

# Parent Engagement

*a strategy and guide.*

Connect

Collaborate

Communicate





Hi there, I'm Alan Mackenzie, an independent consultant specialising in online safety, specifically within education to children, young people, schools and other organizations, and parents.

I'm a strong believer that technology, for the most part, is neutral; behaviour is key.

To understand behaviour, we have to be a part of children's lives in order to understand what they're doing with technology and why.

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## Foreword from Alan Mackenzie

One of the most common questions and concerns I hear from schools relates to parental engagement. Arguably it is one of the most frustrating aspects as schools are having to deal with the issues that are happening outside school, taking up valuable time and resources.

Unfortunately there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all solution, but over the years and the hundreds of parents events I have attended and spoken at, there are a few things that can work.

The most important aspect of all of this is to have a strategy in place; one that means you're getting good information out in the most appropriate way, in a way that parents want to read more, that engages and interests them and therefore has a positive impact.

That's the purpose of this guide, to help you with this strategy and give you a few pointers along the way. It isn't a solution but hopefully it will go some way to helping you. I hope you find it useful.

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# Why is it difficult?

There are so many reasons why it can be difficult to engage with parents and carers, but having delivered training at hundreds of schools some of the things I've heard are:

- I'm scared of what I'm going to hear.
- My partner is a technical whiz.
- My children are too sensible.
- I rely on my kids to teach me.
- It's up to the school to teach my kids.
- Time.

I wouldn't say these are the majority of parents, but it does go to show there are lots of different reasons, or perceptions, which can make this aspect especially difficult.

As I have been doing this for some years now I go back to some schools annually to host a parents afternoon or evening and see the same parents who are fully involved, want to know more and always have questions, but it goes without saying there are some that won't engage, regardless of what you do.

Some of these tend to be those

It's just all so scary!

very parents that you really want or need to engage with yet no matter what you do it just doesn't happen.

That latter statement is perhaps the most common concern I hear from schools, usually because the children of these parents are described as the most vulnerable in terms of behaviour and lifestyle.

So what can we do?



# Changing Perceptions

Given some of the examples on the previous page, you can see that a lot of this is to do with changing perceptions and managing expectations.

The first one is a classic example, “It’s all so scary” or “I’m scared of what I’m going to hear.”

The word scary is used quite a lot, and whilst I’m adamant that I don’t scare parents during sessions I deliver, some still describe it as scary. When we delve a little deeper into what they’re saying I find they mean that it’s new to them and they find it difficult to keep up with due to the fast-paced nature of technology.

Equally, parents are quite understandably concerned due to the constant media clickbait that tends to concentrate on the very worst things that happen. We’re all human and if we’re continually hearing about all the bad things we naturally start to turn away from it; we de-sensitize.

The second example, “My partner is a technical whiz,” is a pretty common one, sometimes backed up with, “My kids are blocked from everything.”

That isn’t protecting children; for

one technology cannot protect children (although it can assist in some circumstances) and wrapping children up in cotton wool simply doesn’t work.

There are lots of different perceptions and they need to be changed to redress the balance from a school issue to a parental issue:

- to let people know the reality, not media hype.
- to ensure parents know that it is their responsibility.
- to give them the tools to feel comfortable with that responsibility.
- to balance the enormous opportunities whilst being aware of the risks.

More than likely this is something you already know, but what you want to know is what you can do about it.

This is where we need a strategy; to know what the concerns or perceptions are, to be able to respond to these concerns with good, realistic and well-researched advice, and to communicate this information using the best channels.

**Connect-Collaborate-Communicate**

Changing perceptions isn't always easy and it can't be done overnight, this is why a strategy works best. Any strategy needs a few steps in place so that you're moving forward in a managed way; sometimes you'll need to take a step back or rethink your approach.

You can't do this by yourself, different aspects of your strategy need to be owned by different people. It isn't a lot of work but if you can spread the responsibilities it builds in resilience and reduces the likelihood of failure.

It also allows others to give opinions and suggest alternative solutions if something isn't working as you would like.

