GET WITH IT!

A parents' guide
to new media:

understanding and
sharing the new
media technologies
with your children

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION:
The world of new media

This booklet is about helping you

The world of new media has come fast upon us. Things seemed a lot simpler twenty years ago. Back then there was just the television, the radio, the telephone and the stereo. Now a mobile phone tries to be all of those things at the same time.

Yet while some things have changed, some things remain the same. Children have the same desire to communicate, to socialise, to be entertained and to protect their privacy as much as we ever did. So when it comes to new technologies like the computer or the mobile phone, the same rules apply. The diary we kept under the mattress as a teenager has been replaced by text messages or e-mails and we need to respect this privacy zone.

This booklet gives you an overview of what new technologies can do. They are not something to fear but, rather, embrace. They are no more difficult than when you first got a microwave oven or a video recorder. You did not need to know what every button did - just which buttons you needed to make things happen. It is the same with the personal computer and the Internet or the advanced new mobile phones. They can help you do things and they are playing a significant role in shaping your children's lives – just like the television did in our childhoods.

Like television in the 1960s, new media technologies can offer you and your family new opportunities and experiences. They can allow you to shop at a supermarket without leaving your house. They can allow you pay your bills, check your bank balance and purchase books, music or films, all from the comfort of your home. They can teach you things you never knew at the touch of a button. They can store your entire music collection. They can play your favourite film on demand. They can show you places you never dreamed of and

put you in contact with loved ones anytime of the day around the world. Computers, micro-chips and the Internet can make the world a smaller place - not a scarier one - because they offer people around the world the chance to talk, to exchange ideas and learn.

Yes, they can be used by people whose intentions may be harmful, even criminal, but this is the same for all developments and in the case of new media it is mainly the exception not the rule. We worry about the content and people our children may have access to on the Internet it but we can protect them best by sharing their new media.

The risk from paedophiles has sometimes over-shadowed the other issues of child safety. Children with phones or computers that access the Internet are more at risk of becoming victims of marketing scams and racking up debt through premium services than the unwanted advances of paedophiles – although that remains a real concern. This guide is not about making you, as parents, more afraid of the new media world of children but more aware of how it works and how you can help them, and yourself, enjoy and explore all of the net-connected technologies of today. While the focus of this project is the Internet we also look at how digital media, from digital television to mobile phones, affect children and what parents should know in order to help them ensure their children use and enjoy the wonders of technology wisely.

As parents if we engage with children and their technology we can learn with them, know what they are doing and where they are going online.

The message is simple, get involved, "Get With IT!"

The opportunities of new media

We now live in a global village. Technology has brought the whole world somewhat closer. Airplanes can transport us faster. Communication technology can put anyone, anywhere in the world, in touch 24 hours a day, relatively inexpensively. Geography, for day to day business and communication, is no longer an obstacle. But this globalising effect has also brought with it other challenges. Some of our long-held social rules and laws are now harder to enforce. Certain types of pornography and products that are illegal in this country are now available on the Internet. Although, they remain illegal to possess it is now easier to get access to such content over the Internet.

Now that media like music, film and games have been "digitised", they can be sent over the Internet or mobile phone with relative ease and without having to exist in a recognisable "hard copy" form (they don't have to be on a disc or a tape). New technology tools, like the mobile phone, have also become more advanced and offer access to the Internet while 'wireless' zones allow laptops to have mobile Internet access. The old idea of a computer hooked up to lots of wires is breaking down and more and more young people can use the Internet as a mobile tool and communicate while on the move.

Just who is the gate-keeper in the Internet age is a challenge for everyone – especially parents. In the new media village the old rules of control and access break down and regulating the Internet's content is not as easy as radio and television. Today the Film Censor's Office classifies films based on their suitability for different ages and both RTE and the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) have legal responsibilities to monitor the standards of broadcast media, including advertisement, particularly in relation to children. But with the Internet it is not so straightforward. For example, a website that has libellous content can only be shut down if it breaks the laws of the country where the website is hosted (i.e. where the

server computer is located). The difficulty is locating the server and bringing legal proceedings against the owner. By the time you do so, the website may be hosted in another country. This is due to the fact that the Internet is not "owned" or run by a single entity or governing body. It is simply a collection of computers around the world that are networked together and make their content available to each other. It is like a club that is open to all – all you need is a computer and an Internet connection. The same is true with satellite TV. Satellites can "beam" television programming from other countries that have very different cultural values and norms than may be accepted in Ireland. Anyone with a satellite dish can pick up these programmes and little can be done to prevent it.

Whatever regulations are put in place regarding new media content, in the end the best line of control rests with parents and their ability to be part of their children's media world, to share it and understand it. You could decide not to have computers or tools with Internet access around your children, just as some people prefer to bring their children up without television, but for many of us the advantages of having a connected life and home far out-weigh the risks attached to being online.

So how does a parent make sense of all this? Start by talking to your children about how they use and enjoy new media technologies from digital games, DVDs, 3G phones to the home or school computer. Ask them questions. Find out what they know and let them share their knowledge with you. Talk about your concerns and let them tell you about their experiences. Often children are the best technical support we have on tap in the home. Let them guide you through their technology.

The more you know as a parent, the more you can support them. All public libraries have free Internet and computer access and librarians are trained and happy to help you with them. Local colleges and community centres run computer courses for adults.

Get your children to talk about what they use the technology for – whether it is a mobile phone, a PC or a video games console. Your children will enjoy the fact that they can teach you something and it is an opportunity to share activities with them. Don't take their word about a game being 'harmless' but play it with them and see it from their point of view. Share the experience.

Encourage them to talk about anything that makes them feel "uncomfortable" without being judgemental. Children have more opportunities to see and hear things in our media-saturated world. By taking the time to discuss these things with them and put media experiences into context you can help them handle some of the day-to-day media content they experience whether violent or sexual in nature. It may seem simple to say they should never see anything disturbing, and you can create rules and boundaries which will help that, but in the visual age we live in it is also good to make sure they are talking to you about everything they do and experience in the media whether on or offline.

