



# Global Parents' Guide

**Making  
Responsible Use  
of Information and  
Communications  
Technologies at  
Home**

**DR. MOHAMED MAHMOOD BEGG**

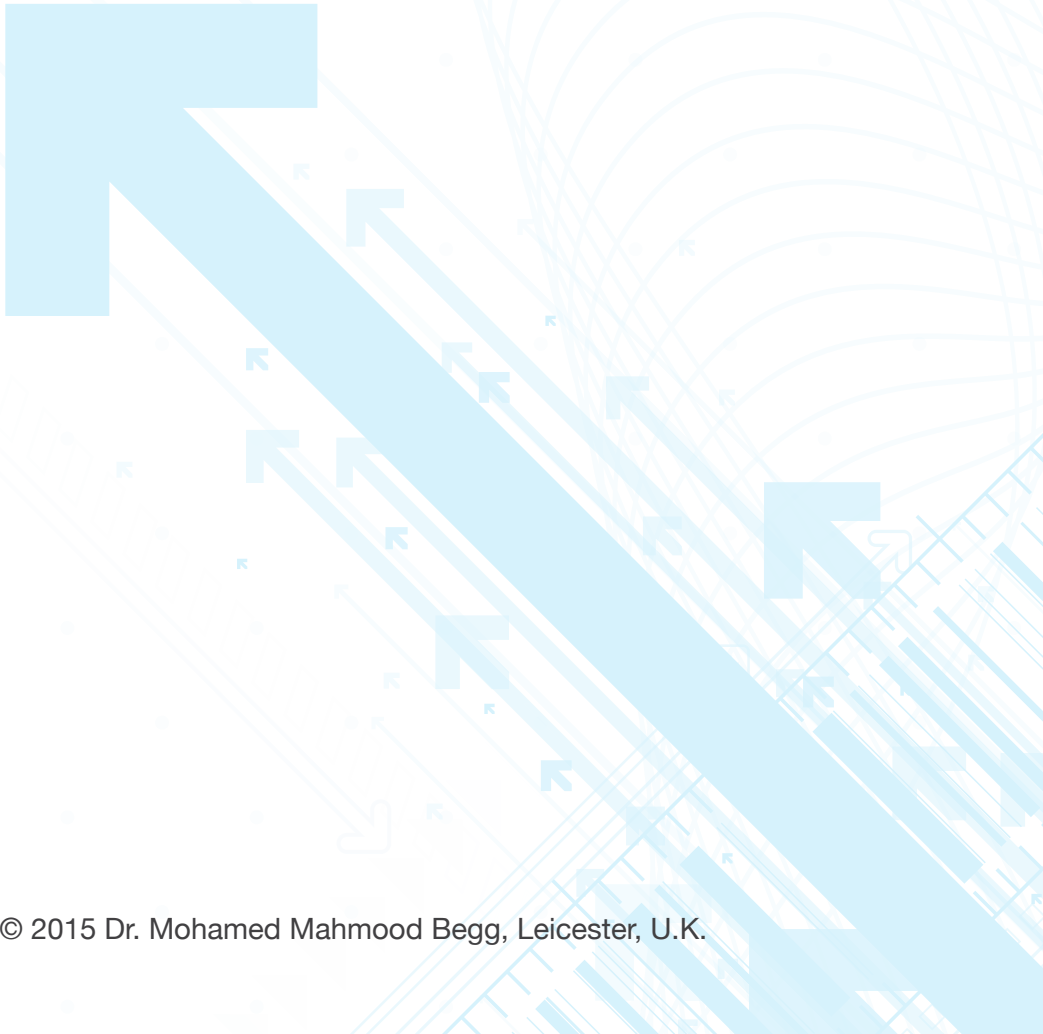
786

00110111

00111000

00110110

[binary]





**Making  
Responsible Use  
of Information and  
Communications  
Technologies at  
Home**

DR. MOHAMED MAHMOOD BEGG

# FOREWORD

Almost the entire world has embraced the revolution of social media and use of information technology has now become a necessity. The days of computers or mobile phones as a luxury are now gone. All communities, including Muslims, are facing related challenges on a global scale and rejection of social media or information technology is not an option. It remains a crucial duty for all communities to observe their moral and ethical values and strike a balance in the process of embracing the revolution of scientific developments. In my opinion, for a healthy and safe society we all need to achieve a balanced reconciliation between modernity and morality. I am glad that Dr. M M Begg has been able to demonstrate this ideology of reconciliation by authoring this unique parental guide which is equally important for parents of all faith/non-faith communities and nationalities. This booklet is a revised edition that has accommodated recent challenges and needs. It provides valuable information and guidance and I sincerely hope that readers will benefit greatly from its contents and advice.

