*Safe & Autonomous Internet-based Learning Strategies*

# Inspiring Practices

## Deliverable O2 – A2 / O2 – A3

## Leading partner: IPA

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# Executive summary

The current collection of inspiring digital practices is the second element leading to the SAILS Safe Resource for Parents. It is briefly presenting some practices that are

- Aiming at supporting parents as educators in navigating online realities and supporting their children in doing so, and
- Implementing the risk mitigation approach promoted by SAILS based on a healthy balance of online rights.

The document is based on the legislative mapping of participating countries (Greece, Hungary, Netherlands and Spain) compared to international legislative realities that provide the basis of the SAILS approach.

Partners had explored country-specific inspiring practices and – not surprisingly – have only found very few. Thus, the authors have included less specific inspiration, primarily from industry, the Council of Europe and the DigiLitEY COST Action that are aiming at parents in all project countries.

It will be followed by the following:

- Research evidence on safe digital childhood

- Self-assessment tool for parents about their digital practices

- More inspiring practices for parents as educators, primarily offline practices that can build the necessary trust for parental advisory on online activities of children

- A summary of other outcomes of the SAILS project, especially the mock social network forming the core of the SAILS approach

The work done is explain and pursuing a risk mitigation instead of the more wide-spread risk prevention one, primarily based on General Comment No. 25 (March 2021) tot he UN Convention ont he Rights of the Child that

-          - emphasises the importance of balancing ALL rights

-          - gives parents a key role related to evolving capacities of the child

The deliverables are built on the most recent research evidence (eg. Sonia Livingstone, recent Cuncil of Europe research done with parents, research in the European Education Policy Network on Teachers and School Leaders (EEPN) on digital age and education, etc.)

While designing this resource the WHO recommendations on active and sedentary screen time and related documents are taken into account.

Last, but not least, the authors consider that parents have diverse approaches and methods

## About SAILS

The greatest crisis experienced by the world in this century so far, the restrictions introduced over 2020 and 2021 has radically changed the way we relate to each other. Face-to-face interaction has been reduced to a minimum and it is increasingly common to communicate through a screen. The same has happened to millions of students, teachers and families, who have seen that from one day to the next they went from a face-to-face educational to online classes.

This change, unexpected and hardly planned, has caused numerous problems in education:

1) students who have lost their learning group and their mentors due to connection problems, lack of appropriate and sufficient devices or technological inability to keep up with the pace of online classes,

2) teachers who have had to abandon their face-to-face dynamics and adapt in a few days to huge videoconference rooms full of people who do not know the codes of conduct and communication of remote classes,

3) families overwhelmed by a situation that disrupts all their work and home planning, who find many difficulties to support and facilitate the online learning of young people,

4) school leaders are under pressure to make centre-level decisions to address the pandemic and are often unaware of best educational practices in these cases and are going in blind.

In this rough sea – while we believe online communication should not replace face-to-face education, and all efforts must be made to make in-person schooling possible while digital provisions should remain available as a complementary means used in some cases -, we aim to provide clear guidelines for sailors to deploy or retract their sails when necessary. The aim of this project is to provide students, teachers, schools leaders and families with tools to make appropriate decisions facing the conflicts that COVID-19 has brought to the surface in the processes of learning, communication and socialization of the school community as part of a digital childhood.

The methodology proposed in this project aims to be radically different from previous attempts to raise awareness among students about good behaviour on the net, the management of their autonomy and appropriate and safe social relations. With this objective, we will develop a fictitious social network in which we will reliably represent the potentially dangerous scenarios that can occur in this context (IO1). This network will be used as a social sandbox where different automated profiles (social bots) will behave inappropriately and interact with the fictitious profiles created by the students. From the interaction with these social bots, students will be able to understand which behaviours are not appropriate or safe in a practical way.

