Stop and think about walking down a busy high street. Now imagine all the risks that are around you; traffic, muggers, pickpockets, con artists. Some are malicious and some are just a product of the busy lives we lead. Much the same is true of using the Internet, there are hazards everywhere, but as in the high street we can all learn to avoid them and offer ourselves some protection.

In the high street we have the benefit of our years of experience and the advice of friends and family. In case you do not have that benefit of advice for your future use of the Internet, this factsheet provides an introduction to some of the major hazards you may encounter.

Internet Hoaxes

You can't believe everything that you read, or everything that you receive across the Internet. There are a number of old Internet hoaxes which continue to resurface on the net, taking advantage of new users. These hoaxes take the general form of purporting to be a warning about some dangerous email message, piece of software, etc. You can protect yourself from these hoaxes by learning more about them. If you receive a warning e-mail or message check out the details on the Internet, if you type the details of the warning into a search engine such as Google – you will get advice about its validity.

Personal Risks

The Internet is full of material that you will find inappropriate and even offensive. The Internet has been defined as a huge electronic library, but one where anyone can publish any book they like with only very limited controls. You should be aware that in using the Internet you are likely to encounter pornography, scams, requests for personal information, requests for money, etc.

Essentially our advice is to treat any request or email on the Internet as you would any other. If someone offered to make you rich in the pub, would you give them your money without some research and advice? The same is true on the Internet.

Equally there are many ways to block access to obscene material. The links provided at the end of this factsheet will provide you with further sources of information on this if you are concerned.

Spam

Spam is a term that has come into common usage for unsolicited or junk e-mail. This can take the form of someone posting the same message to many newsgroups or listservs. Or, you might receive Spam through unwanted email messages advertising some company or service. This form of junk mail is becoming more and more of a problem on the Internet.
Everyone gets Spam, just as we all get junk mail from the post office and adverts on Television. There are actions you can take to reduce the quantity but it is unlikely that you will ever be able to eradicate it.

AbilityNet Factsheet – Making IT Accessible For All

AbilityNet is a registered charity, No. 1067673. Telephone 0800 269 545 – Email: enquiries@abilitynet.org.uk – Web: www.AbilityNet.org.uk

Again the links at the end of this factsheet can help you with this problem.

Viruses

A computer virus is a program that is hidden within the code of another program. The virus is set up to replicate itself and spread to other programs on a person's computer. Viruses can be destructive or benign.

Like a real virus, a computer virus can spread in many ways. Again would you deliberately go to a country with a flu epidemic without considering how to protect yourself – or choosing not to go.

Catching a virus is easy! But the places with an "epidemic" by which you might get infected include – your e-mail, sharing discs, illegal copies of software, and file sharing. You may not be able to refuse to use all of these and hence you should make sure you are inoculated, and that you keep your inoculation up to date with regular updates or boosters.

AbilityNet would not supply a machine without an Anti Virus solution. This is a program which runs in the background and keeps your computer safe – keep it up to date and don't switch it off !

Links

This is only an introduction to the issues – if you want further advice we would recommend the following links to information on the Internet.

Be safe online

http://www.besafeonline.org/English/safer_use_of_services_on_the_internet.htm
The aim of this website is to provide information and advice to adults, especially parents and teachers, about potential problems of life on the Internet and how to behave.

Childnet International

http://www.childnet-int.org/
On this website you can read about the way in which Childnet is working around the world with many other organisations to help highlight and promote the positive inspiring ways children can use the Net. You can also read about the strategic education and policy initiatives they are engaged in which are helping to protect children in this new environment.

Cyber Hood watch

http://www.cyber-hood-watch.org/default.htm

Cyber Hood Watch is a program designed to enrich the experiences of the Internet Community by reducing the incidence of problems that occur online. This is accomplished through a combination of:
- Internet Safety Awareness Promotion
- Safety, Security, and Online Privacy Protection Education
- Providing related Tools, Equipment, and Programs Free of charge to Low Income Families

NCTE

http://www.ncte.ie/ICTAdviceSupport/TheInternet/

The Internet Safety section provides useful advice and information on this topic, including the NCTE's Acceptable Use Policy Guidelines for Primary Schools, Sample Parent Permission Letter and forms and details of Internet Safety projects.

Resilience

http://www.ukresilience.info/protecting.htm

This page provides insight into how you can play your part in protecting access to your computer, the information it contains, and the activities it helps you perform.

Other useful Links

http://w3.one.net/~banks/spam.htm
A useful guide to Spam and how to avoid it

http://www.pcworld.com/howto/article/0,aid,86484,00.asp
Further step by step advice on spam

http://www.cybernothing.org/faqs/net-abuse-faq.html
Very long and detailed FAQ (frequently asked questions) on every aspect of internet risk, abuse and hazard – mostly text

Search for more

Using www.google.com you can find much more useful information – try searching using these terms

    Spam
        Prevent Spam
        Stop Spam
        Anti Spam
    Viruses
        Prevent Virus
        Anti Virus
        Virus Protection
    Hoaxes

Internet Hoaxes
Online Hoaxes

General search terms include
Safe surfing
On line privacy
Safe use of the Internet
Protect myself online

All of these will produce lists of useful links for you to follow – these will include commercial products to help address the issues.

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