It is better to prepare them than to ignore the potential impact of what they might see or hear in any media content.

The real worry for parents is not knowing. Not knowing what your child is doing when they are on the Internet or playing with new media games and tools. Do you know exactly what technologies are available in your household, in the Internet café or in your children's friends houses and what they do? This booklet will help you to understand how those technologies work a little better and help you use, enjoy and sometimes police them.

There are simple steps you can take. Checking telephone bills will help to see how long your child has spent online. Mobile phone bills will alert you to the amount of text or picture messages being sent. For young children, under ten, checking e-mails is wise or looking at the history files for suitability of sites and chat rooms.

In this booklet, when we discuss "young children" we mean age 10 and under. Older children above this age threshold can develop more responsibility for their own media use. However, children are different. The advice in this booklet should be taken simply as a guide for you. You know your child best and you know what is best for your child. We would encourage you to trust your instincts about their maturity.

Also, as games become more violent or sexual in content you can check the suitability of games by the classification on the cover. If it does not have a classification, you can check if the game title is suitable at www.pegi.info. Ask advice when you buy it. Check with other parents whose children have used the games.

Most importantly, you need to set boundaries. This can be done in consultation with your children so they understand the reasons behind the rules. Boundaries could include when and where the Internet can be accessed and for how long. Children should be warned never to give personal information, even their full name, nor should they agree to meet an online friend offline without your permission and direct involvement. You should encourage young children, particularly under ten, not to click on retail sites and to ignore the scams that can appear in e-mails or pop-ups. It is also wise to not leave credit cards lying around. The temptation may be too much. Doing so could prove much more costly than your child taking money from a handbag or wallet for sweets and it is unlikely that a credit card company will accept any excuses if the product is delivered to your home address.

By talking about the realities, by explaining how things can go wrong, you can help them play safe online. Ask questions and share their technology know-how. Let them know how the downside works so they can handle it. Children are used to playing safe on the street and knowing what hazards are there. It is not that different online.

Get involved. Share their new media world and find out how they are using the Internet, the mobile phone, digital games or DVDs … Get with IT!

2. NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

- DVD players and recorders

- The personal computer

- The Internet

- The games console

- The mobile phone

- Digital television

- Other technologies

DVD PLAYERS and RECORDERS

The video recorder is now a common device in every home. Although they are considered analogue or old technology, they are worth mentioning as they are perhaps the first media device that people found difficulty to master. The average video recorder has many functions alongside play, rewind, forward and record. Through the remote control, users can set the time and pre-record programmes of their choice. For many, this is where the difficulties start. How many of us still have those flashing zeroes on our video recorder? How many of us have left the instruction manual in the box where we found it? Now that DVD players are on their way to replacing video recorders, those problems remain.

A DVD player is the digital equivalent of the video playing function of your video recorder. Instead of tape, the film is "digitally" recorded on to a Digital Versatile Disc (or DVD). The word versatile – the "V" in DVD – gives you a clue as to what makes DVDs so different from

video tapes. DVDs are "versatile". As well as being able to play a film, you can pause it without a shake or jitter. You can select scenes immediately without having to forward or rewind. You can watch DVD extras and see out-takes, deleted scenes, alternative endings, listen to voice-over commentaries or watch documentaries and trailers about the film; all of this from one small, shiny disc.

The next generation of DVD players are now beginning to have recording capability. This will mean that you will be able to record television programmes or home videos on to blank DVDs from the comfort of your armchair. What better incentive is there to read that instruction manual? Even better, why not ask your children to work it out with you?

THE PERSONAL COMPUTER
The personal computer (or PC) is of great educational benefit to you and your child. It can help with homework. It can offer a world of knowledge through educational CD-Roms and the Internet as well as let you keep in touch with friends and family abroad. It can help young children in terms of literacy and numeracy.

For older children, it can develop their interests in a whole range of subjects from music to sport, from astronomy to marine life. It can keep them occupied and entertained playing games or writing stories.

The PC can be used for both business and entertainment purposes. In some ways the PC is like a television, a video games console, a jukebox, a personal organiser, a vast library and a filing cabinet all rolled into one. This is what makes it so exciting and so baffling.

PCs are also becoming much smaller and portable. A portable PC is called a laptop as it can sit on your lap. There are also pocket PCs which are about the size of a large mobile phone and are used mainly by business people.

Most PCs (equipped with speakers) can play music CDs, store music digitally, play video games and DVDs. They can also connect to the Internet and download and play digital music, films and short cartoons. E-mail and instant messaging services can give your child access to other children and offer them the chance to have a pen-pal anywhere in the world. In short, it offers them experiences that we could only have dreamed of in our childhood.

But as a parent, even without an Internet connection, you need to be aware that all kinds of content, film and music can be used on the computer so you need to be involved in what your children are watching, listening to or playing.

THE INTERNET

The Internet is just a collection of computers spread over the world and connected to each other in order to exchange information. It is not unlike the telephone network, but it can do a lot more then just voice calls. It comes from the combination of the words "International" and "Network". When your child goes "online" through the telephone connection or some other way, they are connecting to the Internet. Although, the World Wide Web is, strictly-speaking, just a part of the Internet, the terms "the Web", the Internet and "the Net" are often used to describe the same thing. In reality, the Web is a vast and constantly expanding collection of websites on the Internet containing knowledge and information spanning every possible theme or subject.

Online: when you are connected to a network, usually the Internet.

Some computers connected to the Internet contain (or "host") websites with information about a particular subject. For example, the website for the Internet Advisory Board is www.iab.ie. This is its web address. By typing that web address into your PC, you will be brought immediately to the Internet Advisory Board's website.

Confused?

Well, perhaps think of it this way. If you can imagine a group of houses in a village where all the front doors are linked together by a string, that string would form a "web" around the village of "connected" houses. If Mr. O'Brien in Number 10 knew something that you wanted to find out, you would follow the string to his address. Likewise, the Web consists of a "web of sites" (or websites) which are connected together by a string called the Internet. By typing in a certain address, you are brought to the website that lives at that address and can view the information available on that website.