(Maulana) Mohammad Shahid Raza OBE  
Vice Chair, The Interfaith Network UK  
Head Imam, Leicester Central Mosque, Leicester

1st May, 2015

# INTRODUCTION

Parental responsibilities have never been light throughout the history of mankind. Parents have always struggled to bring their children up to become responsible adults. Some have succeeded in this quest while others have totally failed but not always due to their own shortcomings. The environment in which children grow, the faith influence of their parents, the community in which they live and the standard of education they receive also have a profound affect on them.

One of the greatest changes in the world over the recent few decades has been the most powerful influence of technological developments. The Internet, satellite television, mobile phones and the ease of international travel have revolutionised the human life style (including Muslims) on this planet. While the benefits of these developments are enormous, one cannot totally ignore some of the dark sides of these advancements on our new generations regardless of race, colour, religion or country of residence. The benefits and the harms appear to be universal. However, for Muslims there are extra sensitivities to be considered as some Western cultural attitudes do not necessarily comply with the teachings of Islamic faith. For example, naked or near naked displays and man woman relationships outside marriage are seriously discouraged in the Islamic faith. Al-Qur'an mentions the punishment of such conduct in the hereafter as 'much more severe' than the worldly punishment (Chapter xxiv, 3-11).

For the purpose of this book, the author has chosen ICT and particularly the influence of the Internet on today's society and the enormous new challenges facing parents in bring up their children in this new Information Age. The onward march of technology means that majority of the parents are still not ICT literate while their children are utilising computers in schools – and in many cases in their own homes – often without parental supervision or guidance. Parents appear to be consigned to the peripheries of this onward rush because they have not been informed about exactly what it is that they are supposed to supervise, or how to respond to their children's questions about on-line safety. Many parents in effect find themselves disconnected or set adrift from this process. Others who do not have computer skills feel ill prepared to embark on the process of educating their children about on-line safety.

Filtering information on the Internet may be one way of tackling the concerns, but this by itself is not enough. Some sociologists, educationalists, and researchers are therefore, beginning to provide some guidelines to parents and children. This research is still in its early stages and it is always likely to trail behind the actual speed with which technology is advancing.

This guide highlights some of the main issues surrounding children and parents in the use of new technologies, particularly the use of the Internet at home and provides solutions where possible. This guide makes some specific references to the Muslim communities in the U.K. as the initial research on this subject was conducted within the Muslim community in Leicester while the author was engaged in his PhD research at the De Montfort University, Leicester. It is expected that this guide will go some way in easing the anxieties and concerns of all parents nationally and internationally in the new Information Age in which we are living. Belonging to the Islamic faith is not a pre-requisite and the author, therefore, welcomes any parents to read this book and find some benefit from it in accordance with the circumstances of their particular family.

**Dr. Mohamed Mahmood Begg**

Research Associate, De Montfort University  
Leicester. LE1 9BH

1st May, 2015



## WHAT PARENTS MUST KNOW

All parents (including Muslim parents) need to understand that the Computing Revolution is here to stay. There is no going back and there is no possibility of breaking away from these developments unless it is adopted at the expense of illiteracy and becoming a non-citizen. In the United Kingdom there is a huge push by the government to integrate computers in the schools' curriculum with National Grid for Learning and it is proceeding at a very rapid pace.

In today's society we have all become dependent on ICT for most of our activities whether it is work, home, education or leisure. Almost every country is making use of ICT, the rich more than the poor. Developed in the West, it has a Western cultural approach with English as its main language. As communication has been made much easier through the use of email facilities, no one is interested in the old days of writing letters and waiting for weeks for any reply. Children do need the Internet for their education and completing their school projects. Indeed, the Internet is the world's largest library providing some information on almost any subject.

The Internet facilities provided to schools in the United Kingdom are filtered and parents need not be unduly concerned about what the children are learning through the Internet in schools. Almost all lessons are supervised.

However, the use of the internet at home, particularly by children, raises many concerns which are discussed in this book.



