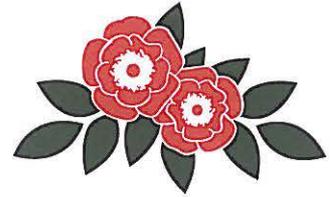


NEWS RELEASE

UNIVERSITY
— OF CENTRAL —
LANCASHIRE



STRICT EMBARGO: 00:01HRS THURSDAY 18 JULY 2002

Children unaware of Internet dangers, says study

A major new study into children's use of on-line chat rooms has revealed that many youngsters are still unaware of the dangers of the Internet, particularly the dangers of face-to-face meetings with on-line friends. Others, who are aware of the guidelines, choose to ignore them.

The study, by the Cyberspace Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire, questioned around 1400 children aged between 9 and 16, and found almost a third had never been warned about the dangers of arranging meetings with people they had previously only met on-line whilst 15% said they had never been told not to give out their address on-line.

As many as one in ten children who regularly use chat rooms had met up with people they had met on-line, usually unsupervised by an adult, despite many of them being aware of the safety guideline warning against this.

The results of the survey will be revealed at the launch of the research findings at the University of Central Lancashire on Thursday 18th July 2002 at 10.45 am.

Rachel O'Connell, Head of the Cyberspace Research Unit at the University, who conducted the study, says: "Our research indicates that there are thousands of children in the UK who remain unaware of basic Internet safety guidelines, despite having access to these new technologies, either at home or at school. It is essential that we challenge this lack of knowledge, get the message across to children, teachers, parents and carers, and help to keep children safe."

The study has prompted the Cyberspace Research Unit to launch a new website which tackles Internet safety issues by offering simple advice and technical solutions, introduced by a cast of colourful cybernauts. The For Kids By Kids On-line site, www.fkbko.net, is written in language designed to appeal to children and young people, from first-time surfers to seasoned web users.

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The study was endorsed by the seven UK children's charities who together form the Children's Charities Coalition for Internet Safety – Barnardo's, ChildLine, NCB, NCH, NCVCCO, NSPCC and The Children's Society. John Carr, from NCH, speaking on behalf of the coalition, says: "This research confirms the coalition's belief that it is as important to teach children how to behave and spot danger on-line as it is to educate them about road safety. The Internet is a fundamental part of young people's every day lives. We cannot ignore what the children questioned in this study are telling us - that many of them do not know how to use the Internet safely."

The research is part of the ONCE project, an international EU-funded initiative, led by the Cyberspace Research Unit with partners in Belgium, Greece and Ireland. Interim results suggest there are concerns common to each country: firstly, many children are still unaware of basic safety messages and, secondly, children are endangering themselves by attending face-to-face meetings with people they met on-line and are not turning to their parents for safety advice or when things go wrong.

Home Office Minister and Chair of the Taskforce on Child Protection on the Internet, Hilary Benn says: "Protecting children on and off-line is of the highest priority for the Government and we need to ensure that parents and children are aware of both the great benefits the Internet offers as well as its potential for misuse. The Home Office, on behalf of the Taskforce on Child Protection on the Internet, has contributed to commissioning some of the research published today which provides a useful insight into how children use the Internet.

"The Taskforce, a partnership of Government, industry, child welfare organisations, the main opposition parties, law enforcement agencies and academics, has run a successful awareness campaign aimed at parents and teenagers. We will study today's research findings carefully to see how they may be able to inform any future work."

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PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

Full survey findings will be announced at the launch of the ONCE research to be held at the Cyberspace Research Unit, University of Central Lancashire at 10.45 am on Thursday 18th July. There will be an opportunity for the press to take photographs and ask questions. Young Internet users will be on hand to give demonstrations of the FKBKO site. Full details are available from Charlotte Barrow, tel: 01772 893758

GENERAL INFORMATION

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