Surfing the Net

You may have heard the phrase "surfing the Net". "Surfing" is the term used when you look at or "browse" various websites on the Net. Literally, you are surfing over a tide of information. The main programme for navigating the Web through a personal computer is the "browser". The most popular "browser" used on PCs is Microsoft's Internet Explorer.

However, there are other "browsers" such as Safari for Apple Macs, the Opera web browser and Mozilla's Firefox. It is in a "browser" that you type the address of the website you want to go to. Website addresses you may have heard of are the Irish government's Information on Public Services website (www.oasis.gov.ie), Radio Telefís Éireann's website (www.rte.ie) or the government website, (www.irlgov.ie)

Search Engines

A common method of surfing the Internet is to use Search Engines. Among the more popular search engines are Google (www.google.com) and Yahoo (www.yahoo.com). Both have child-friendly search engines which can be used to filter out adult orientated content. These engines are like a phone book of web addresses. If you are looking for certain information – for example, dinosaurs or a recipe for chicken soup – you just type these words

into the Search Engine, click Search and it will search out the Web addresses on the Net that may have the information you are looking for. These will come up as a list of websites containing the words you are looking for. In the Parents' questions section, we deal with precautions that you can use to monitor and protect your child from coming across inappropriate material and the Useful websites section has a list of child-friendly search engines.

E-mail

One of the most popular uses of personal computers connected to the Internet is e-mail. E-mail stands for Electronic Mail and is a way of sending messages from one computer to another over the Internet. Messages are composed in special e-mail programmes (such as Microsoft Outlook Express or Apple's Mail) or on websites such as www.hotmail.com. In order to send an e-mail, you will need a special e-mail address like paul@ireland.com or paul@eircom.net

The easiest types of e-mail addresses to obtain are webmail. When you sign up to these websites, they will give you an e-mail address such as johnsmith@gmail.com. The @ symbol stands for "at" – so it means johnsmith at the Gmail.com address. Once you have an e-mail address, you are then ready to send and receive e-mail. Check and compare costs and mail box storage on e-mail accounts before signing up and above all make sure you have virus checking software across both your computer and your e-mail account.

Instant Messaging and Chatrooms

Because the Internet connects PCs, it allows people to "chat" by using programmes like Yahoo Messenger and Microsoft's Instant Messenger. It is very much like texting except it is done on the PC and the text conversation can be followed on the screen. These programmes offer a cheap form of communication for people – especially young people.

There are also certain websites which have chatroom forums – which allow people to "post up" messages and converse with each other. These forums are often dedicated to certain topics or themes

such as "movies" or "soap operas" and conversations are called "threads". When a conversation or "thread" becomes personally abusive, this is called "flaming".

Do's and don'ts of chatrooms for children: Never reveal name, address phone number or password. Never reply to nasty or suggestive messages. Never meet anyone offline without your parents being with you.

These chatrooms have also become the mainstay for "Internet dating" where individuals meet each other online and may decide to meet up. Young children should be actively discouraged from using chatrooms without direct parental supervision. A real danger in recent times has been the threat of paedophiles/sex-offenders luring children into a real-life meeting.

Blogging

The term "Blog" comes from a combination of the words Web and Log. They are basically online diaries and the act of maintaining one is called "blogging". You can set up a free blog at websites such as www.blogspot.com or www.blogger.com. Why would anyone set one up? Many newspaper journalists have their own blogs which offer them a chance to get their articles in the public domain immediately and also to get feedback from members of the public. Young children, under ten, should not be encouraged to keep blogs and older children should work with you if they maintain a blog. Talk to your children about the pros and cons if they decide they wish to keep one. Your children may also decide to design and maintain their own personal websites and the same considerations should apply. The more involved you are the better but give them space to learn, be creative and discover. And as they grow up respect their privacy.

Peer-to-Peer

Another popular use of the Internet is called "peer-to-peer" file swapping. These programmes allow you to swap or share files from your own computer to another over the Internet. There are also some commercial peer-to-peer applications which allow users to buy music and video content over the Internet. In 2000, a high-profile case was brought against Napster, a free peer-to-peer programme provider in the US, as its many users were using the application to download music illegally. The outcome of this court case was that Napster was shut down briefly but has since re-emerged as a legal music file-swapping site. However, there are many more peer-to-peer programme vendors that have sprung up since. Recently, video files are increasingly being swapped (including whole feature film movie files).

As a parent, you should explain to your child that by misusing these peer-to-peer programmes and downloading copyrighted works like music or films, that they are in fact breaking the law. It is best to make them aware of the risks.

Viruses and Spam

Viruses are malicious pieces of software that are created to wreak havoc on your computer. It is important that you have anti-virus software to deal with the threat. There are free privacy and anti-virus software downloads available for your home PC called AVG (www.grisoft.com) and Spybot S&D (www.safer-networking.org). Spam is the term for "unwanted" e-mails and is often the way that your computer gets a virus. If you receive an e-mail with an attachment from an address you don't recognise, DO NOT open it. It is likely that it contains a virus. There is also anti-spam software available online such as from www.spamkiller.com and www.qurb.com. It is important that you have anti-virus and anti-spam software on any PC that your children might be using. Ask your retail agent for advice and installation, if you are unsure.

THE GAMES CONSOLE

There are a number of types of video games consoles like the Sony PlayStation, Microsoft's X Box and the Nintendo's GameCube. They all allow you do one main thing and that is to play games. These games can be bought on discs that look like a CD or a DVD. Brand new titles can cost anything up to €60. Titles range from sporting games like football, golf or grand prix racing to more violent, action-orientated games. Players control the action on the screen through a controller – a banana-shaped device with buttons and a wire attached to the main console. This allows the player to manoeuvre their character or vehicle on screen or, in certain types of games, to move and press objects. Two controllers allow two players to play at the same time. There are also other attachments for games consoles such as, toy guns, dance mats, headsets and cameras.

Unlike a personal computer (which has its own special television called a "monitor"), consoles are plugged into the back of a normal television. They can be an addictive distraction. This can frustrate some parents who may worry that their child is spending far too much time on them. Games consoles also have a loyal following in the 18-35 year old market – a generation who have grown up on computer and video games.