The route I advise is to establish a group or use an existing group you have in school. For further information and guidance you can see my 'Establishing your e-Safety Group' guide which is a free download:

[www.esafety-adviser.com/resources](http://www.esafety-adviser.com/resources)

A few things to consider:

1. Define the end goal. This is the most important step and should always be your first step. What do you want to achieve and by when? Be realistic.
2. Agree steps and timescales to achieve that goal using connect, collaborate, communicate.
3. Devolve the responsibilities, for

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example give ownership of the student survey to the students, give ownership of the parental survey to the PTA (if you have one).

4. Meet often for a short period so that you keep everything on track.

## General Tips

Keep your strategy simple. You haven't got time or resources; this is medium term, not a quick solution. Once you've got to your goal, whether you have achieved it or not, you will be able to reflect and see what worked, what didn't work, what could have been done better etc.

Your end goal is really important; take some time to consider what you want to achieve. For example if it's a parents evening in 4 or 6 months time you need to be very strict with strategy timescales. If you are looking at a parents evening, consider these points:

Don't mention e-safety or online safety, invariably parents won't know what you mean, be creative in your title, e.g. 'Exploring the online world with children; opportunities and risks.'

Involve children. You probably don't want them in the main talk (age dependent) but 15-20 mins explaining what they do in school draws the parents in.

If you're not convinced a parents evening will work, consider putting together a small series of simple videos and putting them up on YouTube. Those videos can be embedded on your school website and the page can be populated with other information and guidance. There's lots of ideas, just try to be creative.

The biggest point of Connect-

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Collaborate-Communicate is to raise interest levels, change mindsets, take away parental fears and ultimately redress the balance of the school doing everything and empowering parents.

**It's about working together.**

## How does it work?

Parents e-safety evenings can be poorly attended, sending out random information or information reacting to something that appears in the media rarely has any long term impact.

Consistency is one of the key elements for a successful strategy, and to achieve consistency we need to:

Understand the [concerns of parents](#). Although their concerns may not match your own, by knowing what their concerns are you can embed important safeguarding information.

For example, if parents want to know how to set parental restrictions, you can embed information that lets them know why it's important and show them where to go to learn more.

Equally we must know the [concerns of staff and the students](#) too. The same principle applies, although with students you can use this information as part of your embedded curriculum, and with staff you can identify any weaknesses in staff training.

Once you have the background intelligence you need to know the [best way to communicate](#) with parents; what do you use currently and does this match up with their wishes? If not then it's time to re-think. Don't assume that just because you set up a Twitter account that parents will flock to that because most parents I speak with are not interested in Twitter.

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Finally we need to communicate:

- the right information,
- from the right organisations,
- **REGULARLY**

## STEP 1 Define your goal

You can be as complicated or as simple as you want, but I always go for simplicity so I would consider:

- What do you want to achieve?
- By when?
- How will you achieve it?

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## Goal

### Example 1

1. To raise the awareness of opportunities and risks for children online. To engage further with parents and carers and redress the balance that the internet is not a scary place and to empower parents with relevant information according to the age of their children and their needs. The ultimate goal will be to have a parents presentation where we can have engaging discussions.
2. End of term 2
3. Given the statutory areas that we must cover, alongside the concerns of parents, students and staff, we will produce a series of videos created by the students to share via the school website.

### Example 2

1. To engage with parents and carers in regards to some of the serious safeguarding issues we have been seeing. To inform parents how to spot these issues before a risk turns into a harmful situation and to give the best support and guidance we can by working in collaboration.
2. Beginning of term 3
3. We will slowly raise awareness throughout the year sending out regular and relevant communications to parents, culminating in a parents evening during the first week of term 3.

## Goal

Describe your goal. What do you want to achieve, how will you measure impact?

## Who is involved?

Staff:

Parents:

Students

## Step 2 Connect

Once you have your goal in place and devolved responsibilities, it's now time to connect.

It's very easy to make assumptions about the concerns of others and if you're just sending out information blindly the likelihood of anyone taking any notice is small. However if you know what their concerns are, and therefore the information they would like to know, the chances of them reading it and taking notice is that much greater.

So the **Connect** part of the strategy means connecting with parents, staff and very importantly, students.

