

Staying Safe Online: Supporting ALN Learners

An isometric illustration of a person with brown hair wearing a light green long-sleeved shirt, blue pants, and red sneakers. They are sitting in a white office chair at a pink desk, facing away from the viewer. They are wearing large white headphones and typing on a black keyboard. On the desk, there is a large computer monitor displaying a blank white screen with a few colorful sticky notes on the left side. Next to the monitor is a yellow mug and a small blue book. A yellow desk lamp is positioned behind the monitor. On the wall above the desk, there are two pink shelves. The top shelf holds a small potted cactus, a red-framed photo of two people, and two books. The bottom shelf holds a small blue clock and a black book. To the right of the desk, there is a tall green cactus in a yellow pot. The floor is covered with a yellow rug that has red and white striped borders.

Understanding vulnerabilities &
promoting safe digital practices

ECAD5011



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) guarantees that every child has the right to grow up healthy, happy and safe. This includes being protected from harm and appropriately supported to recover from abuse. Practitioners and professionals should adopt a Children's Rights Approach in line with the UNCRC's duty of due regard and follow National Participation Standards

Who Are ALN Learners?

- ALN = learners needing additional support due to learning difficulties or disabilities.

- May include: ASD, ADHD, dyslexia, speech/language needs, sensory or emotional challenges.

- ALN learners are not a homogenous group. Needs and risks vary widely.

Why Are ALN Learners More Vulnerable Online?

- Cognitive and processing differences – may misunderstand tone or nuance.

- Increased trust or naivety – more likely to believe strangers or false info.

- Escapism – may over-rely on digital spaces for comfort.

- Social exclusion offline – may seek validation online.

Key Online Risks for ALN Learners

- Cyberbullying – more likely to be targets, less likely to report.

- Grooming or exploitation – may not recognize inappropriate behavior.

- Exposure to harmful content – self-harm, disinformation, extremism.

- Privacy risks – may overshare personal information.

[Internet-Matters-Report-Vulnerable-Children-in-a-Digital-World.pdf](#)

Warning Signs of Online Harm



- SUDDEN BEHAVIOR
CHANGES OR
ANXIETY.



- AVOIDING DEVICES
OR EXCESSIVE USE.



- ISOLATION FROM
PEERS.



- MENTIONS OF
UNKNOWN ONLINE
'FRIENDS'.

Case Studies: Online Vulnerability in Action

What can you
suggest as an
intervention?

Case Study 1: Poppy (Age 9, ASD)

- Poppy enjoys online gaming and chats with players.
- She shares her school and location with a new 'friend'.
- Her parents notice she's anxious and hiding his device.



Intervention:

Case Study 2: Sam (Age 10, Dyslexia & ADHD)

- - Sam struggles with reading online content and misinterprets messages.
- - He becomes upset after being excluded in a group chat.
-  Intervention:

Discussion Prompts: Responding to Case Studies

1. What early warning signs of online risk were visible in each case?
2. How might these learners' ALN profiles contribute to their vulnerability?
3. What could you do as a teacher or support staff to help prevent similar situations?
4. How would you engage the learner's family and external services in a support plan?
5. What teaching strategies could promote safer online habits for learners like Poppy and Sam?

 Encourage empathy, collaboration, and practical safeguarding ideas.

Resources & Tools

- Childnet International – <https://www.childnet.com/>

- ThinkUKnow (by CEOP) – <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

- NSPCC Online Safety – <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

- SWGfL SEND Hub – [SEND \(Special Educational Needs and Disabilities\) | SWGfL](#)

Hwb - [Online Safety resources for learners with additional learning needs](#)

Can you create an activity to enable Idris to develop his skills to stay safe online?

What Can Educators Do?



- Teach digital literacy explicitly – not just what, but why.



- Use repetition and visual prompts.



- Provide safe spaces to discuss online experiences.



- Use role-play scenarios for decision-making practice.



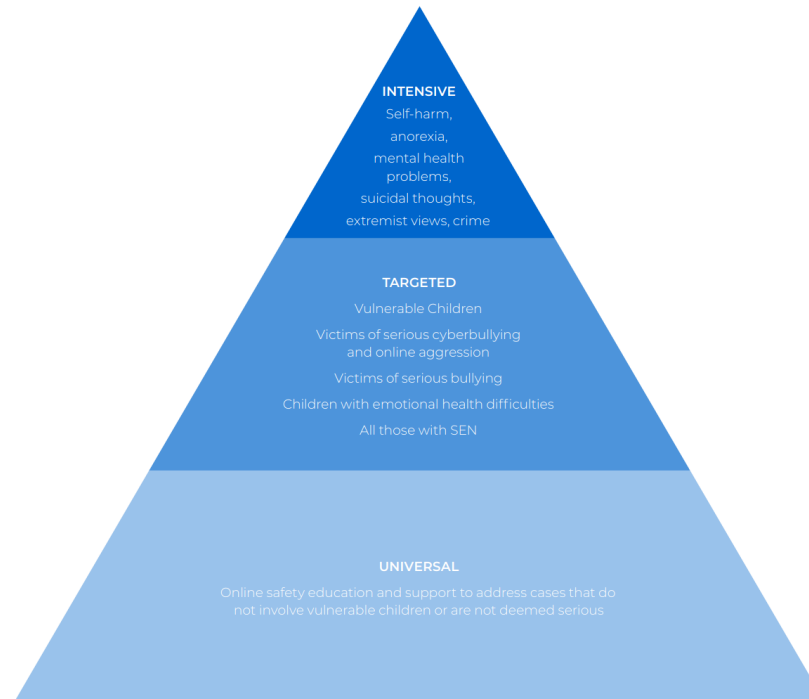
- Collaborate with families and external agencies.

Three tier model of delivery of Online Safety and Support for Children and Young People

Insights for Educators

1. *One size doesn't fit all*

A 'one size fits all' online safety education message will not suit vulnerable children and young people. More nuance and sensitivity are needed, along with specialised knowledge delivered in this proposed 3 tier model:



A three tier model of delivery of Online Safety Education and Support for Children and Young People

Final Thoughts

"All learners deserve to be safe, seen, and supported—online and offline."

Encourage open conversations, regular check-ins, and build digital resilience.