Video games consoles can also perform other functions such as playing DVDs, playing music CDs and going "online". An increasingly popular form of entertainment is "online gaming" whereby players play each other over the Internet through a broadband connection. This means that they can play a friend living down the road or even in another country over their games console. If they wear a headset, they can talk and listen to each other while they play. This is a new, fun and exciting form of entertainment which has become extremely popular in Asian countries and is likely to become increasingly popular here as more homes get broadband connections.

There are also handheld games consoles such as the Nintendo Gameboy, Gameboy Advance and DS. These allow you to play games on the move. A range of games are available for these

portable games consoles and they look like small cartridges. Sony have also just launched a new handheld games console called the Playstation Portable (or PSP). Most of the games for these handhelds are quite safe. Play them with your children to see for yourself.

However, the main threat to your child from video games is their addictive nature. Young and old children should be encouraged to limit the time they spend playing video games in order to maintain a balanced healthy lifestyle. Obesity and other health problems are a risk if your child is not gaining sufficient exercise. As a parent you should set boundaries with your child about the length of time spent online or playing video game playing and chat with them about why it's good to have a balance between all their activities, whether swimming or football and video games.

See the Parents' questions section if you want to know more about violent games.

THE MOBILE PHONE

Like the video recorder, the mobile phone started off as "analogue" or old technology. You may remember the size of the first mobile phones. They were big, clunky brick-like objects that rarely could get a signal.

Texting

One of the more interesting features that digital allows is the Short Messaging Service (SMS) (better known as texting). Above the numbers on the phone, there are letters of the alphabet. These allow you to type a "text" message and send it, instead of ringing the person. The "message" will then appear on their phone display for them to read.

Irish mobile phone users now average 4 billion text messages a year. "Texting" has become an alternative form of communication among children and adults alike. It has also developed its own language. This language developed due to the length of time it took to write a text message and also due to the cap on how long a text message could be. So children began to abbreviate their messages as such: "R U IN 2DAY?" ("Are you in today?"), "TXTME L8R" ("Text me later."), "C U 2NITE" ("See you tonight?") and "10s ne1?" ("Tennis anyone?").

However, most phones now have "predictive text". This is a programme on the phone that guesses the word that you are trying to type. This means it is much easier to write a text message quickly and fully, though the popularity of the other form has meant that the abbreviations are still used widely. As well as texting on your phone, you can play games, carry personal details, take digital photographs, record small videos and play music.

Text Abbreviations:
:) = Happy face
:D = Super happy face
:(= Sad face
;) = Wink
:/ = Wry face
:P = Tongue out for just kidding
((hug)) = a hug
<g> = grin
ALL CAPS = yelling
4VR = Forever
YER = Your, you're
B4 = Before
CUZ = Because
LOL = Laughing out loud
B4N = Bye for now
BCNU = Be seeing you

Ringtones

One particularly popular pastime for children and teens is downloading "ringtones". Every phone has a number of pre-recorded "ringtones" that let you know that someone is calling. However, users can download different "ringtones" by ringing certain numbers on their phone. These ringtone numbers are usually advertised in newspapers and magazines and, increasingly,

on TV. The average cost of a ringtone is €2 and this is automatically charged to your mobile bill when you ring the number. If you are on a "bill-pay" phone, it will be debited from your bill. "Pay as you Go" phones are automatically debited from their call credit.

Ringtones have become big business. In the United Kingdom, Ringtones based on certain popular songs have actually outstripped music chart sales. As a parent, you need to be conscious of how much your child is spending on these so-called premium services. A premium service is a service (like buying ringtones or subscribing to a text "joke of the day") which charges more than a normal phone call. They are much like the premium numbers on your landline such as Weather Dial or 11811. Children can easily rack up debt using these type of services.

Picture and video-messaging
As mobiles become increasingly sophisticated, more premium services will be offered. Many phones have the capability to take and send digital pictures. The mobile phone operators charge more for these kinds of services then they do for sending text messages because there is more "data" used in sending the message. Mobile phone operators charge for either the length of a call, the amount of "data" used in the call or a combination of both. Pictures and video contain more data, hence they charge more. Many children now download their pictures and photographs to their personal computer and send them by e-mail. Be aware that video mobile phones are now linked with some negatives, like school bullying, harrassment and intimidation, and we discuss some of these issues on page 30 in Parents' Questions.

Gaming
Another premium service that is available is downloading games. These can cost anything between €3 and €6. The games available are usually very simple games and the content is similar to the early arcade games. They are generally harmless in nature but they are relatively expensive.

What is 3G?

3G is the generic name for the next generation of mobile phone networks. These networks are able to deal with a lot more data meaning that the mobile phone can send and receive information on a similar scale to the Internet. However, the operators do charge more. Currently, it is difficult to send quality video over a mobile phone as the data is just too big. However, 3G will make it much easier - both to send and receive large e-mails and to "surf the Net". At present, most phones can only "surf the Net" in a limited way and 3G – due to its cost – has had limited take-up. But as competition and more operators develop, prices will drop and it will become a mass-market offering. As such, it will be something your children will want to use. The likelihood then is that your child will have constant access to the Internet and you as a parent will have to monitor his/her use of it. Although mobile phone operators will have filtering programmes to protect younger children, there are no guarantees that these will be 100% successful. Also there are no filters to stop your child from running up high credit. Awareness and information are again the best protection.

Wireless

Wireless was the old term for a radio receiver. Now it means a lot more. Simply speaking, it allows information to be transmitted "without wires". A wireless connection means that certain laptops or PCs can connect to the Internet without plugging into the wall. They pick up the signal through the air over a radio frequency. In the future it is likely that all devices will be able to connect to each other "without wires". Why would they want to be able to do that? Well, a car with a wireless connection would be able to get traffic information or route maps. A fridge will be able to download recipes. An oven could be switched on and off remotely while you are at work.

There are a variety of technologies that allow devices connect to each other. Two of the main ones are infra-red and Bluetooth. Infra-red needs "line of sight". For example, it is an infra-red signal that is

used in a TV remote control. Bluetooth is a more powerful means of wireless connection. It can detect another device with Bluetooth within range and can connect to it automatically. Phones with Bluetooth can swap pictures and other information without paying for the call.

