and different ways of playing – the choice is amazing. This is not only fun, but also helps with your learning and development.

At the same time this can bring new risks. For example, it is sometimes difficult to know what to expect when you are playing games on the internet with people you do not know, or if you play a game that is not suitable for your age, but is only suitable for adults. This could lead to experiences that challenge or upset you, or affect you in other ways, and this sometimes needs to be controlled.

This review is not about stopping you from having fun. It is about:

1   Looking at the benefits that video games can have, and what is fun about video games;

2   Looking at the risks of playing video games, and getting a clearer picture of how video games affect you;

3   Making sure the games you play are suitable for your age, and making sure the rules for buying video games and playing them on the internet work.

What do you think about playing video games?

1   **What do you think are the benefits of playing video games?**

For example, think about why you play video games, what you enjoy about them, and whether they help you develop new skills.

Comment...

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2   **Do you think playing video games causes any problems? If so tell me what you think they are?**

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not Sure ☐

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The grading and labelling of the games you buy

There are different ways that video games are classified. Most video games you buy in shops and on the internet are graded for the age they are suitable for. Others have 'picture labels' on them that show what kind of images and actions are included in the game.

The 'PEGI' system has age ratings which show who the game is suitable for and pictures about what the game contains:

3+	7+	12+	16+	18+
www.pegi.info	www.pegi.info	www.pegi.info	www.pegi.info	www.pegi.info
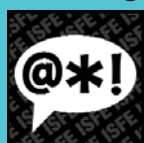
Bad Language   Discrimination   Drugs   Fear
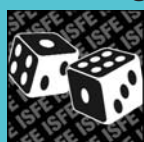
Gambling   Sex   Violence

The 'BBFC' system has age ratings and advice about what's in the game

15 Contains moderate violence	18 Contains strong, bloody violence and hard drug theme
Suitable only for persons of 15 years and over. Not to be supplied to any person below that age.	Suitable only for persons of 18 years and over. Not to be supplied to any person below that age.

Games you buy in shops:

3 **Did you understand how video games are graded and labelled, and what the letters, numbers and symbols meant before you saw them here?**

– For example, think about whether you knew what to expect from a game if you saw these symbols.

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not Sure ☐

Comment...

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4 **Do these labels affect which games you play, or which games your parents allow you to play?**

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not Sure ☐

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5 **Is your playing of video games controlled in any other way?**

– For example, are you allowed to play games on your own?
– Is the length of time you play restricted? Or are there filters on your games console?

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not Sure ☐

Comment..

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Playing Video games on the internet

6 **Before you play a video game on the internet, do you know whether it is suitable for somebody your age?**

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not Sure ☐

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7a Are the games you play on the internet controlled in any way? For example:

Please Tick

Are you only allowed to play when an adult is there? ☐

Can you only play for a certain amount of time? ☐

Or are there systems, such as filters, that stop you from playing certain types of games? ☐

7b Are the games you play on the internet controlled in any other way?

Comment...

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8 What do you think about the ways in which your parents or others control the video games you play?

Comment...

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Learning about safe video game playing

9a **Where do you go to learn about playing video games safely?**

	Please Tick
Your parents or carers	☐
Your brothers or sisters	☐
Your school	☐
Your friends	☐
The internet	☐
I don't go to anyone for help	☐

9b **Is there anywhere else you go? Or, if you don't go anywhere to learn about playing video games safely, why is this?**

Comment...
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10 **Do you think this is enough, or would you like there to be more help available?**

Have enough help already ☐   Need more help ☐   Not Sure ☐

Comment...

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Do things need to change?

11 **Do you think there needs to be new or different ways to help protect children and young people from playing video games that are not suitable for their age?**

Think about playing video games bought from the shop, downloaded from the internet, or played online.

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not Sure ☐

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SECTION 2 – The Internet

The internet is used by millions of people all over the world. It is expanding quickly and new ways to use it are being introduced all the time.

