European Parents’ Panel on Online Safety

20 October 2010

Luxemburg, Euroforum
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I. Introduction

30 parents from across the EU, Norway, Iceland and Russia, selected through the INSAFE network, met in Luxembourg on 20th October 2010 as a group to discuss online safety.

Representatives of this group presented the findings of the Parents' Panel, as well as personal views and experiences at the Safer Internet Forum on 21st-22nd October 2010.

The group of parents was a heterogeneous one: ranging from experts with professional interest in the topic (many of them were teachers) to parents, who were not very familiar with the Internet. What they all had in common was the desire to provide the best possible environment for upbringing their children.

The day was full of interaction and offered lots of opportunities to exchange ideas for the process of raising kids in these – as one mother said – “really difficult times”. Lots of different subjects were covered, not all of them seemed to be of the same importance to the parents.

For the detailed agenda see Annex I.

As preparatory work, all parents filled out a questionnaire, outlining their main concerns vis à vis of online technologies and indicating the use by their children and by themselves of internet and communicating technologies. Results can be found in Annex II.

During the day Parents took part in plenary sessions and in smaller working groups, using the methodology of the "World Café". All parents had the possibility to participate in topics that are the most interesting for them and where they could contribute the most.

The group was brilliantly moderated by Barbara Buchegger and Karl Hopwood (see annex III). The parents gave very positive feedback on the moderation of this meeting, in particular they like working through the world café methodology.

From the overall discussion it was quite clear that parents need lots of support in their role as a parent and that they have to find means to stay up to date with technology.

In general the feedback received from the parents on this meeting was positive, they really enjoyed the networking and knowledge sharing at European level.

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1 World café methodology offers the possibility for participants to exchange ideas and discuss relevant questions on a topic. Small groups changing groups discuss and exchange ideas. It is a dialogue and discussion technique, based on self-organized principles and tries to develop new ideas in a group of experts. For more information http://www.theworldcafe.com
II. Impressions from Parents Panel after the first "tour de table"

The first plenary session aimed on getting to know each other and to exchange best parental strategies. Starting the day with an introduction round, it was clear very soon that parental strategies have to differ according to the age of children. Young children need more guidance and protection, yet empowerment has to start already at a very young age so it can "work", when children get older. To offer lots of other things to do to keep the children busy in order to prevent them from spending too much time on computers, internet, mobile phones, game consoles, was a common parental strategy. We also heard very often, that it is important to build trust between parents and their children. Trust is the best strategy, whereas it is not always easy to achieve.

**Estonia:** Keep your children busy with all that is interesting to them; it’s not just about the internet.

**Greece:** Talk to children and know what they are doing online. They can spend too much time on there.

**Cyprus:** Time limits to follow – and keep them busy –

**Czech Rep:** Not found anything special other than support the positive, and keep other activities going.

**Hungary:** Important to just talk about it.

**Sweden:** Important to talk, especially about personal information and the fact that everything stays there – it is about trust.

**Malta:** Internet is part of us, we have to accept it – I learn to trust them and we talk about it – we had some parental lessons which has helped us to deal with it with our children – concern is that they are multi-tasking and doing homework while on FB – I worry about the amount of time they spend online.

**Denmark:** Multi-tasking worries me – it’s not that healthy to be doing this all the time. Talking about it – is the most effective way of doing it.
Spain: Keep them busy – give them other interests – main aim should be homework during the week – keep them away from computer while they are doing homework – but between Mon-Fri they use for homework only.

Belgium: Pupils are always one step ahead – it's hard to follow – talking to them is important – dialogue is not always possible though, some CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE will want to hide things – trust and dialogue is the most important – but perhaps this isn't the case for all parents and children.

Norway: Quite strict with games and content – we used to have restrictions – some days without computers – but not possible now – we need to be more flexible nowadays – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE like different things to us – we need to have a balance between what is okay and what is not. We have discussions about the internet – we abide by age controls etc. but we realise that they will be looking at these games in other people's houses – e.g. Grand Theft Auto – but other parents think this is okay. You need trust with your children – have had discussions about grooming etc. We need to trust, but not be naive. Keep a bit of an eye on what they are doing!