The only danger with wireless technologies is that if the proper security is not in place, they can be "hijacked". There has been a recent phenomenon called "blue-jacking" where someone steals information from your phone or sends offensive messages and pictures when they detect your Bluetooth connection. Children should be encouraged to switch off Bluetooth unless they are using it for a specific reason. If you have a wireless Internet connection at home for your laptop or Pocket PC, you should ensure that the proper security is in place to protect your wireless connection from being used by others in the vicinity.

DIGITAL TELEVISION

With a population in Ireland of 4.1 million people and growing, there are nearly 1.4 million TV households and many with more then one television in the household. Ireland is a big consumer of media and television. We all know the television aerial, from the old "rabbit ears" on top of the television or the large aerial on the roof. Well, this is analogue TV which picks up the TV signal through the aerial allowing the viewer to watch three or four local Irish channels.

Those with cable television – where the aerial was replaced by a cable plugged into the wall – could receive more channels. This service was also completely analogue until a few years ago when the cable operators started introducing digital services. The two big cable operators in Ireland, NTL and Chorus, currently offer customers a choice of either the old analogue or the new digital service. Over time, everyone will move to digital.

Digital TV is a recent phenomenon and like the mobile phone, simply means that the analogue signal has been replaced by a digital one.

This gives more versatility. In the case of television, it gives more channels because more "data" can be put into the signal when it is "digital" then when it is analogue. There are a number of different types of digital TV available in this country – but the two main types are cable and satellite. The main providers of digital TV in Ireland are NTL, BSkyB Satellite and Chorus, although there are other smaller players emerging.

Set-Top Box
If you have digital TV there is probably a set-top box attached to your television. This is a box that reads the digital signal and puts it on to your television screen. It is this box which is becoming increasingly more important as digital TV develops. Aside from just decoding the digital TV signal, this box does a lot more.

Using your remote control, you can look at a programme guide on the television and see what programmes are coming up. You can also set reminders for your favourite programme or film.

This all happens thanks to this little box. If you have a Sky Digital set top box, you may be familiar with the "red button". Often TV programmes will encourage you to "press the red button now!". When you press the red button on your remote control, you can interact with the television programme – finding out more information, watching alternative camera angles or even voting. In the future, this little box will do more – such as allowing you to record up to 60 hours of programmes, surf the Internet or even make video calls to friends and family. digital TV is rapidly becoming an exciting window on the world.

With the amount of programme channels available – especially on satellite – there is a greater chance of your child coming across violent or obscene programme content. Most digital set-top boxes offer you a function whereby you can "lock" certain inappropriate channels. However, as it is possible that your child will know how to unlock these channels, it is wise to talk with your child about these

issues and set boundaries as to what he/she can and can not watch. Think it out before you agree to very young children having a digital TV+DVD player in their own bedrooms. Even with locked out channels you create an environment where they can get access to material you may not feel is suitable. Watching the TV, particularly with children under 10, in a family environment, at least means you can put a context on what they see.

OTHER TECHNOLOGIES
There are many other digital devices that are becoming popular. Here is a selection:

MP3 Players
MP3 players play music that has been specially digitised (and often called MP3 files). The most popular MP3 player is called an iPod and is produced by the Apple Corporation. MP3 players are a bit like Walkmans – except that they don't require tapes or CDs. The music is downloaded from a personal computer. Users can transfer music from their own CDs - via their computer – onto their own MP3 player. Alternatively, they can buy music of their choice online from a range of websites. In order to do this, they need a credit card to purchase these items. However, it is illegal for them to copy a CD purchased by someone else on to their own MP3 player for their own personal use.

Personal Video Recorder
Another form of video recorder that is also emerging is the Personal Video Recorder (or PVR). This is popular in the United States where it is marketed under the brand name TiVo. In Ireland, it is available on subscription from BskyB and is built into their Sky Plus set top box. The personal video recorder is a bit like a small personal computer, except it looks like a box that sits on top of your television. This box allows you to record up to sixty hours of television while you are watching the television. You can then go back and look at programmes you may have missed. This type of recorder is purely there to "personalise" your television viewing. It means that you can

set the box to record the programmes that you want to watch throughout the day, week or month and watch them at your leisure. In a few years, as digital television becomes more popular, it is likely that every home will have this kind of technology.

Memory Sticks
These are small compact devices – often on key rings – that plug into the back of a computer into what is called the USB port. They are also sometimes called Flash memory devices, USB key rings or USB sticks. They are handy devices in that they can be used to store information from a computer so that you can bring it to another computer. They are replacing the traditional floppy discs because they perform the same function but store hundreds of times more information and are easy to carry about. They are viewed as a security threat by businesses and schools because people can easily remove sensitive information from computer hard-drives or equally easily place offensive or illegal information on them.

Digital Camcorders
Many of you may have camcorders that you use on holidays or at birthdays. Your child may take an interest and it can be a means of self-expression – just like digital cameras and their ability to shoot video clips. With the recent phenomenon of Reality TV shows like "Big Brother", older children are increasingly using digital camcorders to record video diaries and personal films. There is little wrong with this and it can be a means of creative expression.

Digital Radio

Although radio is generally an "analogue" technology, this is beginning to change. In the UK, they are already transmitting digital radio which is much more versatile then its analogue counterpart. Also, radio stations across the world are now transmitting over the Internet and on digital TV sets (including Ireland). Whether digital or not, parents need to know that radio does not have a 9pm watershed, and day-time radio shows can have very adult content. Most children have lots of access to radio and parents need to be conscious of what kind of stations and shows their children are listening to, particularly online where not only radio stations exist outside broadcasting regulation and controls.

3. PARENTS' QUESTIONS

Q: So what's so dangerous about the Internet for my child?