## BENEFITS OF ICT AT HOME

- The Internet is now the world's largest library whether at school, university or home. One can usually find some information on any subject or topic when a search is carried out even though the authenticity of the information may sometimes be questionable.
- Children can produce better home work pieces or projects by finding appropriate information and are even encouraged by their teachers and parents to do so and therefore need the Internet connection in their homes.
- Email facilities have improved the speed of communication between families, children, individuals and organisations to a remarkable extent. One is now able to send an email message across to the other end of the world and receive a reply within a matter of minutes. Web camera facilities enable parties across the world to see each other while communicating live. The old days of writing a letter and putting it in a post box is becoming more and more unpopular even though business organisations still have to do this due to some legal requirements. However, many business organisations are also encouraging on-line communication and paperless bills to reduce cost both to themselves and the customer.
- Many families and individuals these days make their holiday bookings including hotels through the Internet which are usually better bargains. It is also popular these days with families and individuals to book cinema tickets or concert tickets through the Internet and even choose their preferred seats in the hall from the seating plan.



- E-commerce, (online shopping) from home has become more and more popular over the last few years and is a great facility for everyone particularly for women with children, pensioners and disabled persons as they can make their orders from home and can make a payment online or when the delivery takes place at their home address.
- Considerable religious material particularly Islamic, is available on the Internet and office programs provide word processing, spreadsheets, databases and many more which children and adults can use.
- Storing digital photos from a digital camera and sharing them with friends and families has become an easy process and web camera is facilitating communication while seeing the other party live.
- Learning foreign languages has become easier through language programs which both children and adults can use. For Muslims, Arabic language programs are now available and other programs like Alim, Al-Ustadh, Al-Qari and many more are available on religious lessons. It is easy to download books, videos and games.
- For adults matrimonial and friendship websites are available. Many young couples particularly within the Islamic faith have found their partners through such facilities which was not a common possibility before.

The list of benefits is getting longer and longer and so are the risks.



## CONCERNS OF ICT AT HOME

- Pornographic websites can be accessed intentionally or unintentionally (stumbled upon) through pop-ups or other combination of words. This is a matter of concern for every family regardless of faith, culture, origin or country of residence. Child pornography is an international crime and yet no end of criminals are caught who use the Internet for this purpose.
- The use of Chat Rooms has been proving particularly dangerous for children as paedophiles use this facility to prey on young innocent children. Older men pretend to be children mostly through the unsupervised chat rooms and try to entice young children by offering them sweets, presents and arrangements to meet for outings for their evil intentions. Cyber stalking is new threat to women.
- Sending and receiving spam is common. Most of us get spam emails offering all sorts of services. The accompanying attachments may contain virus which damage or ruin your PC. Hackers and crackers are constantly at work trying to break security codes and enter your system for malicious purposes. Cyber bullying has also become common. This is related to sending threatening emails or text messages on mobile phones.
- There are many hate websites present on the Internet and can be against anyone whether Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus or Sikhs. There are some websites which appear to be Islamic but they are run by non-Muslims. The aim of these websites appears to be nothing except to destroy any harmony between people living together.

- Gambling is prohibited in Islam. However, gambling websites have grown on the Internet and is now a multi-billion dollar business. One can gamble in Las Vegas while sitting in a village in the U.K. or anywhere in the world without anyone's knowledge.
- Violent Computer Games is another serious concern for parents in today's information and technology age. There have been several cases in the US where children have taken a gun to their school and shot fellow children and teachers. There may be some reservation in this matter but when the children concerned were questioned, they said that they had been playing a particular violent computer game before resorting to such an act.
- Computer addiction is another serious concern around the globe as young people seem to be spending hours continuously on computers and possibly become totally detached from reality, thus developing into unsocial, inward looking, obese persons with no other interest. In the US computer addiction is classified as a disease which has to be diagnosed. Many of the addicts are sent to health farms where there are no computers at all to get them off this addiction. Muslim parents experience difficulties in sending their children to supplementary schools as the children may be too involved in playing a game. To add to these concerns we now have many gaming and entertainment devices such as iPods and Play Stations.
- R.S.I. (Repetitive Strain Injury) occurs particularly in women who spend hours working on a keyboard. Excessive strain on eyes causing headaches and muscular aches are common among those spending long hours on computers.
- There are websites which teach how to make a Bomb and how to commit suicide. All these are serious concerns and dangers to young people growing up in this age.
- Social network websites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Bebo can be a threat to personal privacy.

