



# A Lesson in Safe Selfies

By Alan Mackenzie



Too often when we talk about being safe on the internet, there's a concentration on all the dark and bad things. Done badly it can scare younger children, and for older students it's a case of "here we go again". It goes without saying, there are some very serious risks, but scaring or concentrating on the negatives rarely has any impact.

*For a fun way to engage your students in online safety, choose a subject that all children understand and are familiar with. I find that "Safe Selfies" is a theme that works well.*

Leading e-safety consultant Alan Mackenzie provides fun and interactive ideas to engage children in the serious lessons of online safety.

## Provides Intelligence

Safe Selfies is topic is something that can provide a bit of intelligence back to the school in regards to what types of things the children are posting, where they are posting them, what platforms they are using, such as social media and their levels of knowledge to see if any further work is required.

## Can be developed in the classroom

It's something that can be developed in school, for example the children can create their own principles for the safe and appropriate sharing of information, such as images, and use this to teach staff.

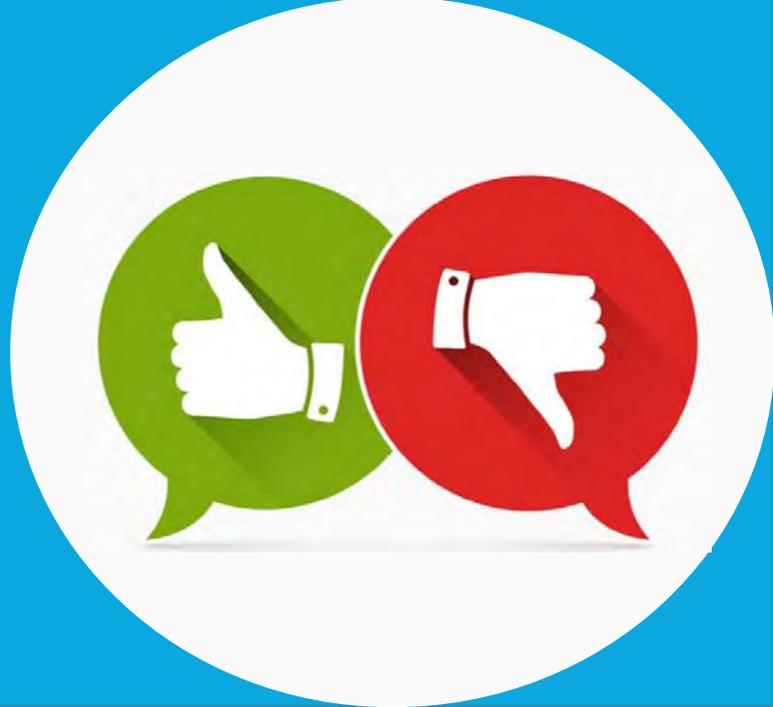
## Knowledge can be applied immediately

It's knowledge that children can take home, share with their parents, and apply immediately. For example, one of the principles is that children should always ask permission to share if somebody else is in the image, e.g. a friend. As adults we should model similar behaviour; children have a right to privacy too.



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The following describes a primary school work-shop based around safe selfies. This can also be tailored for secondary school students and parents.



First start by establishing a baseline: ask what do children understand by selfies, how do we take selfies, what platforms do we share selfies on? In some recent sessions I ran, by far the most popular answers were phones, Instagram and Snapchat. No surprises there!



## Get the children laughing

You could use a couple of funny YouTube videos about selfies to get the children laughing. This is just a way of loosening them up to show that we can have fun whilst learning about serious topics and importantly, to get them talking.

For parents in particular this strategy is a great opener to get that conversation started, about what channels children watch, whether they've got 'restricted mode' applied to filter out some of those inappropriate videos etc.

[Click on the YouTube image for funny animal selfie videos!](#)



Next move onto the selfies. When I run my work-shops I show the children a series of images; the children have to look at the images, and either give a thumbs up or a thumbs down as to whether each one is appropriate to share online.

Importantly, here they need to give a reason why it is safe or not safe. The clincher in my work-shops is that all the images I use are of me at various ages and in different situations.

For example, as a young child standing with my sister (from 1969!), as a young man standing next to a sign which says where I am working abroad, and a few others too. This is all about making it a bit of fun for the children and this never fails to prompt a bit of banter about my various hairstyles!

## What should you consider?

Is there any personal/private information? This would include information such as a school tie/ blazer or a name badge.

It could be an image of you on holiday. On its own that's harmless, but if it's posted with information such as when you went away and for how long, that's a risk.

