



Checklist & Concrete Criteria for Positive Content



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POSCON consists of institutions and companies from over 15 European countries – content producers and providers, researchers, parents' associations, experts from the area of media for children.

Members of the network are:

Graz University of Technology, Austria; Business Solutions Europa, Belgium; COFACE, Belgium; Czech Radio, Czech Republic; NCBI (Národní Centrum Bezpečnějšího Internetu), Czech Republic; MovieStarPlanet, Denmark; University of Aalborg, Denmark; Tallinn University Pedagogical College, Estonia; National Center for Scientific Research "Demokritos", Greece; Human Behavior Laboratory, University of Iceland, Iceland; Paxel123.com, Iceland; La Nave Di Clo, Italy; Kidi.lv, Latvia; Fluency Smart Intervention Strategy Application, Malta; Het Klokhuis/ NTR Youth, The Netherlands; FCT – Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, Portugal; National Federation of Romanian Parents' Association, Romania; University of Navarra, Spain; University of Basel, Switzerland; Tomorrow's Child, United Kingdom.

www.positivecontent.eu

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are primarily aimed at producers and providers who design, develop and distribute online content and services for children from 4 to 12 years of age:

- > Producers or providers of online content/services that target children and/or young people
- > Producers or providers of online content/services that are not necessarily targeted to young people yet are popular amongst youngsters.

Online content includes text, image, audio and/or video material. Online content is accessible through various online services such as websites, games, web radios and TV, media (video/image) sharing platforms, blogs, social networks, browsers, search engines and apps. Online content and services complement traditional channels for learning and entertainment such as school, family, peers, linear broadcast and other traditional media.

These guidelines apply to all forms of online content and services as mentioned above but are not limited to these.

HOW CAN WE PRODUCE AND PROVIDE QUALITY ONLINE CONTENT AND SERVICES TARGETED AT GIVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES?

In order to support children and young people online, there is a need to produce and provide high quality online content and services from which children can benefit when they go online¹. These guidelines address current needs and challenges within a discourse on what positive online content and services are.

Online content and services can enable children to participate actively in civic or political activities² as well as empower them to express their thoughts and opinions as active providers of online content themselves, demands expressly formulated in Article 13 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.³

¹ The EU Kids Online Survey showed that children and young people are going online at an increasingly early age, but only 37 % of European 9-12 year olds feel that there are a lot of good things for kids of their age online. See EU Kids "Online Risks and Safety on the Internet. The perspective of European children" (2012): eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731/1/Risks%20and%20safety%20on%20the%20internet%28Isero%29.pdf, p.35

² Livingstone / Bober / Helsper: "Active participation or just more information? Young people's take-up of opportunities to act and interact on the internet": www2.scedu.unibo.it/roversi/SocioNet/livingstone.pdf

³ www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx

WHAT ARE HIGH QUALITY ONLINE CONTENT AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN?

These guidelines elaborate key aspects to consider when producing or providing online content and services for children: target group and age-appropriateness, attractiveness, usability, reliability, safety and privacy issues as well as specifics if social media communication and/or commercial elements are present.

Positive online content and services enable children to:

- > learn and develop
- > have fun and enjoy themselves
- > acquire and retain life skills
- > stretch or stimulate imagination
- > enhance and enable creativity
- > discover new possibilities and abilities
- > enhance social/cultural understanding
- > develop a positive view of themselves and a respect for their identity
- > build up positive relationships with their family and friends
- > encourage their sense of self, community and place
- > enhance their participation in society
- > produce and distribute their own positive online content

Note: The European Commission has launched the competition “European Award for Best Content for Kids” (www.bestcontentaward.eu) which aims at highlighting existing quality content for 4-12 year old children as well as encouraging the production of new positive online content and services for children all over Europe. The competition was run for the first time in 2010; the second competition took place in 2013 and was coordinated by INSAFE, the European network of Safer Internet Centres (www.saferinternet.org). The winners of the European Award for Best Content for Kids have been selected from over 1,100 entries from all over Europe and received their awards from European Commission Vice- President Neelie Kroes at a high-level event on Safer Internet Day 2014. These guidelines have formed the basis for the list of criteria that guided the national organisers and the national juries as well as the European jury when judging the entries.⁴

THE TARGET GROUP OF CHILDREN

What is attractive to children and young people can be very different from what is attractive to adults. However, input from researchers working with the toy industry and producers of online and interactive audiovisual content for youngsters gives an indication of elements that need to be taken into consideration.

From the toy industry, we learn that the content that provides the most positive experiences for children and young people is “open” – enabling children to play and learn in their own way. As such, content should be aimed at developing life skills and increasing positive feelings. It should avoid predetermining how they should act – they should be encouraged to make open choices and to interact.

Position: The actual age or age range of the target group, the development of cognitive abilities and capabilities are important for how the content is perceived and should guide the preproduction and production process. Parents are also an important target group, since they are often the gate-keeper for younger children. Designing online content which gains the trust of parents enables your content to stand out.

STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDELINES

The guidelines are structured to provide advice that producers/providers might consider in a production or dissemination process. They provide nine key topics as well as a final chapter specifically focusing on apps:

1. Target groups are clearly defined and addressed
2. Content and services are attractive
3. Content and services are usable
4. Content and services are reliable
5. Content and services are safe
6. The privacy of children is ensured
7. Guidelines if social media communication features are present: social networks, chat rooms, forums, guest books, video platforms etc.
8. Guidelines if commercial elements are present: advertising, sponsoring, online shopping etc.
9. Guidelines for Apps
10. Guidelines: towards accessibility of online content and services for everyone

The key topics bear equal weight – the chosen structure does not prioritise any topic over another.

