

Local children encouraged to challenge online safety - and enter competition.

We are proud to be supporting Safer Internet Day 2021 today. The theme for the day is 'An internet we trust' and is focusing on exploring reliability in the online world.

With the nation remaining in lockdown, it's a pertinent subject. The majority of children are learning from home and spending a large portion of time online. Whilst initial technical security issues might have been addressed, the campaign encourages young people to think about the vast amount of information and opportunities online, and help to understand how to separate fact from fiction.

Of course, the internet has great potential to inform, connect and inspire but it's also important to always question or challenge things online. Our connected world has adapted massively over the last year, allowing most of us all to continue our day-to-day lives from our homes - but it's power to influence, persuade and manipulate young people's decisions, opinions and what they share online cannot be underestimated.

By opening up conversations around reliability online, we want young people to consider how they explore information, and in particular what strategies they can implement to spot and speak out against harmful and misleading content online.

To help achieve this, Wiltshire Police Digital Investigations & Intelligence Unit are running a competition for young people of Swindon and Wiltshire to design their very own avatar – a bit like a digital portrait or create a whole new character.

This can be hand drawn, painted or computer generated – let your imagination run wild! You could label or annotate it with any significant details or added online safety features for bonus points!

Entries are to be emailed by 12pm on Monday 15 March to digital@wiltshire.pnn.police.uk and please include: your name, parents name, age, address, contact telephone number, name of school.

The judging panel for entries will include representatives from our Corporate Communications department, Digital Investigations & Intelligence Unit and Public Protection Department. The winners will receive an Amazon Fire HD 8" 32GB Tablet, to help support online learning – one each for primary (year six and below) and secondary (years 7 to 13) categories.

Wiltshire Police Detective Inspector, Gemma Vinton, said "A huge amount of time is spent on the internet, particularly in lockdown, and having an online presence is becoming more and more significant to the younger generation. The main route to connect with friends is virtually - social networking is a positive method on the whole but of course comes with it's own pitfalls, from cyber bullying to not necessarily being certain of who you're really chatting to. It's important to raise awareness amongst children and young people, parents, carers and teachers alike, now more than ever before."

Detective Superintendent for the Public Protection Department, Ben Mant commented: "Our aim is to keep our younger generation as safe and secure as possible. Keeping them informed of the dangers, but also equipping them with their own tools and skills to feel empowered in recognising the risks for themselves is imperative in tackling online safety."

Police and Crime Commissioner, Angus Macpherson, added "It's vital we help our communities in keeping our youngsters safe online. With increasing amount of time spent connected, the risks only rise. They've adapted exceptionally well to learning online but we

can't be complacent, there's an overwhelming amount of information on the internet and we need to keep our children informed of how to best navigate it and give them a voice to speak up if something's not right."

More details and useful education resources aimed at specific age groups can be found at <https://www.saferinternetday.org>

If you would like to speak to DI Gemma Vinton, DSupt Ben Mant or PCC Angus Macpherson, please email sian.rivers@wiltshire.pnn.police.uk.

(Please note Sian works Wednesdays, Thursdays and a half day Fridays. Outside of these hours please email Katrina.Fleet@wiltshire.pnn.police.uk.)