



HELP US KEEP KIDS SAFE ONLINE – NORTHERN IRELAND TEACHERS' PLEA

Northern Ireland teachers have backed police calls for parents to talk to their children about staying safe online.

As national Safer Internet Day (February 7) approaches, the PSNI were urging families to have a conversation around the potential threats after concerned parents in North Belfast approached them about a suspicious stranger contacting their child online.

However, local support agencies working with grooming victims say the problem is universal with a child from across Northern Ireland falling victim to online sexual exploitation every three days (NSPCC).

“These statistics are shocking, especially as so many children have turned up at school this term with phones and tablets they got at Christmas. As educators we do all we can to ensure they know how to stay safe, but we need support,” said Avril Hall Callaghan, General Secretary of the Ulster Teachers’ Union.

“The internet is so integral to all our lives today but social media is especially so to young people. Sadly, however, because they are young and inexperienced in life they can fall foul of adults who want to take advantage of their naivety.

“It is vital that our children are equipped with the protection they need to navigate these dangers.

"We recognise the critical need for joined-up working, timely sharing of information and collective action to protect victims of abuse and address this issue. The welfare of the victims is absolutely paramount.

"However, teachers must be properly trained and adequately supported if they are to fulfil this role. Failure to properly fund this area could put children at risk.

"Empowering young people through awareness raising and e-safety are two critical elements in helping them protect themselves as part of an overall strategy – but again, if teachers are to deliver this they must be adequately trained and they need the back-up of the child's family at home.

"Parents should know what sites their children enjoy visiting, how they stay safe online and make sure they know what to do if they are concerned about anyone who approaches them online."

ENDS

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