Note: There is a short checklist document “Criteria for Positive Content and Services” accompanying these elaborate guidelines. The checklist provides a short overview of these nine key topics (chapter 11).⁵

⁵ See document “Checklist: Criteria for Positive Content” attached to these guidelines or on www.positivecontent.eu/

1. TARGET GROUPS ARE CLEARLY DEFINED AND ADDRESSED

- Define and analyze your target group by age range.
- Have a vision and strategy for your content/service:
 - > Consider why you are producing and providing this content/service and why is it relevant.
 - > Define the objectives of your online content/service.
 - > Be clear about the potential actions and reactions you aim to produce in your target group.
 - > Define what the core use of the content/service should be.
 - > Make sure you have the sufficient time and resources to create the high quality content/ service you are aiming for.
- Make the target group or recommended age range transparent and comprehensible.
- Take into account the cognitive development of the target group (physical and mental skills, emotions) in terms of content, design and navigation:
 - > Know the abilities, skills and needs of your target group.
 - > Keep in mind what makes children and young people vulnerable.
- The content/service is understandable for the target group:
 - > Use well written language, without mistakes and suitable for the target group.
 - > Provide the content in the target group's native language. If text has been translated from another language, ensure it has been proofread by a native speaker to avoid misspellings and errors.
 - > Make the content/service meaningful for users so it meets their specific and current interests.
 - > Take into account the different cultural and linguistic contexts and the users' socio-cultural development.
 - > Adapt the story-line, text, dialogues and images to the target audience.
 - > Ensure instructions are clear, simple and intuitive to the target group as well as their parents and educators.

- Engage the target group in the development and testing of content/services in order to make it as age-appropriate, relevant and user-friendly as possible.



The international co-productions My Friend Boo (www.myfriendboo.com), In Search of Sara J (www.insearchofsaraj.eu) and Boys and Girls (www.boysandgirlslabs.eu), backed by the European Union, have all piloted an innovative methodology to engage the target group in the development and testing of content and visuals in order to make it as age-appropriate and relevant as possible. Producers can be inspired by looking at the methodology used in each of the mentioned productions on their websites.

- Take into account the context in which the content/service will be used:
 - > E.g. is the user alone, guided by his/her parents, together with peers, in busy surroundings or in a quiet place?
 - > Which experiences is the user likely to have?
- Provide information for parents, teachers and other professionals, especially when the target group is young children.
- Seek out information about relevant organisations who could support you
 - > Safer Internet Programme
 - > National Safer Internet Centres⁶
 - > National regulators
 - > Thematic network POSCON

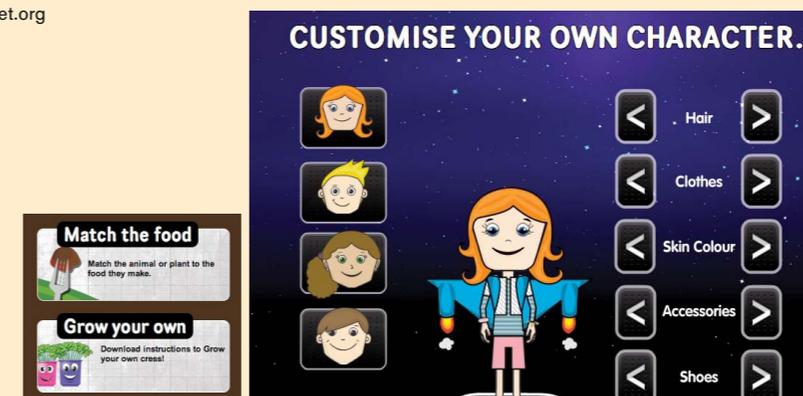
⁶ ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/projects/centres/index_en.htm

- Present the content/service in an attractive way to the target group through the use of creative, interactive, innovative, entertaining and/or educational features.

2. CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE ATTRACTIVE

- Know what is attractive to children and which elements you should consider when creating content/services targeted at them:
 - > Put yourself in the place of your target group in order to get attuned to how they might use the content.
 - > Get a clear idea about what stimulates the child, his preferred learning styles and the consequences this has for the content you want to develop.
 - > Establish what would motivate the child to engage with your content/service, to enjoy it, to wish for similar experiences and to feel satisfied when it ends.

Examples: www.coolfoodplanet.org



- Stimulate the user group to have positive experiences and effectively avoid encouraging physical or psychological violence, bullying and other harmful behaviours towards other people or animals, or harm to the children using it.

- Capture the users' attention in a pleasant way, using stimulating, original, and amusing approaches and formats:
 - > Create content/services that is/are meaningful to the target group, including graphics, video and audio content.
 - > Create content/services that is/are fun, enjoyable and entertaining.
 - > Offer opportunities to interact, to be challenged and to visit the content/service on a regular basis.



Oddizzi Africa Home Page (www.oddizzi.com): Shows how child-friendly written content can be, with graphics, video clips and hyperlinks to other content areas within Oddizzi. Fun with Justin mobile game (www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/justins-house/games/play/justins-house-fun-with-justin/) to be played on a mobile device

- The visuals are of high quality, properly attributed and labelled:
 - > Consider the impact that images and videos have on the user group (images and sounds have stronger visual impact than text).
- Interactivity: Children get the opportunity to actively interact with the content/service or others.
 - > The content/service seeks a reaction from the user and responds to the user's actions.
 - > The users can influence the way the content/service evolves.
 - > The content/service encourages the user to experiment and find new solutions.
 - > The content/service stimulates positive online interaction and/or offline interaction with peers and family.
- Make the content/service environment appropriately challenging:
 - > The user is able to easily select the level of engagement and participation and he/she is suitably rewarded for his/her efforts.
 - > The content/service creates a learning curve that gives the user a feeling of mastery and control over the actions/evolution of the actions.

- > Rules are appropriately challenging on the one hand and simple enough to master on the other hand.
- > The user is given appropriate and consistent feedback on his/her actions, so that he/she knows if a mistake is made and is guided in the right direction.
- > When appropriate, keep track of the user's work and give feedback suitable for the individual user.
- > Produce content/services which has/have something to offer for different types of users: e.g. realistic or imaginative users, active or receptive users, dreamers, thinkers, actors or achievers, etc.