Interestingly, when I showed the children a picture of me next to a sign that said 'Bermuda', the children were concerned that a bad person would know where I was and come and get me; this is incredibly common to hear. It is though an opportunity to apply some context; the chances of that happening are small to nil, but the theory is correct. What is more important here is that you are away from home.

## Continued...

Ask if there is anyone else in the image? If so, then we must give consideration for the privacy of that person. If you know them, ask them, and if you don't, apply a 'blur' filter to their face or place an emoji over it. Children will come up with their own creative ideas for this!



### Location Settings

With older children, you will also need to look at location settings when considering how safe they are posting images online. Use your phone to show how many different apps try to use your location, and explain why they want this information (it's normally advertising!), but other people can sometimes extract that location information using EXIF data, so it's best to just turn it off.

### EXIF Data

**EXIF stands for Exchangeable Image File Format and is the digital information that uses GPS coordinates for example which can tell you where a picture was taken. It can also include dates and times etc, So if you're sharing images, be aware there is also the potential to share a lot of other information too.**

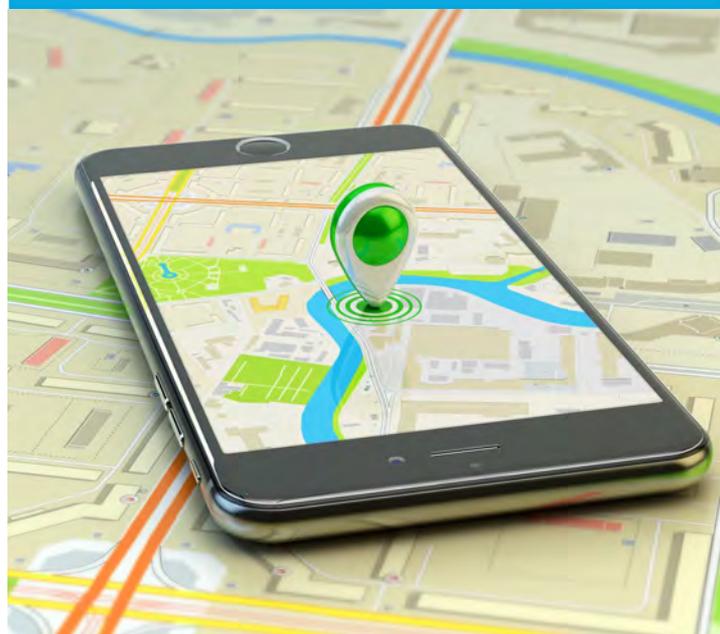
### Apply Context

This all sounds very simple I know, and it is; but you will find the things you talk about aren't just about selfies but images and online images in general. The learning points are applicable to posting anything online at any time. This is just a fun way of doing it. Additionally, it allows you to apply context to the learning points by having conversations with the children.

### Common worries

One very common thing you'll hear from children is, "if you share personal information online, someone will find out where you live and come and get you." Context is so important here; the chances of such a thing happening is exceptionally rare, but the theory is correct which is why we should always give it due consideration.

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“There are a couple of key principles in what I do, and I would recommend you consider adopting these too, whether you are a teacher or a parent/carer.”



## ***Did you know?***

*If you see inappropriate images involving children, you can report it anonymously to the Internet Watch Foundation at [iwf.org.uk](http://iwf.org.uk).*

*The IWF will remove the image and your report could lead to the rescue of a young victim from further abuse.*

## What can you do?

It doesn't matter if you're not 'tech savvy.' You will learn from the children as part of the process. It isn't about the technology, it's about the fundamental principles of using the technology, in other words life experience:

Showing videos/animations about 'the dangers' is okay now and again to raise awareness of particular issues, as long as there is room for discussion in order to express feelings and opinions.

For best impact, talk to the children about real things they are doing. I like to use the theme of 'safe selfies'; because this one thing takes you down so many different avenues such as the technology, how they use it, what they're using (in terms of sites and apps) and of course the main principle – the safe and appropriate ways of sharing information.

Children will really open up to you; in fact sometimes you can't get them to stop talking! This is great for parents as it can give assurances everything is OK. Equally in school it can indicate gaps in knowledge, or specific risks that may need addressing as part of a wider safeguarding approach.

Every time I run a session like this, there's a queue of children at the end wanting to share their thoughts and experiences. They're thirsty for more information, and that can only be a good thing.

Schools Broadband provides specialist internet connections for schools, DfE compliant web filtering and world-leading network security all in one package. We also run online safety student and teacher workshops in collaboration with Alan Mackenzie. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact us on:

**01133 222 333 or email [info@schoolsbbroadband.co.uk](mailto:info@schoolsbbroadband.co.uk)**