Although the fictional social network can also be used by teachers and families for their digital literacy, we believe that it is necessary to develop specific work materials for these groups. In the case of teachers, a guide to all the new methodological possibilities that online platforms offer can be very useful (IO3). In addition, we believe that it is necessary that they have sufficient keys to analyse and solve common problems that occur in online learning contexts (cyber-bullying,

difficulties in maintaining respect in video conferences, abuse of anonymity on the network, plagiarism and problem-solving apps, etc.).

Families also need clear guidance in this new scenario. The potential lack of digital literacy, digital competence or even other soft skills has turned some family members otherwise able to support schooling – together with the majority of teachers - into people unable to help the students they live with or to communicate properly around schooling. For these reasons, this project aims to provide families with practical guidance (IO2) that explain in accessible language how to do most things that are needed in a virtual context that may also include virtual learning and what the use of each tool, social network or platform implies.

Finally, schools as a whole need to adopt strategies to coordinate all this effort and lead education in the post-Covid era to a safe port. With this purpose in mind, SAILS will provide an adaptable and flexible roadmap for schools where the integration of safe and proper use of digital resources will be defined as a strategy engaging all actors (IO4).

In short, the SAILS project intends to serve as a navigation chart in this immense ocean of possibilities that the Internet offers us in the educational context to avoid, above all, the storms that already existed and the new ones that COVID-19 has brought.

The transnational consortium that has been created to carry out this project is the key to ensuring its success. The experience in the coordination of projects and the research that the team of UDEUSTO has been carrying out in the development of games and in the development of key competences is going to suppose a key piece to guarantee the success of SAILS. In addition, the experience of entities like EA and ESHA in their work with leaders in schools is going to allow that the changes and innovations are established at school level and that they transfer the barriers to the society. Besides, the experience of IPA and PPAA and their connection with several networks of families and other agents is going to allow to obtain an impact, not only in school environments, but at a higher impact level.

# SAIL Safe Resource for Parents

With far more families using digital tools, many of them forced by the COVID-19 school closures, it is clear that the resources available for parents often do not help answer their concerns and questions. (When parents are mentioned in this IO descriptions, we mean parents, guardians and other responsible adults having a stake in the parenting of children). Recently published research (Livingstone, S. 2020) shows parents use different strategies and have different approaches to digital childhood. Our approach will mirror that and will support all appropriate parenting practices, by not trying to suggest a single right approach, but help families find their own ways.

COVID-19 school closures also made it necessary for schools and families to work together, parents and teachers often learning to navigate digital realities together. While experiences made more teachers and parents appreciate the potential and benefits of using digital technologies for learning, there are several areas in which parents need support and in which parents often need to negotiate with teachers. Overconfidence is just as problematic as overprotective approaches, and this resource is aiming at addressing both. Research conducted since March 2020 by IPA clearly shows that parents wish digital technology to become an integral part of schooling and education in a broader sense, but there is also a demand for finding a healthy balance between online and offline activities, finding the role of digital technology in traditional educational activities, negotiating passive and active screen time, and understanding and observing privacy and data protection.

There is a lot of confusion about the impact of screen time on children and often a lack of knowledge on its developmental psychology angles. Using the WHO's recommendations on a restriction on passive screen time, we are aiming for introducing innovative approaches to active use. The resource will also take it into consideration that school-age is not a homogenous period, and thus will support parents with children at different stages with age-appropriate approaches.

The SAILS Safe resource for parents will use an innovative risk mitigation approach rather than the usual risk prevention one, and for that it will help increase parents' digital literacy levels and empower them for parenting in the digital age. We will implement an approach that is based on responsible digital citizenship, free, informed choices, and as little restrictions as possible. It will support parents in understanding how technology works, understanding the rights of their children and their rights online (with special focus on balancing the right to safety to other equally important child rights, and implications of the GDPR). It will help develop family strategies in a way that considers cultural and individual differences.