Slovenia: No special advice – but we have internet in the living room – so we can control in some way – so they don't use it for too long – the 2 children have to share – it helps to restrict use – I try and spend time talking to them about everything, not just internet, but friends, school etc. Sometimes we look at the things others are posting and publishing.

Romania: Spend more time with children – we need to know their friends –

Austria: There's no advice that works for every child – we restrict resources – not time – 4 people have to share 2 computers for leisure – so discussion is needed. Be interested in what the children are doing – drop everything and take an interest and look with them and try and understand what it is like to grow up with the media.

Germany: It was easier before the internet – computer has to stay in another room otherwise they are on FB all the time – during the night etc. Keep them busy!

Finland: Try and talk about things that could go wrong – internet is positive, but CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE need instructions on how to deal with the negative side....we think about violence and porn, but there are other things as well – you have to try and be ahead of the issues and ahead of the children – try and give them some tools that they can use – eventually children and young people will be exposed to things we don't want them to see – but if they are prepared it will be better – be open and honest about the positive and negative aspects.

Italy: My son uses the internet in the right way – he is not interested in porn or violence – keep communication alive with your children –

Bulgaria: talking about things they are interested in – internet can be a good way to learn for Children and young people – it is a place with good and bad –

Latvia: No problems yet – I use the internet a lot – Children and young people do use it – but mainly for education purposes and for contacting friends – honesty is crucial – this really helps –

Lithuania: talking to Children and young people is the best thing – Google – we need sites for children with search tools

Poland: Children and young people are the biggest fans of the internet – stay close to your children – keep them busy

Portugal: Children and young people should use the internet to reach more information – fantastic to look for information in other languages – really useful tool – often Children and young people just use the computer to play games – not on the internet – use the internet for FB – we talk a lot about what Children and young people are seeing, what they are looking for etc. Internet needs to be part of the professional life of children

France: Trust is the most important thing.
**Ireland:** We should be afraid – very afraid! We don’t put restrictions online – but I am stricter now – I don’t monitor the access – they go on FB – keep in touch with them get to know their friends – it is a very short period when Children and young people are in their home – spend time with them, keep them involved in other activities. Worries about pro-ana sites etc. You can’t always know what it is that they are doing...I think we should be very concerned – with a single click, they have so much access – as a parent – you need to be with them at all stages in their life – communication is the key to this! Talk when they want to! Be open and recognise the difficulties that they have in their lives. Also the access from mobile devices. Be open.

**Slovakia:** Best solution is ”don’t have kids!!” you can try restrictive measures – but they don’t work really – they find ways around the restrictions – multi-tasking is a bit of a problem – talking to them – teach them what is urgent and important – help them to distinguish.

**Iceland:** Be in love with the lives of your children – keep communication open – we need to accept that they can multi-task – it can help them to focus.

**UK:** Children and young people are more intelligent that we are – we have the worldly wisdom – they can multi-task though. Internet is an extension of the telephone – we mustn’t be frightened of the internet – let Children and young people teach us. we need to be more involved with the internet –

**Netherlands:** NB – children can’t always multi-task - it can actually cause problems – grades can go down etc. More children than ever are lowering their levels and taking exams that aren’t appropriate for their age group – multi-tasking isn’t something that our brain can cope with. As a parent we need to know that normal Children and young people can’t multi-task - they learn to do the things that they need to do. They have trouble in planning or concentrating – we need to talk about their ambition – talk about their goals – help them to focus on what they are striving for. Install a filter when they are younger so that we can leave them alone – at the minimum a porn filter – a site which has been spelt incorrectly can cause huge problems – we need to use whitelists and special browsers.

**Luxembourg:** we can use the restrictions on things like FB etc. Communication is crucial- you need to do things together –

**Russia:** some parents try and keep parents from the internet – but this isn’t possible – Children and young people have friendships online – we can be friends on the internet with our children, but we need to know them in the real world – the same goes for friends – you should know them for real if you know them online....

**Manuela Martra (European Commission DG Infso):** most of the parents’ panel representatives are here with their children who are teens but we should not forget that we need to educate about online safety already small children When young our children still have a lot of trust and dialogue with their parents and teachers and if we start a dialogue on this now they will not be surprised by our interest in their online activities later on.
III. Outline of the day
In the morning session, the focus was set on online activities of kids, risks and strategies of parents and the discussion was carried out through the world café methodology.