A: The Internet is rapidly becoming the best captured source of human knowledge. However, it is also becoming a dump for some of the worst – such as pornography, exploitation, piracy, hate literature, misinformation and slander. Hate literature is a worrying trend. It can mean generating hate against a group on racial, sexual or ethnic difference. It can mean targeting the most vulnerable. Equally worrying has been the development of sites promoting violence, terrorism and even youth suicide and self-harm. Many people take for granted what they read on the Internet as if it were the same as in a newspaper or book and had come through an editorial filter with someone legally responsible for that content. On the Internet this is sometimes not the case. Material can be put on the Internet without any intermediary filters, without fact checking and without any professional context. This can lead to the spread of racist ideas, propaganda, disinformation and slander.

It is this aspect of the Internet that may concern us. It is why parents should monitor their children's use of the Internet and look out for warning signs such as offensive e-mails, improper conversations in chat rooms or inappropriate content. You know what is best for your children. You need to know what information they are pulling from this vast global communications tool. It can enrich family life and learning. But the freedom to exchange information through the Internet can mean lots of unchecked and untrue statements ending up in the public domain. Making children aware of the need for trusted sources of information is crucial.

Q: How do I protect my child from seeing offensive
   material on the Internet?

A: There are a number of software applications which can be put on
to your personal computer – such as Net Nanny
(www.netnanny.com). However, it is difficult to stop children
stumbling across certain content whether through spam e-mail or
search engines. If they think there is something out there they will
usually be able to find it! Best to talk to them about what is out there
so that they have a sense of awareness and context for anything they
come across. Information is power and can empower children to
protect themselves as they begin to explore new media on their
own.

So we recommend that you talk to your children about what they are
doing online. Supervise your child's use of the Internet and set
boundaries for what is appropriate and what is not. This should start
at a young age and the boundaries may expand as the child grows
and develops his or her own maturity, judgment and independence.
It is crucial for children to become independent but boundaries allow
them to have an expanding safety net as they grow into adolescents
and young adults. If your child does see inappropriate content –
either on the Internet or in a magazine somewhere – you should
encourage them to come to you about it. It is important to keep the
lines of communication open so you can gauge what kind of material
is upsetting them and how to handle it.

Mobile phones increasingly claim to have the ability to "surf the Net".
These phones can only access a limited amount of content online
and usually content that the mobile phone operator deems useful. In
the future it is likely that mobiles will have full Internet access and the
same rules should apply for your children. Check with the retail
agent before purchasing a phone for your child to be sure what
level of access is available to the Internet and whether that is
suitable for your child's age group.

Q: How do I know who my child is talking to in a chatroom?

A: Quite simply, you don't. Until web-cams become part of chat rooms, you may never know the identity of who you are talking to. You need to use common sense. Discourage young children's chatrooms and monitor older children to make sure that they are viewing reputable sites. Get them to create a "buddy list" of friends that they can talk with online.

For older children, there is the issue of privacy and individuality. So talk to your child and tell them they should never arrange to meet people "offline" that they may have met in a chatroom. Also, they should never pretend to be someone else in a chatroom. Ask them to tell you if they get inappropriate "chat" or requests to meet up. By empowering your child with information, they will make safer decisions. It is worth saying that the link between risks, incidents and actual harm is low but better forewarned. Information is power and can protect your children.

Q: What are the dangers of my child using free peer-to-peer (P2P) file swapping software?

A: For parents, there are a number of issues to be aware of in relation to free peer-to-peer. One is that your child may be breaking the law if they are downloading copyright music or film content. Secondly, these free peer-to-peer networks are completely unmonitored and there is the real threat of them downloading computer viruses, pornography or other unsuitably graphic or offensive material. As a parent you need to be aware of these applications and if your child is using them. Popular free peer-to-peer programmes include Gnutella (www.gnutella.com) and Kazza (www.kazza.com). Talk to your child about this type of software and get them to explain to you how and why they use it.

Q: My child is playing video games a lot, is it bad, what should I do?

A: Many parents worry that their children are not getting enough exercise due to playing games consoles. The same can be said for television. Recent research studies have shown that games consoles can increase dexterity and intellectual development among children in that many games encourage lateral thinking and problem-solving exercises. However, too much of anything is a bad thing. It is wise that children get a healthy balance between game play, television and exercise. Boundaries should be set that limit their indoor digital media time. It is important that children get exercise in order to maintain a healthy balanced lifestyle.

Q: How do I know what kind of content is on a video game?

A: One worry in relation to video games is the increasing level of violence and horror in them. Video games are not classified in Ireland by the Film Censor and so parents should be cautious about the kind of video games they purchase for their children. Many titles are aimed at an older audience and have the same level of violence and sexual content that we would associate with an over-18's film. This may not be readily apparent from the cover of the video game and often the games may become more violent or graphic in nature as you go through the different games levels.
If you are unsure, check with your video games store regarding to the suitability of the game for your child. It is a good idea to ask other parents. Alternatively, you can check if the game title is suitable at the following web address: www.pegi.info

Q: How can my child experience bullying through a mobile phone?

A: Due to the fact that many children in the school yard now have mobile phones, inevitably they have become a vehicle for bullying through offensive texts, photos or calls. You should be aware of your child's reaction to texts or calls. Encourage them to talk to you if you feel that they are receiving disturbing texts or calls.

Q: How do I keep my child safe from unwanted calls or texts over the mobile phone?

A: This is a potential danger as mobiles become rapidly n sophisticated. There is the risk that offensive, pornographic or bullying material can be sent or accessed through the mobile phone. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the mobile phone operators to monitor all the traffic over their network. So it is up to parents to monitor their own child's use of their mobile phone. Encourage them to talk to you about any unwanted pictures, texts or calls that they might receive. Discuss the dangers, set boundaries for their use of the phone and explain why you are doing this in order to look after them rather than to limit their freedom. Setting down rules without explanation or discussion will only lead to them using their phone in secret or ignoring the rules when you are not around.

The benefits of mobile telephones far outweigh the risks. The mobile phone means that you can keep in contact with your child wherever they may be. Most parents see the phone as an added source of comfort and protection.

Q: What are the dangers in regard to digital TV for my child?