- Construct a good balance within the content/service: try to create playful movements between activities, interaction, playful handling of online content and objects, construction, fantasy and role play, success and team play.
- Consider whether the content/service allows the child to move smoothly from stage to stage (e.g. experimentation, through functional use, variation and integration) in order to let the interaction develop naturally and fluently.
- If the content/service aims to provide education/learning opportunities, it should enhance the experience by providing appealing graphic, video and audio content:
 - > Is there clear information about the learning goals and how they can be achieved?
 - > The status of achieving each learning goal and/or parts of it is available to the user at any point.

PAXEL123.com offers a dozen educational games in nine languages for children in preschool and primary school. The games are created by an education professional in Iceland and developed in cooperation with teachers and children in several European countries. The games stimulate literacy in mathematics and language. All games are suitable for children with special needs and for second language teaching.



3.

CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE USABLE

KEY ELEMENTS OF USABILITY

How easy are the content and services to use? Children's favourite sites and apps are often sites that are very easy to use. Ask yourself these questions:

1. **LEARNABILITY:** How easy is it for users to accomplish basic tasks the first time they encounter the design?
2. **EFFICIENCY:** Once users have learned the design, how quickly can they perform tasks?
3. **MEMORABILITY:** When users return to the design after a period of not using it, how easily can they re-establish proficiency?
4. **ERRORS:** How many errors do users make, how severe are these errors, and how easily can they recover from the errors?
5. **SATISFACTION:** How pleasant is it to use the design?

These are the 5 quality components used to define and assess usability by the Nielsen Norman Group.⁷

Note: For children, the same rules apply. If children get lost on a site or within an app, they leave. If the information is hard to read, children also go away. Children have a short attention span online and they want to find answers to their questions and wishes instantly. Research shows that children (teens especially) are overconfident in their web abilities, but their online performance scores are worse than those of adults. This makes it necessary to create simple, very usable online content and services for them.⁸

You need to give them the best possible help if you want them to keep using your content or service and welcome them back again.

⁷ www.nngroup.com/articles/usability-101-introduction-to-usability/

⁸ www.nngroup.com/articles/usability-of-web-sites-for-teenagers/

GUIDELINES ON NAVIGATION

- The navigation structure is user-friendly and adapted to children. Children should always know where they are.
- The design and navigation is targeted at increasing the positive experiences of the users and matches the needs and behaviours of children.

Ask yourself these two questions:

1. Is it easy to navigate through the content/service, so that the user does not get lost but always knows where he/she is?
2. Is the navigation predictable and stable over time, making it easy for a user to come back to the same content/service?

Note: The cognitive development and skills of the target audience must be taken into account: Realise there are big differences between age groups. For example, young children like animations and sounds, older children like them less.⁹

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Is the design intuitive for children so that they can use the content/service on offer independently after first time use.
2. If the content/service is for younger age groups does it use visuals (like screenshots and animation) and speech instead of text to explain the content or show links to other content available?
3. Have you tested the content/service with children?

Also, consider specifics for your content/service, such as these for websites:

1. If the content/service is for younger age groups, are the icons large and easy to select with a moving cursor, and does it survive the “pound on the keyboard” test?
2. Is the URL/domain name simple and easy to reach and does it avoid involuntary access to unwanted or age-inappropriate content. Children often make spelling mistakes and may mistype your site-url.

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY

(For more information please see chapter 10 (p.33) for concrete guidelines and recommendations “Towards Accessibility of Online Content and Services for Everyone”).

- The content/service is accessible from different platforms and devices (desktop computers, mobile phones, tablet PCs, browsers: Internet Explorer, Firefox, Opera, Safari, Chrome, operating systems: Android, iOS, Windows Phone etc.). Many children use content on a tablet (computer or mobile). A site that uses Flash will not work on a tablet and that is a huge turn off.
- The content/service follows the W3C WCAG 2.0 guidelines¹⁰ (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0) to make it accessible to target groups with different resources and needs.
- The content/service is also downloadable with low bandwidth connections.

BACKGROUND: UNDERSTANDING THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF ACCESSIBILITY¹¹

In order to understand the WCAG 2.0 guidelines it is important to understand the four underlying principles. These were formulated as a foundation to enable anyone to access and use Web content.

Anyone who wants to use the Web must have content that is:

1. **PERCEIVABLE** – Information and user interface components must be presented to users in ways they can perceive. This means that users must be able to perceive the information being presented (it must not be invisible to all of their senses).
2. **OPERABLE** – User interface components and navigation must be operable. This means that users must be able to operate the interface (the interface must not require interaction that a user cannot perform).
3. **UNDERSTANDABLE** – Information and the operation of user interface must be understandable. This means that users must be able to understand the information as well as the operation of the user interface (the content or operation must not be beyond their understanding).
4. **ROBUST** – Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted reliably by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies. This means that users must be able to access the content as technologies advance (as technologies and user agents evolve, the content should remain accessible).

- The content/service
 - > promotes awareness and appreciation of other cultures and forms of expression.
 - > is accessible to a diverse range of social groups (e.g. socially disadvantaged or marginalised groups).
- Does the content/service provide links to other positive content in order to make positive content visible and create a safe surfing environment?

¹⁰ www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/ - Reliance on technologies such as Flash, JavaScript and HTML5 Canvas sometimes presents accessibility problems and makes the content more difficult to be properly indexed by search engines

¹¹ www.w3.org/TR/UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20/intro.html

⁹ www.nngroup.com/articles/usability-of-web-sites-for-teenagers/



The search engine for children www.fragFINN.de in Germany is based on a whitelist providing a huge surfing environment now comprising 11,000 domains, which have been checked by media educators to ensure that they are secure for children. Websites specifically addressing children are shown first in the search results. “Meine Startseite” www.meine-startseite.de (“My homepage”) in Germany provides an easy way for children to access “their” websites. It offers a variety of widgets – based on feeds of the best kids sites – that children can select to create their own homepage.

4. CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE RELIABLE

Those providing content and services for children and young people have a responsibility to offer them a safe and reliable place to evolve. Providers need to be aware of the potential risks to children and young people¹², and how they can be dealt with or avoided. Finding the right balance is the key: let children communicate, play and create without borders and do so in a safe and reliable environment.

- The content/service must comply with the relevant legislation or regulations: Seek out information about the relevant legislation and regulations¹³, e.g. on the protection of minors, privacy, commercial communication etc.
- The producer/creator and provider (organisation or individual) must be clearly identified and contact information provided.¹⁴
- Contact details are easily accessible in order to enable parents or children to get in touch in case of problems.
- The content offered is true, up-to-date and/or topical (where relevant).
- Provide clear information about the goals of the content/service you provide/produce (e.g. long-term motivation, educational, commercial, entertainment, etc.).
- If access to third party content is provided, ensure that:
 - > The producer/provider has made sure that the content does not infringe upon the copyright of other people/organisations.
 - > The content indicates acceptance of, or exemption from, responsibility for content that is not controlled by your service, e.g. forums, links etc.
 - > References to content from other sources are given, and the internet address of the entity or of the document is cited.
 - > The destination of links is indicated, e.g. by providing a brief description of the source alongside the link.

¹² EU Kids Online “Risks and Safety on the Internet. The perspective of European children” (2012): eprints.lse.ac.uk/33731/1/Risks%20and%20safety%20on%20the%20internet%28sero%29.pdf

¹³ For example www.coppa.org in the US/ CA or the Audiovisual Media Services Directive eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:095:0001:0024:EN:PDF in the European Union

¹⁴ E.g. in Germany it is the law for the provider to have a “web imprint” which clearly indicates: the name of the provider/company; first and last name of a contact person (or CEO, communication office etc); full address (post box is not acceptable), telephone number and contact form or e-mail.

- > If the content is informative or educational: there is reference to author, bibliography, dates of publication and updates etc.
- New content is uploaded periodically and services are regularly maintained and reviewed to ensure high quality:
 - > Frequent and coherent updates and quality controls are performed to:
 - > Keep information up-to-date, where relevant.
 - > Provide information on publication dates/the date of the last update made to the content/service.
 - > Check regularly for abuse/misuse of the brand/URL.
 - > Regularly inspection should be made:
 - > For broken links or dead ends.
 - > To ensure that links from the content/service do not contain viruses or other malware and that a high level of security is maintained.
 - > If installation of a program or game is required, it is straight-forward and easy to do so.
- The content and services are accurate and reliable:
 - > Provide correct, rigorous and unequivocal information about the production/selection of content, so that the users know what to expect from the content/service.
 - > If the content deals with sensitive topics (e.g. public health), make sure the information provided is scientifically sound and includes an author reference for informative content.
 - > Assess which features are being offered, which are appropriate to the intended audience and establish mechanisms for reviewing content/conduct on the service or the kind of content/conduct that the service allows.

5. CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE SAFE

Content and services must be safe to use for the target group. Apart from not offering harmful content or experiences and monitoring the service effectively, the content/service should give children the tools they need to report content and actions which frighten them. This will give them a feeling of security.

- The content must not be harmful to minors: it must not contain offensive material or other harmful elements (i.e. pornography, racist/violent/offending content, pictures or videos).
- The content/service must be safe for children to use and maintain this level of safety over time.
- Has it been taken into consideration how the service may be associated with potential risks to children and young people and the provider has acted upon these considerations?
- The content/service gives children and young people the tools, knowledge and skills to use it in a safe way.
 - > Clear, targeted guidance and educational material is provided in a prominent, accessible, easy-to-understand and practical format.
 - > It is clearly indicated which content is appropriate for different age groups and/or where a minimum registration age applies.
 - > The provider/producer must ensure that content unsuitable for children under a certain age group is not accessed by this group, for instance by implementing an age verification system.
- Provide reporting mechanisms that are easy to use and find:
 - > E.g. an alarm button, in case children need help or advice or need to report potentially harmful content or contact.
 - > The information they need to make an effective report, and, where appropriate, an indication of how reports are typically handled, including response time.
 - > Reports must be acknowledged and acted upon promptly (e.g. 48 hours).
- The content/service must limit exposure to potentially inappropriate content¹⁵ and contact.
 - > Measures must be in place to ensure that there is no access to content that might be

¹⁵ The definition of online content which can be deemed harmful for children varies across European countries and regions. Content which in general falls under the heading of harmful content may include: pornography/nudity, violence, racism and xenophobia etc. Harmful content may be detrimental to the moral, mental or physical well-being of children or encourage them to self-harm or to inflict harm on other people or animals.

harmful to children and young people.

- > Measures must be in place to ensure that the content does not link to unsuitable content, either directly or indirectly and that it aims to take such content off the service if identified.
- > If possible, content should be labelled under an existing content labelling system (e.g. PEGI and PEGI Online for games¹⁶, age-de.xml).
- > If a search function is provided, safety measures must be provided to limit access to harmful/inappropriate content if it delivers free web results.
- > Support staff and moderators receive specific training in relation to online child protection and safeguarding issues.
- Mechanisms must be introduced to allow parents and guardians to be engaged in their children's use of the content.

¹⁶ www.pegi.info

6. THE PRIVACY OF CHILDREN IS ENSURED

This chapter refers to the data belonging to children which may be actively collected or processed by the provider of the content/service. In particular, it focuses on personal data which may be requested when registering for services such as a social network or signing up for a newsletter, using entry forms for guest books or message boards, when sending e-cards or using provided contact forms. Also it refers to data which are processed while using the content/service. However, it does not cover the aspect of children themselves giving access to personal data deliberately or voluntarily for example via status posts, uploaded pictures or in guest books. The aspect of educating children to keep their personal data private and be careful of what to share with others online is covered by specific criteria on rules and security information regarding social communication features (Chapter 7).

