



## **Children and the Internet:**

### *Perceived dangers*

#### **Nicola Brace**

In the press we've been reading about negative influences of the media on children. Violence is just one example. Are there other risks that unregulated access to the internet poses?

#### **Sonia Livingstone**

There are a whole range of risks. You could say that everything that's bad in society, that might harm children in society, is available on the internet. Sometimes more accessibly than it is offline. And sometimes in a more extreme form.

So for example, children have always at a certain point, shown an interest in pornography, but the pornography on the internet is easier to find and more diverse, often more extreme than children could get their hands on 10, 20, 30 years ago.

So there's a whole set of risks that are posed to children by the internet that are perhaps more extreme or more diverse or somehow amplified by easy availability of the internet. And the latest anxiety is about 'sexting' which is a kind of peer group sharing of sexual images, which is sometimes part of normal experimentation as children grow up, and sometimes also exploitative or abusive. And then even more recently, I guess, the way in which bullying, which has also always been part of childhood, has moved on to the internet and become part of children's everyday experience, is causing a lot of concern.

#### **Nicola Brace**

So are there risks then that have always existed but have transferred to the internet? Or is there anything that's new in the way of a risk?

#### **Sonia Livingstone**

I think what we would say from research is that some of the risks are familiar, but changed by the presence of the internet. So there's always been bullying in schools, but what the internet enables is for the bully to reach the child also in their bedroom, also on their mobile phone in their private lives.

So it's kind of hard to walk away and escape. So it's still bullying, it's a familiar problem, but it's experienced a bit differently.

Some of the new problems that we're just beginning to research are things like chat rooms that encourage children to be anorexic or chat rooms that might encourage children to be suicidal or to engage in self-harm practices. And we know very little about those. It's assumed that they are relatively rare, or, rather few children find their way to those, but perhaps those are the particularly vulnerable children who might find themselves visiting those sites.