- What have been your biggest issues in school?
- What are the biggest issues according to:
  - Parents?
  - Staff?
  - Students? (hugely important)
- What information would they find useful?
- How would parents like that information sent to them? Give them lots of options; just because you don't have a Facebook Page doesn't mean you can't ask. You may find this one thing alone will hugely increase your engagement.

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The easiest way to find out this information is to put out a poll. For example you could use a poll on your Facebook page, a Google doc (which auto compiles the results for you), use Survey Monkey (the free online version is good), or just use plain old paper.

It doesn't really matter, whichever is easiest for you. For parents, you could even consider sending the poll home with students and getting them to ask the questions. Results can then be compiled in class or by the group.

On the following page you will find a sample letter to send home that you can copy/edit/paste to save you a bit of time.

# Parents Letter

This is just example text to give you an idea. In the MS Word version you can copy/paste/edit in your own school template.

## Example letter to parents

Dear Parent/Carer,

The term ‘e-safety’ or ‘online safety’ may not be familiar to you, or it may conjure up fears of some of the awful things we hear about all too often. The safety, health and wellbeing of all students is of primary importance to us and we do a huge amount of work in school to help, support and guide students.

Because the majority of incidents we are dealing with happen outside school, it is vital that we work together to ensure your children have the best possible education and support, both inside and outside school. But we can't do this without your help; we need to know what concerns you have so that we can support and guide you to raise your own knowledge and understanding. Equally we would like to know the best way to communicate with you.

We also feel it is important that we let you know what we are teaching children to safely navigate the online world so that these positive behaviours can be replicated at home.

Could you please fill in the attached form letting us know:

- The 2 best ways you would prefer us to communicate with you.
- Circle your top 5 concerns. (Note: this doesn't mean we won't take notice of the others, we're just looking at priorities).

We will take all the answers and find out what the priorities are and the preferred methods of communication.

Yours Sincerely,



# Ways to Communicate

Please circle the 2 best ways to communicate with you. We will count them all up to see which are the most popular.

Newsletter

Website/blog

Facebook

Twitter

Video

Podcast

Other  
(please state)

## Top 5 Concerns

Please circle your top 5 concerns or things you would like to know more about.  
(Note these are just examples, make sure yours are age related).

Sexual abuse/  
exploitation

Bullying

Radicalisation

Sexting

ID theft

Inappropriate  
content

Who, where,  
how do I report?

Gaming

YouTube

Social Media

Setting/using  
parental filters

General 'stay  
safe' advice

Keeping up with  
advice

Other  
(please state)

## Step 2 Collaborate

Once you've got your results in, it's now time to compile them all together and collaborate on what the priorities are, what information or resources you need to gather together and how you are going to communicate that information.

Involve the students and parents in this (if you've got a group together), it may surprise you the different concerns that different groups of people have. What a young or older child finds concerning can vary massively with parental concerns, but it's important that we can respond to both.

1. Prioritise the issues. Between the 3 groups (parents, staff, students) are there common concerns? If so prioritise these in your communications first. Don't forget that statutory safeguarding issues must be a prime consideration.
2. What are the preferred communications methods? Many parents prefer electronic and there's no doubt that social media is hugely popular, but this can change from school to school.
3. What resources will you use for information? You can't be expected to do all the work, there are plenty of resources, people and organisations sharing good

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information (see towards the end of this guide - where to find help). Think carefully about this one, you need good, balanced information. Remember opportunities and risks, not just risks.

Capitalize on this and re-use the information (remember copyright). In other words, you're not doing all the work, you're signposting relevant information.

# Staff Concerns

Use this sheet to note down all the concerns once you have completed and compiled the surveys.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# Parent Concerns

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# Student Concerns

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# Preferred Communication

Note down the preferred ways to communicate in order of best/worst. Decide if it is workable/feasible. It's likely that many parents will prefer electronic communication, e.g. Facebook, Twitter. Don't worry if this sounds like too much work, remember there are free ways to schedule and cross-post to multiple services at once, e.g. Buffer, Hootsuite.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Having considered all the options, what is your decision? Do you need to do any preparatory works, i.e. set up a Facebook Page? If so, you may find my free guide useful - Using Facebook as a School Communication Tool

[www.esafety-adviser.com/resources](http://www.esafety-adviser.com/resources)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Connect

This is just example text to give you an idea. In the MS Word version the tables are editable so you can add more text/rows etc.