If the content/service collects personal data:

- Ensure that privacy laws are respected.
- Consider whether it is truly necessary to collect the user's personal data (mobile numbers, birth date, full name, address etc) in order for the content/service to function properly.
- Provide an effective security and privacy policy which is easily accessible to users and their parents, in particular regarding the target groups' personal information.
- Provide information in a clear and suitable manner about which data is collected and why (in compliance with privacy legislation at EU and national level, preferably in a way children will also understand).
- Provide transparent information on:
 - > which information is being collected
 - > how it is collected
 - > who is collecting it
 - > what it is used for
 - > the confidentiality of personal data

- > a data protection point / report mechanism
- > why and under what circumstances personal data might be transmitted to a third party (e.g. to receive a prize).
- Collect private or sensitive information in a transparent (e.g. non-aggressive, unpressured) way.
- If the visitor's data is processed while using the site, this should be made transparent, e.g. through a privacy policy.
- Take measures so that children are not requested to submit personal data of other people (e.g. a friend or family).
- Get parental consent whenever sensitive data (e.g. name, contact details) is requested from a minor, according to national legislation, e.g. through e-mail validation by parents, for instance:
 - > If the child is encouraged to participate in a competition and allowed to win a prize where he/she has to provide personal details in order to receive the prize.
 - > If the data is due to be disclosed to a third party, for instance with the purpose of delivering a prize.

7. GUIDELINES IF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION FEATURES ARE PRESENT: SOCIAL NETWORKS, CHAT ROOMS, FORUMS, GUEST BOOKS, VIDEO PLATFORMS ETC.

Possibilities for interactive communication or to post user-generated content might encompass social networking services, chat rooms, guest books, forums, video platforms etc. The Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU, developed and signed by 20 social networking services providers offer a framework for ensuring the safety of children and young people.¹⁷ It is important to ensure that user-generated content and interactive communication services are safe and secure for children and young people to use.

- If you provide chat rooms, forums etc. or allow the publication of user-generated content and interactive communication does the content show that steps have been taken towards ensuring that the services are safe for children and teens to use?
 - > Age and identification of users:
 - > The service should clearly state the age from which children and teens can use the communication facility, and the measures that are in place to identify and delete under-age users, when required.
 - > Parental consent must be requested if registration is required.
 - > A system for validation of users and/or to obtain parental consent for registration (valid e-mail address, registration via SMS etc) must be implemented.
 - > Constant and active monitoring and moderation of user contributions ensures that all content that may be harmful to children is deleted:
 - > The provider monitors these services, also in situations where the user has the opportunity to become "part of the story" via chat or message boards.
 - > Are user contributions monitored before they are published and/or are measures in place to ensure that content which may be harmful to the target group is not posted?
 - > An easy-to-use reporting facility is available in the chat room/forum/website etc. so that the

¹⁷ The Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU, developed and signed by 20 social networking services providers active in Europe, offer key guidelines for social network providers to ensure children's safety while using social networking services in the following areas. Raising awareness; Age-appropriate content for intended audience; Empowering users through tools and technology; Easy-to-use report mechanisms; Response to notifications of illegal conduct or content; Enable and encourage a safe approach to personal information and privacy; Assessment of means for reviewing illegal or prohibited content/conduct. These guidelines are applicable for all services offering interactive communication services. For more info please visit ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/self_reg/social_network/index_en.htm

providers of the service/content can be notified of any abuse of the services, potentially harmful content and negative incidents. Measures are also in place to acknowledge receipt of the reports and act upon them promptly, i.e. alarm button, contact form, moderator is present with personal profile or avatar.



Seitenstark-Chat (www.seitenstark.de/chat/) is a safe chat room for children which is constantly moderated. There are two moderators present, one deciding on each chat post if it is allowed to go through and one communicating with chatters who do not abide by the rules or helping out with problems.

Video-sharing platform juki (www.juki.de) for children with social media communication features: Users can watch and upload videos, also they can create their own cartoon film. Every video is checked before it is visible to the public. Users can interact via commentaries and rate videos made by others. User profiles do not include personal data of children and have to be validated by the parents.

- Specific rules and security information are offered on how to use the services safely (i.e. guidance on netiquette while communicating with others, protection of personal data, protection against cyberbullying etc.).
- Provide easy-to-use and find reporting mechanisms in case children need help or advice or need to report potentially harmful content or contact.

8. GUIDELINES IF COMMERCIAL ELEMENTS ARE PRESENT: ADVERTISING, SPONSORING, ONLINE SHOPPING ETC.

Advertising and sponsorship is a common source of revenue for online content/service providers and producers. However, children and young people are generally more susceptible to manipulation than adults and are not necessarily trained in recognising what is advertising and what is not. Therefore, special consideration needs to be given regarding how commercial communication¹⁸ is integrated into or appears on websites providing content targeted at children and young people.

- If your content/service contains commercial elements, make sure the commercial aims are easily recognizable to the target audience:
 - > Take into account the age, knowledge and level of maturity of the target audience.
 - > Clearly state what the commercial aims are to both the user and his/her parents, in an appropriate manner in an open, honest article on the service.
 - > Take measures to prevent children being invited to spend money or enter into contracts by themselves.
 - > Take measures to avoid surreptitious commercial communication.
 - > Make sure that you accept commercial communications only from reliable and credible partners.
 - > Make efforts to stay in control of the commercial content and do not allow anybody to influence it.
- Be sure to avoid commercial communications inappropriate to children (e.g. no advertising or shopping for alcohol, tobacco, erotic products, gambling, lotteries etc.).
 - > Be sure to also avoid:
 - > Directly encouraging minors to buy or hire a product or service by exploiting their inexperience or credulity.
 - > Directly encouraging them to persuade their parents or others to purchase the goods or services being presented.
 - > Exploiting the special trust minors place in parents, teachers or other persons.
 - > Images/content that may be considered harmful to the target audience

¹⁸ The Audiovisual Media Services Directive eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:095:0001:0024:EN:PDF in Art. 1 (h) considers "images with or without sound which are designed to promote, directly or indirectly, the goods, services or image of a natural or legal entity pursuing an economic activity" as "audiovisual commercial communication". "Such images accompany or are included in a programme in return for payment or for similar consideration or for self-promotional purposes. Forms of audiovisual commercial communication include, inter alia, television advertising [Art. 1 (i)], sponsorship [Art. 1 (k)], teleshopping [Art. 1 (l)] and product placement [Art. 1 (m)]."