A: One of the issues with digital TV is the sheer amount of programming. It is hard to drag a child away from the television when there is so much on it that they might want to see. Boundaries need to be set by adults to limit the amount of time that children spend watching television. But digital television offers much more educational programming then we would have had otherwise.

A risk may be inappropriate programmes and content. Non-Irish channels on digital television – especially through satellite – are outside the regulation of the Irish state. As such, your child can be exposed (even before the watershed) to offensive or inappropriate content. It is a good idea to become familiar with the channels and schedules that your child likes. Certain set-top boxes also allow you to block channels.

For younger children, a more pervasive threat is commercial advertising, especially on the digital children's channels. Irish broadcasting regulation does not dictate the amount or type of advertising that can be permitted on these channels while Irish domestic TV channels, RTÉ, TG4 and TV3, face significant controls over advertisement in children's programming. It is worth looking at the rules protecting children in relation to TV content. Check out RTÉ's website www.rte.ie and the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland www.bci.ie.

4. A –Z of New Media

2.5G:
This name designates the type of Internet access on a mobile phone. A 2.5G connection can offer limited amount of Internet access.

3G:
This is a more robust connection for mobile phones offering the opportunity to surf the Internet and send and receive large e-mails and attachments. It will also allow you to do video calls.

A

Analogue:
Analogue is everything before digital. Vinyl records, tape cassettes, music stereos, the telephone etc; these all use analogue signals to convey information. The radio frequency is an example of an analogue signal.

Anti-Virus Software:
This is a type of software that prevents your computer from getting a virus. The main software vendors are Norton's Anti-Virus (www.symantec.com) and McAfee (www.mcafee.com). There are also free downloads available.

Attachment:
This is a file that can arrive with e-mail. An icon of a paperclip will appear with the e-mail if there is an attachment. If you are expecting an attachment such as

a Word document, then it is safe to open. However, do not open attachments from strangers as it is likely that they contain a virus.

B

Blog:
This is a web log or online diary hosted on specific sites such as www.blogger.com. It offers readers the opportunity to reply to opinions and link to their own blogs.

Broadband:
A broadband connection means that you can download information from the Internet much faster and will be connected all the time. As broadband becomes increasingly more popular, it is likely to mean that people will use the Internet to send or watch video much as they do now with text.

Browser:
A piece of software that allows you to "surf" the World Wide Web.

C

CD-ROM:
A CD-Rom is the same as a CD except that some of the information on the disc can only be read by a Personal Computer.

Chat:
Chat is just real-time conversation on the Internet between people

using a programme like MSN Instant Messenger. It's useful and it's free, and it can help keep phone costs down.

Controller:
This is the device by which a player controls the actions in a video game on a games console. A two-player game requires two controllers.

Cyberspace:
This is another term for the Internet.

D

Data:
This refers to digital information and how it is stored. A CD-Rom will have digital data stored on it that is read by a computer.

Digital:
Digital is different than analogue in that the information is stored not as a signal, but as either "on" or "off". In this sense, it is not unlike Morse Code. A personal computer, a mobile phone or any other digital device will read the information and display it accordingly as music, video or text.

Download:
This term refers to the transfer of information from one computer to another over the Internet.

DVD:
Digital Versatile Discs (or DVDs) look like CDs but they can only be played on computers or on a DVD Player. They are mainly used to play films. If you look at a DVD in the light, you will see that the data is stored like grooves on a vinyl record. However, unlike a video tape or a vinyl record, this information is digital and can only be played back by a digital player.

E

E-mail:
is short for electronic mail and is a method of composing, sending, and receiving messages over the Internet.

F

Flaming:
'Flaming' is used to describe when an online conversation called a 'thread', in a chatroom, becomes abusive.

G

Games console:
These are the devices on which video games are played. The larger ones are plugged into television sets to display the game. Smaller handheld consoles have their own screens.

H

History files:
These are the recorded files of what was viewed on the Internet. In the case of inappropriate content, these files are important in order to prove that such content was being viewed. Your computer will offer you a 'history' option.

I

ICT:
Stands for Information and Communications Technology In other words, it can mean almost anything that's new and relevant to communications. This includes the Internet, mobile telephony, satellite communications and digital television over cable or aerials.

Instant Messaging:
This is an application that allows instant text communication or "chat" between two or more people through a network such as the Internet. There are many types of these applications such as MSN Instant Messenger, Yahoo Messenger and Skype.

Internet:
The Internet comes from the words "international network" and is a network of computers sharing information all over the world. This network became commonly known as the Internet in the mid-1980s. The Internet is sometimes confused with the World Wide Web. In fact, the World Wide Web is just a part of the Internet as are e-mail, instant messaging and peer-to-peer networking. The Internet is the network that enables all these different types of communication.

L

Laptop:
A laptop is a portable personal computer that is of a size that it can sit on your lap.

Link:
A link is how you navigate around a website or go from one website to another that may have related information. Linking has opened up a whole new way of presenting information.

N

Net:
An abbreviation of "Internet"

O

Online:
If you are online, you are live on the Internet.

P

Personal Video Recorder:
This is a "box" which connects to your TV and allows you to record television programming without the need for tapes or DVDs.

Pocket PC:
This is a small, handheld PC about the size of a large mobile phone. It is also called a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA).

Predictive text:
This is a programme on mobile phones that helps you compose text messages quickly by "predicting" the word you might be typing.

Premium services:
These are services that you can access through a mobile phone that provide content at premium rates (or more than the call should cost).

Programme guide:
On a digital TV, this is an electronic programme guide whereby you can access extra information about other channels and programming through the remote control.

R

Remote Control:
The remote control is a device that wirelessly controls devices such as the TV, video recorder, DVD or music system.

Ringtones:
These are digital music files that can be used on mobile phones as ringing tones. All phones come with pre-programmed ringtones but you can also download ringtones at a price.

S

Satellite dish:
A satellite dish is a round, plate-like object that acts as an aerial for digital TV. It is usually hung on the side of the house or on the roof.

Search engine:
Search engines allow you to search the World Wide Web for relevant text, images, audio and increasingly video. If you are looking for something on the Net, use a search engine such as Google.com or Yahoo.com.