# Impact of Social Media

- Social Media can be very useful and helpful to find and connect with anyone across the world. Professionals and students can make use of this technological facility to share and explore common interests. However, news reports constantly highlight the presence of criminally minded people and also some radical preachers who have radicalised young people to join organisations harmful to global peace.
- Many young people get a false sense of connection to people across the world and start sharing personal or private information which can lead to exploitation. In reality the person on the other end may not be what they claim to be! They could be spending hours in communications at the expense of other activities. Obesity, inability to communicate with real people or develop any meaningful relationships is the result.
- Cyber-bullying and even cyber-stalking can develop as a result of false connections leading to all sorts of complications and health issues in one's normal life.
- Decreased productivity is another result of being over involved with social media. Young people may ignore their responsibilities and tasks that need to be completed whether at school, university or in their work place or business.
- Privacy risks are highlighted in media reports frequently. Boyfriends and girlfriends share private pictures, but once the relationship breaks down, one of them or both of them may put such pictures in public domain resulting in misery or even suicide as reported by the media during recent years.
- The list of benefits and harms is unending. In the end it is the individual person's responsibility how to use this Social Media technological facility to their advantage. The responsibilities of parents have become more complex and demanding than ever. What is the way forward?



## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- If parents have to supervise their children's use of the Internet at home then it is imperative that they themselves must be literate and additionally computer literate. Despite the fact that computers have now been around for more 25 years, there are many parents in the U.K. and even more around the world who are not computer literate while their children are now growing up with computers all around them. There is therefore quite a gap in the computer literacy level of parents and children even though there may not be normal literacy gap between them. In the U.K. there are plenty of opportunities for parents to update their computer skills by attending adult computer literacy classes in the evenings in most Community Colleges. Such facilities are available in other countries too but a strong motivation is required to take up such opportunities. If parents are not ICT literate then it becomes impossible to understand how to supervise their children's use of the Internet and can result in their children falling into the dark side of the Internet.
- For parents who are reasonably computer literate, the first advice from the U.K. Home Office is that the computer system should be installed in the living area of the house and not the child's bedroom. If the computer is in the living area then it is possible for parents and perhaps elder brothers and sisters to see what is on the screen as part of their supervision of the use of the Internet being made. If the computer system is installed in the child's bedroom then it would become impossible to know who the child is communicating with and which type of websites are being accessed.

- The home computer system does not have to be of the highest specifications, an averagely priced system which fulfils the requirements of parents and children can be adequate for the home use. It would be best if some filter programs like Net Nanny, Cyber Patrol, Surf Watch or similar is installed on the home system right from the beginning. The shop which sells you the system will willingly help you with the extra programs and may even install them free as part of the purchase. It is also important that parents keep a track of the web sites used by their children.
- It is important to establish some rules within the home and family with regards to the use of the Internet. For example, children should be given a clear guideline on the length of time they spend in front of the screen, priority being given to their home work from schools. As most children play computer games at home, it is parental responsibility to make sure that the games they buy for them are suitable for their age and are not violent in content.
- Parents in the current information age need to know not only their children's physical friends but also their online friends. It is also parental duty to know who is ringing their children and who their children ring. If parents feel that their children have been disturbed by a phone call or any online activity, they must try and establish what has been happening and take up the matter with appropriate authorities on behalf of their children.
- The use of chat rooms by children and some of the resulting problems are a serious concern in today's society. There are two types of chat rooms catering for different interests and ages. In the case of children there are supervised and unsupervised chat rooms. Clearly, it is better if children use supervised chat rooms as there is likely to be a moderator present who can control the language and contents of a chat. In unsupervised chat rooms this is not possible and therefore paedophiles appear on line as soon as children log on and can start throwing their snares quite quickly by offering sweets or outings for their ill motives. There have been several cases reported in the media where children have agreed to meet someone by themselves and have consequently been abused or even murdered (BBC News, 9th March, 2010). Parents can point out the Panic Button to their children on some programs like the Facebook if they feel harassment, though this by itself is not the solution. The parent's dilemma is exasperated further as the internet is now available on mobile phones and may not be filtered.



