Video Chat and Webcams

Webcams have become an increasingly popular and useful tool for young people and adults. People can now video chat face to face with family and friends through video calling services such as Skype and FaceTime, hold video conferences with more than one person on Google Hangouts and social networking sites, and even use their webcam as a barcode scanner to check the cost/trade in value of goods online. Some games consoles also allow the use of a camera to video chat or capture footage of someone playing a game.

What do I need to know?

There are a huge number of positive uses and potential for using webcams as a tool for communication and searching for information and a number of sites and services may wish to access your webcam. The advice below can help you minimise the risks associated with webcams and video chatting.

Top Tips

- **Think before you cam**
  Always consider who you are chatting to and what you are sharing with them. Sharing photos or video taken via a webcam can give away personal information. Be aware that webcam footage can also be recorded by someone and then potentially shared and uploaded anywhere online.

- **Online friendship**
  On some services you may receive chat requests from people you don't know. It's far better to stick to chatting with people you know in the offline world too; your family and friends. If a site or service has privacy settings, always make use of them to control who can contact you.

- **Webcam content online**
  Some webcam chat sites allow you to chat to and see strangers online and may put you at risk of seeing pornographic content or adult behaviour on webcam. This content should always be reported to the website/service.

- **Just say no**
  People may use webcam chat to convince you to appear naked on camera or perform sexually suggestive acts. This can then be recorded by the watcher and be potentially used to threaten or blackmail.
  If someone ever asks you to do or say anything on camera that makes you feel uncomfortable then just say no and tell an adult you trust.
  Remember it is never too late to tell someone.
  You can also block or report a user to the website/service if they continue to harass you.

- **Tell someone**
  If you have been the subject of inappropriate sexual contact or approach by another person via webcam or other forms of online communication then it is vital to tell a trusted adult and to report it to the police via the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (**www.ceop.police.uk**).

Technical Advice

- **Emails and links**
  Webcams can be affected by viruses so be wary of emails and messages on social networks from strangers that invite you to click on a link or open an attachment. These may actually contain malicious files or 'trojans' which allow the stranger to control your webcam or device remotely.

  Make sure that antivirus and firewall protection is kept up to date on devices that use webcams.

- **Think where your webcam is in the home**
  Make sure that webcams connected to computers are not located in bedrooms or more private areas of the house. Although it is rare, there have been cases of webcams being hacked by programs/users to take pictures or video without the owner's knowledge.
  Unplugging the webcam, covering the lens or pointing it at a blank wall when not in use are good steps to take to minimise this risk, as is closing your laptop lid when not in use.

- **Know which services/sites use webcams**
  Sites, services and apps may ask for permission to use your webcam. Before you accept, always think carefully about why the service may want to use your camera and who may be able to see the video feed.

- **End calls and log out**
  Always make sure you end a video chat when finished and log out of the site or service. This can help prevent anyone from accessing your account or webcam without your knowledge.

Useful Links

www.childnet.com/young-people/secondary/hot-topics
www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-and-resources
www.ceop.police.uk
https://support.skype.com