Set top box:
A set top box is a box that connects to your TV and allows you to receive digital television either through cable, satellite, an aerial or through the phone line. It literally translates the digital information and displays it on your television screen.

SMS:
Stands for "Short Messaging Service" but is generally known as texting.

Spam:
Unwanted e-mail. These are often marketing scams or unwanted advertisements, occasionally of a sexual nature. They increasingly contain malicious viruses. Children should be encouraged not to open e-mails from people they do not know and certainly not to open any attachments. Also, never reply or unsubscribe to spam – this just tells the sender that your address is active and you will get more spam. There is filtering software available – but this sometimes sends wanted e-mails to the junk mail box. Always check your junk mail box for e-mails that may have been put through there by mistake.

Surfing:
This is the term used to describe moving around the Web.

T

Texting:
This is the means of sending a written message from one phone to another.

TiVo:
This is a brand name a type of Personal Video Recorder. It has become in the US a generic name like Hoover.

V

VHS:
(Video Home System) is the technical name for a video cassette that plays in a home video recorder.

Virus:
This is a malicious piece of software which can do great damage to a personal computer. They are often sent through e-mail attachments or on disks. It is important that you have anti-virus software to deal with the threat and that you are always careful when opening an attachment or putting in a disk from a stranger.

W

Web address:
This is the address that tells your computer the location of a website such as www.ireland.com or www.iab.ie.

Web cams:
These are small digital cameras that are plugged into a PC. They allow you to do things such as video conference or send video mail.

Website: A website is a site on the World Wide Web where information is held. A website sits on a computer that is connected to the Internet.

World Wide Web: The World Wide Web is a collection of websites held on computers all around the world and connected by the Internet.

5. GENERAL INFORMATION

USEFUL WEBSITES

CHILD-FOCUSSED
SEARCH ENGINES

Yahooligans
(www.yahooligans.com)

SurfMonkey
(www.surfmonkey.com)

SAFETY SITES

There is a large number of "safety sites" on the Internet. Some repeat the same information. Others specialise in certain aspects of Internet safety. Below is just a small example of some sites worth visiting.

www.chatdanger.com
Aimed specifically at children/teens and provides safety tips and advice about using chat rooms.

www.cyberangels.org
Comprehensive international site offering practical advice and lists of suggested safe sites and child-friendly search engines.

www.childnet-int.org
Excellent example of a good all-round safety site for children.

www.netparents.org
Contains a number of valuable resources for parents and kids.
www.netfamilynews.org
Provides useful information and links for families, teachers and guardians of kids who go online.

www.makeitsecure.ie
This website provides information on how to protect your computer and how to safely enjoy the benefits of connecting to the Internet.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

The Media Awareness Network's study

(www.media-awareness.ca) - a study of Canadian students explores what young people do online, how they perceive the Internet and what they know about it.

Markle Foundation
(www.markle.org/news/_news_pressreport_index.stm) - an extensive study of the American public on governance of the Internet.

Prof. Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics
(www.children-go-online.net) - a project exploring the nature and meaning of children's Internet use.

www.saferinternet.org
Contains the European Union's initiatives on promoting safer use of the Internet. Comprehensive and informative, it provides a wealth of information on Internet safety.

www.bullying.org

USEFUL SOFTWARE

Filtering software
information

CyberPatrol
(www.cyberpatrol.com)

Net Nanny
(www.netnanny.com)

Cybersitter
(www.cybersitter.com)

ICRAplus
(www.icra.org/icraplus/)

AGENCIES AND SUPPORTS

National Initiatives

Department of Justice, Equality
and Law Reform
(www.justice.ie)

Hotline
(www.hotline.ie)
Irish hotline for public reports of
child pornography.

Internet Service Providers
Association of Ireland
(www.ispai.ie)

An Garda Síochána
(www.garda.ie)

Scoilnet
(www.scoilnet.ie)
Provides information, advice and
support to schools on Information
Technology.

Barnardos
(www.barnardos.ie)

NetSecure
(www.netsecure.ie)
Netsecure.ie is the official website
of the National Awareness
campaign on Computer security.

Broadband.gov.ie
(www.broadband.gov.ie)
This website offers information on
Broadband technology and
Broadband availability within
Ireland.

NCTE
(www.ncte.ie)
The National Centre for
Technology in Education is an
Irish Government agency
established to provide advice,
support and information on the
use of information and
communications technology (ICT)
in education.

Webwise
(www.webwise.ie)
Is the Irish Internet Safety
Awareness Node managed by
the NCTE. Webwise provides
parents, teachers, and children
with educational resources,
advice and information about
potential dangers on the Internet
and empowers users to minimise
or avoid these risks. Webwise
shares best practice, information
and resources with European
partners through the European
Commission's Insafe network.

Data Protection Commissioner
(www.dataprotection.ie)
The Data Protection
Commissioner is responsible
for upholding rights of privacy in
regard to the processing of
personal data.

International Initiatives

INHOPE
(www.inhope.org)
The Internet Hotline Providers in
Europe Association facilitates the
work of European hotlines in
responding to illegal use and
content on the Internet.

www.virtualglobaltaskforce.org

ICRAsafe
(www.icra.org)
The Internet Content Rating
Association has developed a
system for the labelling of
content on web sites.
Insafe
(www.saferinternet.org)
A network of national groups
that coordinate Internet safety
awareness in Europe.

KIDs.ap
(www.kidsap.org)
An initiative under the auspices
of UNESCO, dedicated to
providing information to help
eradicate child pornography and
the activities of child molester/
abusers via the Internet.

GET WITH IT!

This booklet is about helping you

Parents worry about the dangers of new media for their children from accessing unsuitable content to being exposed to predatory adults. But the Internet and the new media world, from mobiles to digital games, is also one of fun, learning, communications and creativity. This booklet and the Get With IT! campaign is intended to increase awareness of all aspects of the new media world and to help parents navigate the often confusing maze of new media technologies and tools which their children are using. It is intended to help parents know more about the Internet and digital age so that they can best keep their children safe - enjoying the wonders of the digital landscape and avoiding its downside.