## WHAT CAN CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS DO?

- Some E-Safety issues are now being discussed in schools and colleges though still not as much as is required. The Byron Report (2009) has highlighted this. Children and teenagers should take serious note of what they are informed of regarding Child E-Safety in schools and colleges. However, the parental responsibility is much greater in this respect as the Internet access in the home is not filtered when compared with the provision in schools through the national grid.
- Children and teenagers themselves should take some care when entering chat rooms by ensuring that they are in supervised chat rooms as there is likely to be more discipline and less possibility of deteriorating language. Children and teenagers are advised to use the Red Panic Button on some websites like the Facebook and Twitter and others. This can alert the Police on-line child exploitation unit to take action and track any paedophiles.
- Children and teenagers should not give out their passwords to other persons nor should they give out their names, addresses and telephone numbers without consent of their parents. Children should not send their pictures or other personal details to unknown persons or establish telephone friendship without parental knowledge.
- A very serious advice that children and teenagers should observe is that they should never ever, ever, ever go out of town with a person they have met through the Internet. If any meeting is arranged, it would be advisable that at least of the parents be present.



- Children and teenagers can try and ensure that they do not spend more time than allocated to them on the Internet. If they spend unlimited time on the Internet, then dangers of addiction and other health issues can arise.
- Children and teenagers should give priority to their homework from schools and colleges when using the Internet at home and then engage in any recreational activities like computer games.
- If they suffer any epileptic fits as result of using fast games on the screen, it is important that they themselves and their parents should not let them play such games. Warning signs are given on the cover of computer games with strobing images.
- Children and teenagers should not overlook their dinner time or physical activity or any supplementary school time while engaged in playing computer games. An early self-discipline would help them considerably in their future lives.
- Finally, though this is not the end of what children and teenagers themselves can do, they should recognise the dangers of plagiarism when taking material from the Internet while doing their home work. Plagiarism can result in failure and even being expelled from a college.





## CONCLUSION

It is important for parents and children to recognise the benefits and harms of the Internet. For parents to effectively supervise their children's use of the Internet, it is important that they must be computer literate themselves. There are plenty of opportunities for parents to become computer literate or to update their skills by attending short training courses in Adult Education Centres during day time or evening classes.

The Internet provision in schools is filtered through the national grid but it is important to ensure that some filters are installed on home computers. Establishing some rules at home is necessary particularly the time spent in front of a screen. In this regard parents should not push their children excessively on to computers and computer games to fulfil their own social needs. There is a strong need to monitor the use of computers by parents and keeping a track of the websites used by their children.

It is an important parental duty in this information age that they ensure that they themselves and their children get plenty of outdoor activities to protect themselves and their children from the dangers of computer addiction and obesity which once it takes hold is not easy to eliminate.

Finally, within their powers and abilities parents should ensure that they themselves and their children are making a positive and responsible use of the Internet. The final advice from this author to Muslim parents and children is that by being connected to the Internet, they should not disconnect themselves from Allah (swt). Parents from non-Muslim communities should instill moral and ethical values in their children in accordance with their own faith. It is hoped that this small book will go some way in helping parents globally with regards to their concerns regarding the use of the Internet at home.



# BIBLIOGRAPHY & REFERENCES

Al-Qur'an

Aftab, Parry, (2000), 'The Parents Guide to Protecting Your Children in Cyberspace'. McGraw Hill Publishing Co., Maidenhead, Berkshire, U.K.

Al-Haqqani, Sheikh Nazim, (2010), 'Mercy Oceans Endless Horizons', Lefke, North Cyprus.

Begg, M.M. (2003) PhD thesis, De Montfort University, Leicester.

BBC Newsnight March 2010

Byron, Dr Tanya (2008), Safer Children in a Digital World: The Report of the Byron Review 2008

## **Web Sites:**

<http://aftab.com/index.php?page=internet-safety>

[www.direct.gov.uk/clickcleverclicksafe](http://www.direct.gov.uk/clickcleverclicksafe)

[www.cyberangles.org](http://www.cyberangles.org)

[www.chatdanger.com](http://www.chatdanger.com)

[www.childnet-int.org](http://www.childnet-int.org)

[www.criminology.unimelb.edu.au/research/internet/bchildsafety/](http://www.criminology.unimelb.edu.au/research/internet/bchildsafety/)

[www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/help/web/staysafe](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/help/web/staysafe)

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/127/4/800.full>

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Dr. Mohamed Mahmood Begg**

Author/Advisor on Child E-Safety Issues,  
Research Associate, De Montfort University

He has experience of teaching in Higher Education in the U.K. and Internationally, particularly in Malaysia.

His research has been presented at conferences in Sweden, Italy, Poland, United Arab Emirates, Australia the United States of America and of course in the United Kingdom.

Dr Begg is also a regular speaker at many community forums throughout the U.K.

E-mail: [info@mmbegg.com](mailto:info@mmbegg.com)

Web: [www.mmbegg.com](http://www.mmbegg.com)