Who?	What?	When?	How?
Student group	Prep survey	w/b 25th Sept	Decide how you are going to survey students and prepare survey questions.
Student group	Survey	w/b 2nd Oct	Survey students
Staff	Survey	w/b 25th Sept	Prep survey sheets and give to admin staff to print for staff. Prep Facebook post and poll, schedule for 2nd Oct and repeat 5th Oct.
Staff	Survey	w/b 2nd Oct	Survey sheets into staff mailboxes
Parents	Survey		

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Who?	What?	When?	Remarks
Student group	Compile results	w/b 8th Oct	Student results
Student group	Compile results	w/b 8th Oct	Parent results
Staff		w/b 8th Oct	Staff results
All	Discuss results	12th Oct	Compile all the results together and discuss. Set priorities regarding concerns and ways to communicate.

## Communicate

Who?	What?	When?	How?
Student group	Prep survey	w/b 25th Sept	Decide how you are going to survey students and prepare survey questions.
Student group	Survey	w/b 2nd Oct	Survey students
Staff	Survey	w/b 25th Sept	Prep survey sheets and give to admin staff to print for staff. Prep Facebook post and poll, schedule for 2nd Oct and repeat 5th Oct.
Staff	Survey	w/b 2nd Oct	Survey sheets into staff mailboxes

## Step 3 Communicate

You've got all the information you need about concerns of particular groups, you know the preferred communications channels and you know where to go for that information. Now it's time to get it out there.

Here are some handy tips:

Be regular, be consistent. Not only does that set an expectation with parents, it also overcomes some of the difficulties with social media algorithms. For example Facebook determines who sees your posts and this is based on lots of different aspects, of which regularity of posts is one.

If you're going to use Facebook, get parents to 'Follow' your page, not 'Like'. Again this is to do with the algorithm.

If you are going to use one or more social media channels, schedule your posts in advance. The easiest way I find (and free) is [www.buffer.com](http://www.buffer.com).

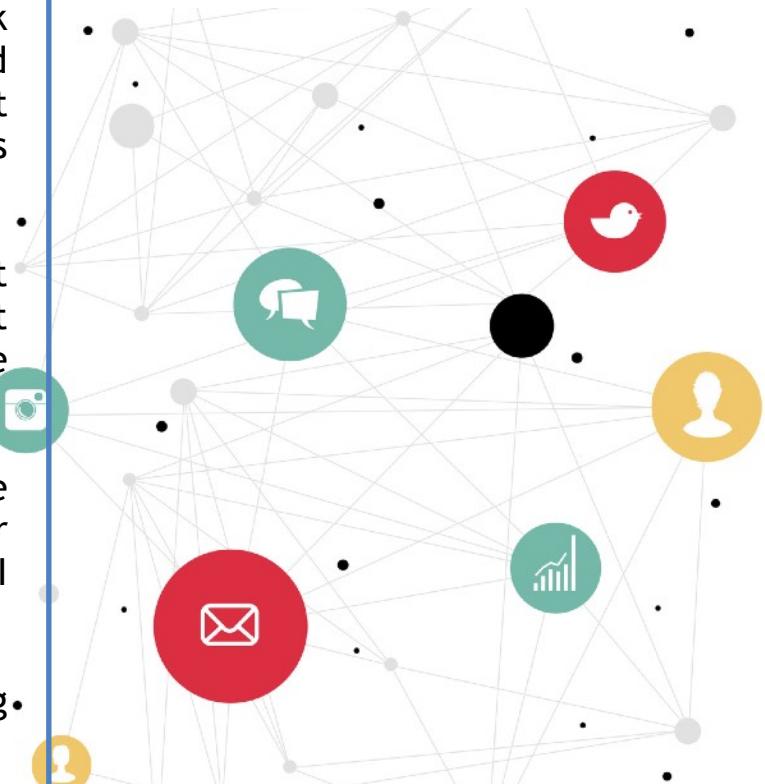
Use the template on the following page to note those scheduled posts.