(see section on safety, chapter 5).

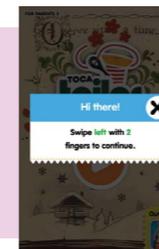
- > Unreasonably showing minors in dangerous situations.
- Implementation of commercial elements:
 - > Make them clearly recognizable and identifiable and separate them from the content the target audience is likely to use so that they do not think it is part of the content.
 - > Do not allow commercial elements to restrict the user's control of actions.
 - > Clearly identify sponsored elements.
- Implementation of online shopping facilities
 - > Make the shop, fee-based content or subscription clearly identifiable.
 - > Make sure that you do not place any kind of demand or actively attempt to persuade children or teens to shop online.
 - > Provide clear and detailed information about all goods and services on offer as well as the transaction process, including:
 - > Price, shipment, geographical restrictions
 - > Types of payments and implications (extra charges/discounts), billing time, updated availability
 - > Rights of withdrawal, return policy and costs of return
 - > Consequences if the site suspects fraudulence etc.
 - > Provide sufficient information about the fact that they are about to enter into a contract by accepting any of the offers made.
 - > Ensure there is a financial limit to what children can spend on the service.
 - > Payment methods require parental control.

9. GUIDELINES FOR APPS

The market for mobile devices and apps is growing. The guidelines for positive content in general work for apps as well. In addition, it is necessary to look closer at specific features of apps which complement the previous guidelines:

APPS AND RELIABILITY

- The provider informs parents about the educational value and developments which apply to the app. This kind of relevant communication should be on a website, newsletter or in the app itself in an extra menu only for parents/educators.
- If the app contains advertisement, it is clearly marked and separated from the content.
- The publisher of the app is a responsible party. The user is not given the opportunity to spend money in the app (unless it is in a good protected area and it is clear for the educators or older children that you should ask the permission of an adult).
- The app protects the user from any external influences. It should give no opportunity to have contact with other users or provide access to unsuitable messages.
- The app is 'closed' and offers no opportunities to leave the app and go to an external website, app store, application, e-mail program, advertising area or sharing button. For example, provide different interactions for external services, i.e. swipe random with two fingers – or more fingers – to the left or right, and only communicate them to parents.



TOCA BOCA (Sweden, www.tocaboca.com) introduced the random function Two Finger Swipe Up / Down / Left / Right to go to the purchase page. Toca Boca develops apps for children between 3 and 6 years old, who do not have skills in reading. This function makes sure that this feature is for the exclusive use of parents.

APPS AND USER-FRIENDLY DESIGN

- The publisher of the app should be reserved in making contact with the user and refrain from sending any 'push requests'.
- The publisher does not send messages requesting the user to review the app in the App Store or Google Play store.
- The navigation takes into account that (young) children have limited motor skills (think of the size of the buttons etc.). Children should not be able to get lost within the app and should easily be able to return to the home screen or the previous chapter.
- The app allows the user to keep track of where he/she is in the story (by marking a point in the story for example). It should be easy for the child to find this point again if it wants to continue his/her reading or game.
- The app stands alone. It does not require (permanent) access to the internet, use software that has to be downloaded separately or difficult techniques that are not easily understood by children and educators.
- Settings where children or parents can set and customise functions and activities proposed by the app should be simple and ensure that, if accidentally changed, the app's performance will not be greatly affected.

10. GUIDELINES: TOWARDS ACCESSIBILITY OF ONLINE CONTENT AND SERVICES FOR EVERYONE

The internet offers many opportunities for everyone including people with disabilities. But there are a number of barriers that complicate the use of online content and services and consequently it causes challenges around accessibility. People with disabilities and especially children are often excluded from online media, content and services altogether and are not offered the opportunity to use them freely. This problem is seen across access generally to information, education, entertainment, communication as well as participation within society.

Therefore, the POSCON network aims at raising awareness for accessibility for all users, especially children with disabilities. We aim to enable all children to fully use and participate through online content and services. Most importantly we want to offer guidelines and concrete tips to developers and providers of online content and services for children on how to make their products as accessible as possible. Our suggestions are based on two principles:

- Ambition of "Design for All": Use effective methods to provide content to serve ALL users.
- Awareness from the start: Accessibility features are not expensive per se, but most of them can be implemented cheap and easily especially right at the beginning of the production process.

Furthermore we want to encourage everyone involved in producing and promoting positive online content for children to learn more about accessibility through the work of relevant initiatives and organizations as well as through existing international standards and guidelines.¹⁹

The various forms of disabilities refer to a human being's ability regarding:



¹⁹ See the POSCON "Knowledge database": www.positivecontent.eu/accessibility/

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- What does “accessible” mean?
Web Content Accessibility Guidelines refer to content and services being: Perceivable – Operable – Understandable – Robust (WCAG 2.0) www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/²⁰
- From the start: Keep people with disabilities in mind right from the beginning of the planning, development and production process.
- Include all people involved in the production process:
Accessibility aspects concern strategists, editors, programmers, designers...
- Understand who your users are and what capabilities they have: Don’t think of a “standard” user, instead imagine individuals with very different physical and mental capabilities, have various forms of disabilities in mind.
- Testing: When testing with the target group, consider to also invite children with disabilities. Simulations can help to understand the needs of people with ablepsia, colour-blindness, deafness, single-armed, ADHD, autism and so on. Evaluate your content/service with available tools, web analysers or by expert analysis. (See knowledge database for resources).
- Ensure compatibility not only with various browsers, operating systems etc. but also with assistive technologies such as braille machines.



Best practice example:
Accessible User Research with Children
for BBC CBeebies' Mr Tumble²¹

STRUCTURE

Make sure the user doesn't get lost so try to structure your online content and services: provide headlines, subheadings, lists, etc. A well-developed and consistent structure makes it easier to navigate through content and services especially with the help of assistive technologies.