The SAILS Safe resource for parents is aiming to be a guide available online for parents. The guide will provide parents with background information on the following areas:

- legislation around digital childhood including learning online

- research evidence related to digital childhood - impact on children, parental mitigation, age-specific information

**- inspiring parenting practices, focusing on parents as educators**

The SAILS Safe resource for parents will support parents in using technology for family cohesion, maintaining and strengthening relationships with family and friends, for schooling-related activities as well as non-formal and informal self-directed learning of children and of the parents themselves.

It will contain a self-assessment tool for families to find out what strategies may suit their beliefs and traditions best in a way that also protects and ensures the rights of children to be connected. It will build on existing tools such as the Easy steps to help your child become a Digital Citizen publication by the Council of Europe, but will have the innovative element of linking digital citizenship to learning and schooling activities.

The expected impact on families using the resource is that they will become empowered to support their children better in their digital learning journeys. Although, it will be developed using country-specific experiences from Spain, Greece, and the Netherlands, it will be transferable to other country contexts as it will use an overarching child-rights approach based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by all EU member states and beyond.

This document contains the above-mentioned inspiring practices.

# Select Inspiring Practices

## Helping parents keep their children safe online (by https://www.internetmatters.org/)

The initiative aims to assist parents in keeping their children safe when navigating the online world. By providing advice, checklists, and toolkits, it aims to raise parents' awareness of issues potentially impacting their children such as inappropriate content and fake news.

While it is commendable to raise awareness of risks, the initiative appears to promote a risk-prevention approach through, for instance, setting up parental control on all devices and generally restricting access. It provides guides on restricting access to sites and / or functions on computers, phones, gaming consoles, social media, and so forth.

On a positive note, it also recommends that parents discuss internet safety and conscious web use with their children. This is a laudable aspect of the initiative as it gives children, at least to some extent, a say in their own online presence. Thus, this risk-mitigation focused aspect compensates somewhat for the strict risk-prevention and non-child-right-cognizant restriction recommendations of the initiative.

## Positive Online Content Campaign (https://www.positiveonlinecontentforkids.eu/campaign)

The initiative aims to improve parents' digital literacy which in turn should enable them to act as role models to their children concerning online activities. Additionally, it promotes raising awareness and disseminating knowledge about what positive and negative characteristics of online products to look out for.

By promoting the making of informed choices and the characterization of parents as role models, the initiative appears to fit well with risk-mitigation approaches. For example, instead of banning children from downloading apps, it wishes to teach parents how to recognize and discuss potentially harmful ones.

## Internet Segura for Kids (http://www.infocop.es/pdf/guia.pdf)

The Spanish Internet Safety Centre aims to raise the awareness of parents and children alike concerning the safe and responsible use of the internet and digital technologies in general. It offers a helpline for stakeholders in doubt, which should further the ability of parents and children to make wise choices when navigating the online world.

By recognizing that both parents and children are equal stakeholders in safe internet use and by promoting awareness and training instead of prohibitions and restricting access, the initiative appears cognizant of children's right and in line with a risk-mitigation approach to online threats.

## Apple Families (https://www.apple.com/families/)

Apple's family features aim to enable parents to be aware of what children are doing online. It allows parents to decide on the manner and amount of device and / or app usage. It generally focuses more on limiting and consciously monitoring online activity than pre-emptively banning access. Through time limits and specific app restrictions, it provides a more tailor-made form of regulating online presence for children than blanket prohibitions on, for example, using the App Store.

While a positive approach in that it is more focused on mitigating risks than preventing them, it can easily move astray and incentivize inclined parents to unduly monitor and restrict their children's online activities. However, this is a fine line to tread, and the initiative is commendable for its focus on case-by-case limiting instead of blanket banning.

## #SeizeTheControls (*https://www.seizethecontrols.eu/*)

The initiative recognizes the popularity, potential and positive characteristics of video gaming. It aims to help parents in understanding video games, choosing age-appropriate games for their children, and setting up limits as to when and how long children can play. By promoting that parents, for example, familiarise themselves with in-game reporting tools and by promoting parent-child discussion surrounding video games, it fosters two-sided, honest discussion and subsequent conscious online play.