You will find things happen over time and new issues come to light. That's okay, you can communicate those out too using the same communications channels.

Regardless of the channel you are using, be it paper newsletter or electronic media, all you are doing is

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signposting to the information. For example a sentence followed by a link back to your website (e-safety page) or to a YouTube video.

Always check the information you are signposting to, things change.

Always respect copyright.

Now that you've got everything together; you know the concerns and the preferred communication methods, you can decide what you are going to send out and when. Populate the table with the information. Note in the MS Word version of the guide the table is editable so you can change/edit/add rows and columns etc.

Remember, this is for information that you know parents want to see that you can schedule. There will be times when you find important information that also needs to be shared so use the same communications channels.

What	When	How	Info/Resources
Safer Internet Day 2018	Date: 6th Feb 2018 Send resources on:	Facebook Page School Newsletter Class workshops	Video links Information packs
Anti-Bullying Week 2017	Week beginning 13th Nov 2017	Facebook Page Twitter Parents evening	
Mental Health Awareness 2018	Week beginning 16th May 2018	Facebook Page Twitter Newsletter	
Priority 1 CSE/CSA Keeping up to date	Term 1, 2 and 3	Facebook Page Newsletter	CEOP videos on YouTube Information newsletter
Priority 2	Term 2 and 3		
Priority 3	Term 2		
Priority 4	Term 3		
Priority 5	Term 3		
Additional 1	Term 1		What we do in the curriculum
Additional 2	Term 2 and 3		What we do in the curriculum

# Where to find help

You can't be expected to know everyone and everything; what's important is that you know who/where to turn for information and resources. The following list is by no means exhaustive, it's a simple starting point. Use the information that these people/organizations share to populate your social media feeds and newsletters (remember copyright). They all have websites and social media channels.



DITTO - the free online safety magazine for schools.

[www.esafety-adviser.com/latest-newsletter](http://www.esafety-adviser.com/latest-newsletter)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/esafetyadviser>



A National  
Crime Agency  
command

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

[www.esafety-adviser.com/latest-newsletter](http://www.esafety-adviser.com/latest-newsletter)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CEOPUK>



The UK Safer Internet Centre

[www.esafety-adviser.com/latest-newsletter](http://www.esafety-adviser.com/latest-newsletter)

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/UK\\_SIC](https://twitter.com/UK_SIC)



The Anti-Bullying Alliance

[www.esafety-adviser.com/latest-newsletter](http://www.esafety-adviser.com/latest-newsletter)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ABAonline>

# Where to find help



Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsense.org/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CommonSense>



London School of Economics (Prof. Sonia Livingstone)

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/Livingstone\\_S](https://twitter.com/Livingstone_S)



The award-winning eCadet scheme

<https://www.ecadet.zone/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/eCadets>



The Internet Watch Foundation

<https://www.iwf.org.uk/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/IWFhotline>



The PSHE Association

<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/PSHEassociation>

# Where to find help

**internet  
matters.org**

Internet Matters

<https://www.internetmatters.org/>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/IM\\_org](https://twitter.com/IM_org)



Papyrus - prevention of young suicide

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/PAPYRUS\\_tweets](https://twitter.com/PAPYRUS_tweets)



I hope you have found this guide, strategy and the links useful. I can't cover for every situation and every resource, but hopefully this gives you a nice starting point. The resources I have pointed you to cover a huge range of subject areas for staff, students and parents and by looking at their information you will be shown other good, trustworthy information to different subjects from other people and organisations.

*Alan Mackenzie*

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# Resources

Contact **Alan**

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## Available Training and Consultancy:

### On-site

Staff, students, parents, governors.

Clear, pragmatic, up to date and engaging.

<http://www.esafety-adviser.com>

### Online

All staff, one cost (not based on school or staff size), 12 month licence.

<https://www.theonline.academy/online-safety-training-for-schools/>



Lots of free resources and guides at:  
[\*\*www.esafety-adviser.com/resources\*\*](http://www.esafety-adviser.com/resources)



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