After lunch, as a plenary discussion, the question "Empowerment versus Protection" was discussed, what has to imply when. Is it age depending, is it technology driven, whether parents use either empowerment or protection?

After a second round of world café methodology was spent discussing How parents get advice and information on safety tools and safe use of the internet from? Where and how would parents like to get more information/advice from in the future?

As a final plenary session, the relationship between schools and parents was discussed. Lessons learnt were exchanged and representatives for the Safer Internet Forum were found.

Here below you will find the summary of all topics discussed.
More detailed notes of the discussion with the café methodology are available in Annex IV

III. 1 Summary of common areas of the discussion

1. Online fun, learning and being creative (e.g. Gaming, youtube etc) (what do parents consider to be a leisure online activity for their kids and how do they parents behave in its respect)
   Questions in the morning
   • What is relevant at which age?
   • How do they learn it/hear from it?
   • Do parents and kids have similar ideas about online fun?
   Questions in the afternoon:
   • Which family-rules are working?
   • Differences in kids’ age?
   • Relevance of PEGI in daily life

Summary of discussion on this topic:
Children and young people learn from games, although it is not always understandable for parents. Games can improve coordination and cooperation and build up critical skills and source criticism. On the other hand, games can lead to addiction, change young peoples’ behaviour and their friendships - it might be difficult for children to distinguish between virtual and real. Games can spread malware on computers. A big concern for parents is their children being at friends’ houses without supervision. Parents feel safe about games offered by publishers of schoolbooks.
Parents expressed the need for a white list, where they can find approved games and a checklist to evaluate games for their children. Parents wish for a reporting system to give notice of problems with games. Not all parents know about PEGI or PEGI online.

Differences in age groups or gender regarding games can be seen. Rating systems, such as the Finnish one, where children and parents rate a game are good examples. Parents get such information mainly from schools. A problem regarding age verification appears, when parents abuse such systems and let their children use their own personal data: Poker for minors.

2. Social networks (with a focus on privacy issues: here the parents can discuss what is online privacy and legal provisions they are aware of, what do they think that industry should provide in terms of safeguard - reporting mechanism etc. )

   Questions in the morning:
   - Do parents know what it is?
   - What should it be?
   - What do they think about their kids using it?

Summary of discussion on this topic:

Parents are not sure if their children know about reporting mechanisms in social networks. Therefore, they should advice their children. Parents should assist their children when they report something, since young people and children are often not sure how to do that.

Presently, Facebook is the biggest challenge, since quite a lot of young people are active in Facebook. A code of conduct would help as well as a helpdesk for social networks would be helpful. At the moment, it is quite difficult for parents to find relevant information.

3. Online marketing and advertising on sites which children use

   - Do parents know how SNSs make money? Do they know what viral marketing is?
   - What do parents think about online advertising on sites used by kids?

Summary of discussion on this topic:

Two aspects have to be distinguished:
   - Advertising which influences children
   - Real marketing and selling: In this case, children and young people spend real money through quick loans, apps (e.g. ring tones) or fraudulent web services. Moreover it has to be dealt with the way how young people use credit cards and mobile payment methods.

Legislation needs to be adapted to consider that consumers are often younger than 18 when they shop. This is necessary at an EU wide level, since online shopping is often a border-crossing issue.

4. Mobile Internet use

   - Do their children have phones that allow them to go online? If yes, who bought them? Who insisted on online access?
   - Do parents know what kids do online on their mobile?
   - Are they aware of the existence of applications like Messenger and Facebook on the mobile phone?
   - What are phone-companies offering as support?
   - Who should support?

Summary of discussion on this topic:

Parents should be aware of their children getting a mobile phone with Internet access. Not in all countries parents are legally obliged to be involved in the shopping process. Parents are often not aware that their children can access the Internet via WIFI, e.g. using other devices such as I-pod or X-box. Phone companies should stronger support parents concerning such services, e.g. by putting them off by default when young children are using the phone.

Parental Associations should deal more with this topic and more training should be provided. So far, parents do not seem to worry about their kids using the Internet on mobile phones...

5. Online grooming

   Questions in the morning
• Do parents know about such incidents?
• How often are kids bothered?
• Which networks/tools are especially relevant?

Questions in the afternoon:
• How can parents be informed?
• Who could/should give advice?
• How should industry support?