The internet gives us a huge range of benefits. It helps us to communicate with our friends, provides us with a huge amount of information at the touch of a button, and offers us endless opportunities to learn and explore.

Like the front door of your house, your computer or mobile phone is a doorway to the internet community beyond. And while going online can offer you many new and positive experiences, you need to be prepared for what you might find on the web, so you can enjoy it safely.

Just as you are shown how to cross the road and walk to the local shop, by being taught how to spot what dangers there might be, finding your way safely around the internet is something you should prepare for. You should also feel confident that when you move around inside the internet world, there are similar rules and safety checks as when you walk down your street. So, for example, just as you are not allowed into some pubs when you are younger, there are filters or blocking systems on the internet that stop you from going to sites that may not be suitable for your age.

My review will look at the kinds of images and information you see and the experiences you have on the internet. I will look at how everyone can work together to make sure that you can explore the internet safely.

Benefits and opportunities

12 **What do you think are the benefits of the internet for you?**

– For example think about what you use the internet for, how it helps you in your every day life, and in your learning.

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Risks

13 **Do you think there are any dangers or risks involved in using the internet and if so, what do you think those risks are?**

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What to do if you have experienced abuse over the internet or need help

If you are upset or worried about something that has happened to you on the internet or when you play video games and you need help, you can call Childline's free 24-hour helpline on 0800 1111. Childline also provide an online advice service for 12-16 year olds: www.there4me.com

If you want to report abuse experienced over the internet, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre has a special website for children and young people, where they can report abuse or a problem: www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Controlling the risks

There are different ways to control the information and images you are able to see, and the experiences you have on the internet.

For example, there are some images and information that it is illegal to put on the internet, and if people do, these can be removed, or blocked completely.

On the other hand, there are other images and information that are only suitable for adults to see, and it can be fine to put these on the internet. This is because there are different ways of allowing adults to see this material, whilst stopping you from seeing it – for example by using filters on your computer, or asking you to prove how old you are before you can see it.

I want to find out if these controls are working.

14 **Do you know about the different ways in which images and information on the internet can be controlled and hidden, so you don't see them?**

– For example, the filters that your parents can put on your computer.

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not Sure ☐

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15 **Is your internet use controlled in any way?**

– For example: do your parents set rules about the internet, do they keep an eye on what you look at, or are there filters on your computer?

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16 How well do you think these controls work?

Very well ☐   Partly ☐   Not at all ☐

Comment..

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17a Where do you go to learn about using the internet safely? Do you go to:

	Please Tick
Your parents or carers	☐
Your brothers or sisters	☐
Your school	☐
Your friends	☐
The internet	☐
I don't go to anyone for help	☐

17b Is there anywhere else you go? Or, if you don't go anywhere to learn about using the internet safely, why is this?

Comment...
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Do things need to change?

18 Do you think there needs to be new or different ways to help protect you from images, information or experiences on the internet that might not be suitable for someone your age?

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not Sure ☐

19 What else do you think should be done?

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SECTION 3 – The future

Looking ahead, there will always be new technologies that may mean new ways to use the internet or to play video games – for example many people now use the internet through mobile phones, or play games online.

20 **How do you think this might affect the topics I've been talking about, and the questions I've been asking in this review?**

Comment...
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21 **I would welcome any more thoughts, comments or ideas that you would like to give, about any of the questions or topics in this call for evidence**

Comment...
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Information we would like to know about you

Please tick the box if you would like your response to be kept confidential ☐

Male ☐   Female ☐

Which of the following best describes you

A child aged 0-7 ☐

A child aged 8-11 ☐

A child aged 12-15 ☐

A child aged 16-18 ☐

A parent, or carer responding on behalf of a child or children ☐

A teacher responding on behalf of a child or children ☐

An organisation responding on behalf of children ☐

Other – please state ☐

Where do you live?

England ☐

Wales ☐

Scotland ☐

Northern Ireland ☐

Other – please state ☐

Thank you for taking part in my call for evidence