Instead of discouraging parents from allowing their children to play, the initiative hopes to enable parents to recognize the positive impact games can have while mitigating potential risks, such as non-age-appropriate games (for example, highly violent and obscene shooter games for preteens). To this end, it relies on and explains the Pan-European Game Information classification ("PEGI", https://pegi.info/). The classification allows conscious decision-making when buying and playing games. Sufficiently aware of the contents, parents and children can make informed choices together whether this game is appropriate.

## Smart Parenting in the Digital Age (*https://library.parenthelp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/DigilitEY-Smart-parenting.pdf*)

This guide intends to assist parents in raising children in a digital world. It emphasizes making decisions about boundaries as a team, together with children, while simultaneously building trust. This latter aspect is important as the guide recognizes that total monitoring and constant supervision are not feasible. The guide also promotes leading by example and helping children find games and tools suitable for their age and maturity.

The guide emphasizes that children's consent should be discussed with them from an early age and, whenever possible, they should be allowed to have a say when their consent online is requested. Similarly, helping children understand what not to share online is promoted as a tool for raising risk-conscious children.

Overall, the guide promotes a healthy risk-mitigation approach through discussion and joint decision-making. It opposes blanket prohibitions and making decisions for children. As such, it is a step in the right direction – away from risk-prevention and towards risk-mitigation in online environments.

## UNICEF: Digital Age Assurance Tools and Children's Rights Online across the Globe

Relevantly for present purposes, the discussion paper includes alternatives to age-gating tools. It promotes the use of parental content control on home Wi-Fi networks to prevent children from assessing inappropriate content. Importantly, however, it emphasizes that this tool is only suitable for young children, as older children's rights to access information may be impeded by such measures. It also uniquely recognizes that children are often more tech-savvy than their parents and such measures are thus also likely to give only a false sense of successful risk-prevention to parents.

Similar control measures are available on gaming consoles, and are similarly encouraged only for specific situations and very young children.

## The 4Cs: Classifying Online Risk to Children (S. Livingstone, M. Stoilova)

The authors develop a four-way classification of online risks: the 4Cs. As stated in the report, the classification assists in recognizing that risks to children online can arise when a child

- *"engages with and/or is exposed to potentially harmful CONTENT;*

- *experiences and/or is targeted by potentially harmful CONTACT;*

- *witnesses, participates in and/or is a victim of potentially harmful CONDUCT;*

- *or is party to and/or exploited by a potentially harmful CONTRACT."*

Through the 4Cs classification system, the report hopes to, inter alia, enable parents to be conscious of what type of risks to look out for and what can be done to tackle them, should they arise.

## Mediawijsheid (*https://www.mediawijsheid.nl/ouders/*)

The organization collects and disseminates sources and tools for parents to be digitally literate, active partners in their child's development. Emphasizing educating and conversing with children, sources are collected which may be helpful in mitigating or preventing risks through a variety of manners, such as smart media use. Inevitably, as a collection of sources, it contains risk-prevention approaches alongside risk-mitigation ones. However, it is a helpful, accessible and clear resource for parents wishing to be more digitally literate and better understand their children's digital world.

## Veilig op internet: hoe bescherm je je kind online? (*https://www.oudersvannu.nl/kind/praktisch/veilig-internetten/*)

The website provides tips over children's internet use to parents. Through discussing online risks and dangers, it highlights what parents should pay attention to. It suggests the use of parental controls, although only as a secondary measure after talking to one's child. This is commendable as it promotes dialogue and joint decision-making. It recommends making online activities a daily topic, discussing the positive aspects thereof while not losing sight of potential risks. The advice of discussing internet use with children fits well with a risk-mitigation approach that recognizes children as competent actors in decisions concerning their online presence.