Summary of discussion on this topic:
The terminology is not quite clear, that’s why awareness raising for parents is necessary. The age group 10-14 is the most vulnerable group. One of the problems is that children and young people try to be popular among their peers and this in means in more and more cases that they present themselves in a sexually attractive way, even the very young ones. Using dating sites is also popular, not only among grown-ups. Moderated chat forums are helpful. Help and advice should come from parent associations. Hotlines are there to help, but not many parents are aware of that. A good parent-child relationship is a good basis for kids to feel free to tell their parents once they feel that “something is strange”. Children could use a report button, but often enough they are not aware of being groomed. Advice from people in the community is needed. Sexting is an additional topic that parents should be aware of.

6. Cyberbullying
Questions in the morning
• How are kids bullied?
• How can parents support their kids?

Questions in the afternoon
• How can parents get information?
• How can parents react?
• What can be done within families?

Summary of discussion on this topic:
In regard to Cyber bullying, communication is crucial. Cyber-bullying always goes along with bullying in the real world. Parents need to stay up to date - they need to know about possible threats to their children. Awareness raising becomes easier, once the topic is covered by the media. School is a very important place for parents to get educated and trained. Hotlines are also available for parents. To build a good relationship between parents and young people is crucial for dealing with such situations.

7. Privacy issues
• Do SNS provide enough information for parents?
• Where do parents get information?
• Do parents and kids have same idea about privacy? Differences between girls and boys?

Social Networks
• Do SNS provide enough information for parents?
• What would we wish from SNS?

Summary of discussion on this topic:
Both parents and children have different ideas about and views on privacy, e.g. concerning “friends” on social networks or photos that are posted online. Parents get information from the media, their children and sometimes from their children’s’ schools. They want more qualified information from Social Networks about privacy issues.

8. Addiction and obsessive use
• Support for families? Who is offering it?
• How to react in the family
• When are parents really concerned?

Summary of discussion on this topic:
Parents are really concerned about their children's internet use once daily routines are affected, school is neglected and physical activities are reduced. A proper reaction depends on the age of the child. One way is to provide alternative activities. Whilst helplines are a potential support for parents and young people, it is felt that there is not enough help available.
9. Empowerment versus Protection

During the discussion on empowerment and protection, it soon became clear that both have to be applied. Parents need to make sure that their kids get empowered, whilst they are protected at the same time. Especially young children have to be supervised in their online behaviour. Empowerment has to start at a very young age.

10. School and parents

For parents, schools of their children are an important source of information. On the other hand, schools have a responsibility to educate their pupils on safe online use. Many children do not have parents, who are able to offer sufficient support at home, so schools have to step in and provide this training. Teachers need more qualified trained.

Safer Internet Day activities could be promoted through schools.
IV. Main Conclusions

It is quite a big challenge for parents to keep up to date, regarding the possibilities, risks and challenges due to Internet and mobile phones. To find appropriate parental strategies is not always an easy task. To know, how to react in which situation, is quite a challenge. Due to the age of children, due to cultural background or own knowledge, different strategies are used.

"Talk to your children", that is one of the most frequently used strategies. It is important to have a trustful family environment and to keep up the dialogue. "Keep them busy", was another helpful strategy mentioned by parents.

Parents need support and training in order to keep up to date, school is a relevant place for this kind of training. Fear is not a very helpful strategy to support children; it is better to be informed. But this does not mean that parents should be ignorant concerning risks.

Parents and their children do not always have similar ideas concerning kids’ activities on the Internet. This is especially true for privacy issues, usage of social networks or gaming.

Helplines are a good support for parents, although parents do not always know about it. Safer Internet Day activities could be very helpful, but not many parents know about it. More awareness raising should be done.

Topics that will be even more relevant in the future are Internet use on mobile phones or commercial use of Internet.
While on 20\textsuperscript{th} October 30 parents worked together, their children (aged 12-18) took part in a parallel Youth Panel. On 21\textsuperscript{st} and 22\textsuperscript{nd} October, at Safer Internet Forum, Parents' panel representatives and Youth Panel representative shared their point of views on the above mentioned topic.

In particular, in the parallel session on Parents’ and online technologies (moderated again by Barbara and Karl) the following messages were put across by the children: