

LETTER TO PARENTS AND CARERS
Issued to schools by the Department of Education

14 11 24

Dear Parent/Carer

SUBJECT: IMPORTANT ONLINE SAFETY INFORMATION – CATFISHING AWARENESS AND SAFER SCHOOLS NI APP

I am writing to you today to highlight a serious online safety concern and to provide you with resources to help protect your child. You may be aware of a recent news story about an individual in Northern Ireland who was involved in a large-scale catfishing case with devastating consequences. This has highlighted the potential dangers of Catfishing, and we want to ensure that you have the information and tools to keep your child safer online.

What is Catfishing?

Catfishing is when someone creates a fake online profile to trick people into forming relationships with them. This can be done for various reasons, including exploitation, scamming, or simply to cause emotional harm.

How can Safer Schools NI help?

Safer Schools NI is a free app, funded by the Department of Education, that provides valuable resources and advice on various online safety issues, including Catfishing. The app includes a new resource, "Catching a Catfisher", which provides information on:

- **Identifying Catfishing:** Learn to recognise the signs of a fake profile and deceptive online behaviour.
- **Avoiding Online Scams:** Gain practical tips and strategies to protect yourself from Catfishing and other online scams.
- **Verifying Online Identities:** Discover techniques to confirm the authenticity of online profiles.
- **Staying safe on social media and dating apps:** Access valuable advice on navigating online platforms safely.

What can you do?

- **Download the Safer Schools NI app:** Available for free on [Google Play](#) and the [Apple App Store](#).
- **Talk to your child about online safety:** Have open and honest conversations about the risks of online interactions and the importance of being cautious.
- **Familiarise yourself with the "Catching a Catfisher" resource:** Use this resource to learn more about Catfishing, the risks and how to engage your child in a constructive conversation.

Remember

- Encourage your child to be wary of online relationships with people they have never met in person.

- Remind them never to share personal information, such as their address or phone number, online.
- If your child experiences any concerning online behaviour, report it to the relevant platform and seek support from Safer Schools NI or other trusted sources.

Paul Givan MLA, Education Minister: "As parents, we want the best for our children, including ensuring their safety in the digital world. I encourage all parents to take advantage of the Safer Schools NI app and have open, supportive conversations with their children about online safety."

Colin Stitt, Head of Safer Schools: "Every child deserves to feel safe online. This tragic case reminds us that we must remain vigilant and empower young people with the knowledge to protect themselves. Safer Schools NI app is a vital tool for parents and carers in this effort."

We are committed to working with you to ensure our children and young people are safer online. Please do not hesitate to contact the school with any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely

Mrs S Cullinan
Loreto Grammar School Omagh