Digital Safety

CREATING KINDER ONLINE COMMUNITIES

by Will Gardner, CEO at Childnet

Technology has the power to strengthen friendships, but it also can facilitate mean behaviour. According to the UK Safer Internet Centre's research paper *Friendship in a Digital Age,* 63% of young people believe they are closer to their friends because of the internet. However, the study of more than 1,000 children aged 11 to 16 also shows that 30% of them had been on the receiving end of mean online behaviour in the previous year.

It's very easy for children to make mistakes online, because without face-to-face interaction their intentions can often be misinterpreted and feelings misunderstood. We need to help children understand the need to think before they post and to consider the potential impact of content they share.

So what can parents do to help encourage their children to be kinder to one another online?

You can start talking to your child about being a good friend online as soon as they show an interest in the internet. Engage with their online use: help them learn how to be good friends online – just like you would offline – and to understand the consequences of mean behaviour online. Ensure they know what to do when things go wrong. Last, but definitely not least, it's important to be a good role model, just as you would in the rest of your life.

Childnet's online book *Digiduck's Big Decision* sensitively portrays this message for 3 to 8 year olds, helping parents to start these conversations early. Copy and paste the link below into your internet browser to access this book:

https://www.childnet.com/ufiles/DigiDuck-eBook.pdf
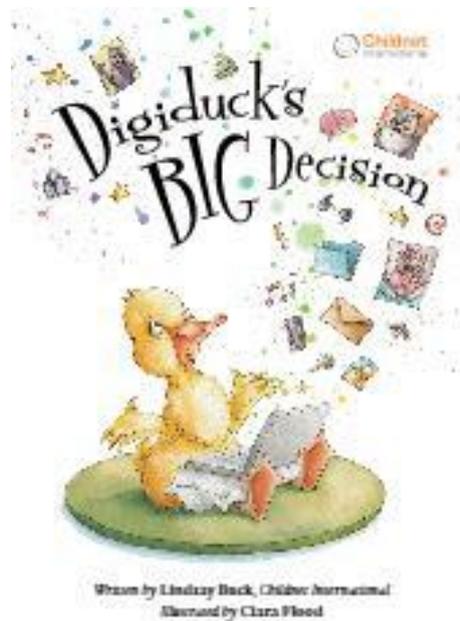
Please note that this has been adapted from an article in a publication, so it has not been written by Oliver House but it includes useful information for parents.