- Provide concise description/information on function of certain elements.
- Include headlines to transport a structure, think of a logic hierarchy for headlines.
- Structure your content/service with lists, e.g. of headlines or links.

- Refer to recommendations on standardization of Web technologies, such as the W3C standards.²²
- Navigation: provide consistent navigation.
- Content should be structured and semantically organized: logic hierarchy for headlines; use of the elements of the editing technology according to their semantic: paragraphs to paragraphs, lists to lists of contents and data tables to tabular content.
- Section of the page: clearly define the different sections of the page and ensure consistent location of screen objects.

ALTERNATIVE TEXTS

Keep in mind that all content could be read by a screen reader or could be verbalized by a user who makes use of a voice recognition system to navigate: Provide alternative texts and attributes:

- Images and graphics which are linked to/carry information: Provide information on images which are needed to understand meaning (not every image transports important information).
- Necessary and elementary images need a text version, sometimes images transport “only” atmosphere – leave empty to make screen reader leave out this image.
- Dynamic animations (e.g. dhtml, flash, html5, shockwave, videos, animated gifs etc.) should have textual description of their content that is accessible to screen reader.
- Forms and form fields which have to be filled in.
 - > Check if all elements of the form are navigable using the keyboard and the sequence is logic.
 - > Provide input assistance to help users avoid and correct mistakes. When an error occurs, identify clearly the input field with which the error is related.
 - > Identify clearly which labels are related with which input fields.
 - > Provide a submit button to each form. If that is an image, do not forget to add the alternative text.
- Links
 - > Provide information that there are external links and a link text – what is to be read aloud by a screen reader for example? (e.g. it may not be practical to read the whole URL).
 - > Avoid links like “click here” – it is not understandable outside of its context.
 - > Clearly distinguish the links inside of a text to be rapidly identified by the user.

LANGUAGE AND SPEECH

- Provide information on language of the text.
- Audio/video content: provide audio commentary (subtitles and captions) for spoken language and atmosphere/background noise.
- Use simple and easy-to-understand language (e.g. websites of public institutions, ministries or news sites sometimes include separate sections in basic and easy-to-understand language).

²⁰ See also chapter 3, p.19

²¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxFGXJxA9Q

²² www.w3.org/TR/tr-date-stds.html

- Download documents (e.g. PDFs) need to be accessible, too:
Observe how to implement the recommendations of the present checklist in the technology that you are using in your download documents.²³
- Consider including “predictive text” when possible, it will help children with communication disorders especially in the area of literacy work.

AUDIO AND VIDEO

- General principle: Audio and video content should not automatically play unless the user knows this is going to happen. If there is sound from the beginning, allow the user to get used to sound volume and adjust their device/interface to his/her need.
- Transcript: You should provide a text transcription of the video/audio.
- Subtitles/Captions: You should provide subtitles/captions that can be turned off and on for AV content.
- Makaton or Sign Language: You should consider the use of Makaton or sign language to AV content.
- Audio description of video: when you have a video with a message mainly transported by the image you should provide an audio description synchronized with the video content that can be turned off and on.
- Video & Sound Control: Allow for video and sound to be paused or stopped altogether. It is best to allow volume, play/stop, rewind/forward control either with mouse or keyboard.
- Allow volume control. Adjustable and adequate volume of sound or speech is important for communicating across different environments that involve different levels of background noise.

COLOUR AND SIZES

- Colour should not be the only carrier of information.
- Use high contrasts and colours easy to distinguish. You can use one of the various contrast calculators that implement the WCAG 2.0 colour contrast algorithm.²⁴
- Allow changeable font sizes / customizable fonts.
- It can help to allow changeable text colours.
- Provide colour-blind options.
- Ensure enlargement of script/font without quality loss.
- Resize text: Except for captions and images of text, text can be resized without assistive technology up to 200 percent without loss of content or functionality.

²³ For example, to produce accessible PDF files take a look at the Adobe page: www.adobe.com/accessibility.html

²⁴ e.g. Contrast Ratio Calculator – www.msfw.com/accessibility/tools/contrastcalculator.aspx



MOBILITY

Think about how to use your website/game/app with only one hand or not using a keyboard at all. Mobility disabilities are about physical limits, for example to reach keys or pushing buttons over and over when you fatigue easily. People with limitations to coordinate their movements or for whom it is impossible to move the upper limbs (arms, head or even eyes) at all result in thinking of a new way of how people can control a user interface. Either using a pointing device controlled with an infrared tracker, an eye gaze or scanning the screen and select the action with a switch (e.g. a big red button, sip or puff switches, foot switches, pillow switches, etc).

- Keyboard functionality/accessibility: Make all functionality available from a keyboard. Keyboard users have to be able to navigate through the website with the tabulator, they have to know where they are on the site.
- Think about if all keys you need are accessible and reconfigurable (especially for games).
- Ensure the user interface to be moved or resized.
- Link “jump to the main content”: Adding a link at the top of each page that goes directly to the main content area.

OTHER

- If applicable, provide different settings for speed and difficulty (levels) for individual adjustments.
- Allow enough time for forms etc. to be filled in before a session expires, it might take longer to fill them in using assistive technologies.
- Let activities be repeatable with sufficient variation to meet individual interest, abilities and stamina.
- Allow for solutions to be customized.



Best practice example:
 Paxel123.com App:
 Pattern Puzzle Game allows
 different levels of difficulty for
 individual settings and was
 positively reviewed by A4
 Educational Series “Apps
 for Children with Special Needs”²⁵

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Remember to provide clear guidelines for users, written for adults if the content is aimed at children, on options to aid those with a disability etc. Also, provide information on how to customize a PC or mobile devices to remove barriers of accessibility and for enabling switch-accessible versions of content provided where applicable.

Top tip: children with autism really benefit from online content, being able to relate to a character. Try developing an online ‘friend’ especially when they struggle with friendships in the real world.

11. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These guidelines build on, among others, a number of already existing guidelines/lists:

- Inventory “Producing and providing online content for children and young people. An inventory”: ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/docs/competition/final_draft.pdf
- Social networking principles for the EU: ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/social_networking/docs/sn_principles.pdf
- fragFINN Whitelist criteria: www.fragfinn.de/download/fragFINN_whitelist_criteria.pdf
- Children’s technology review, evaluation instrument: childrenstech.com/evaluation-instrument/
- Judging criteria for the Prix jeunesse international: www.prixjeunesse.de/
- MyBee evaluation criteria for children’s sites: www.mybee.nl/downloads/MyBee-verantwoording_EN.pdf
- Next Level: Dossier on online games for children, Remco Pijpers and Justine Pardoën, 2009: mijnkindonline.nl/uploads/NextLevelEnglish.pdf
- Quatro Vocabulary for trustmark schemes: www.quatro-project.org/vocabulary
- Council of Europe: Human rights guidelines for online games providers: [www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/Doc/H-Inf\(2008\)008_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/Doc/H-Inf(2008)008_en.pdf)
- “Children’s online charter” as developed by Sonia Livingstone in “A rationale for positive content for children”²⁶
- Criteria for evaluations for the Dutch competition Gouden Apenstaart: www.goudenapenstaart.nl

²⁵ App: itunes.apple.com/app/pattern-puzzle-game/id741471947?ls=1&mt=8
 see review here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdKFKHvEnxM

²⁶ In Communication Research Trends, Vol 28, 2009

12. CHECKLIST: CRITERIA FOR POSITIVE CONTENT AND SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

TARGET GROUPS ARE CLEARLY DEFINED AND ADDRESSED

- Target group or age range is transparent and comprehensible.
- The cognitive development of the target group (physical and mental skills, emotions) is taken into account regarding content, design and navigation.
- The content/service is understandable for the target group.
- Information for parents is provided, especially when the target group is young children.

CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE ATTRACTIVE

- The content/service is presented in an attractive way to the target group through use of creative, interactive, innovative, entertaining and/or educational features.
- The visuals are of high quality, properly attributed and labelled.
- The language used is well written, without mistakes and suitable for the target group.
- Positive online interaction and/or offline interaction with peers and family are stimulated.

CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE USABLE

- The navigation structure is user-friendly and adapted to the target group. Users do not get lost within the site: they always know where they are.
- The URL is easy and simple to reach. Typo-errors will not land the children in unwanted or harmful domains filled with viruses and advertising.
- The design of the content channel facilitates navigation and enables children to find their way easily through the content/site.
- The content/service is accessible through different platforms and devices (browsers, mobile devices etc.).

CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE

- Needs and requirements of people with disabilities regarding vision, mobility, hearing or cognitive aspects are considered when planning, developing and producing the content/service with all participating parties.
- Structure, language/text/speech, sound, images and colours of content and services are designed in a way to support assistive technologies and provide alternative texts/attributes for example.

CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE SAFE

- The content/service is not harmful to minors: it does not contain offensive material or other harmful elements (i.e. pornography, racist/violent/offending content, pictures or videos).
- Children are not directed to other unsuitable content/services, such as external websites with content that is not appropriate for children.

CONTENT AND SERVICES ARE RELIABLE

- Information about the provider/creator is provided.
- Contact details are easily accessible, in order to enable parents or children to get in touch in case of problems.
- Where relevant, the content offered is true, up-to-date and topical.
- The content does not infringe on the copyright of others.

THE PRIVACY OF CHILDREN IS ENSURED

- Privacy laws are respected.
- No more data than necessary is gathered.
- Personal data is treated confidentially, exceptions (i.e. for the purpose of delivering a prize) are made transparent and it is stated clearly that the data is deleted afterwards.
- Information about privacy measures and policies is clearly visible and in language suitable for the target group and his/her parents.
- If the data of visitors is processed while using the site, this should be made transparent.
- If children can share their personal data, they have to actively confirm parental consent.

IF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION FEATURES ARE PRESENT:

SOCIAL NETWORKS, CHAT ROOMS, FORUMS, GUEST BOOKS, VIDEO PLATFORMS ETC.

- Specific rules and security information on how to use the services safely are offered: (i.e. guidance on netiquette while communicating with others, protection of personal data, protection against cyberbullying etc.).
- Parental consent is asked for if registration is required.
- Easy-to-use and find reporting mechanisms are provided, (i.e. an alarm button, in case children need help or advice or need to report potentially harmful content or contact).
- Constant and active monitoring and moderation of user contributions ensures that all content that may be harmful to children is deleted.

IF COMMERCIAL ELEMENTS ARE PRESENT:

ADVERTISING, SPONSORING, ONLINE SHOPPING ETC.

- Commercial elements, advertising and online shopping facilities are clearly set apart from the content, easily recognizable, labelled as such and not age-inappropriate to the target group (e.g. no advertising or shopping for alcohol or cigarettes).
- Commercial elements do not restrict the user's control of actions.
- There is a financial limit to what children can spend on the site or in the game.
- The commercial proposition is openly communicated.
- Payment methods require parental control.



ABOUT POSCON

With more and more children being online at a young age, concepts and ways to accompany and support them in their first and further steps on the internet are needed more than ever. One important keyword here is “positive content and services” where children can easily and safely enjoy the internet and mobile devices. This issue has been addressed on several levels before – on the national level with initiatives bringing forward the production and promotion of positive content, and on the European level e.g. with the EC focus group on positive content, the European Award for Positive Online Content, as well as sessions at the EC’s Safer Internet Forum dedicated to the topic.

THE NETWORK

The Thematic Network POSCON (www.positivecontent.eu) aims to make a substantial contribution to the topic of child online safety on the European level. It brings together players and stakeholders in the field for the first time enabling them to exchange expertise, concepts and content in a way that has not taken place up to now.

OUTCOMES

The network provides concrete recommendations for content providers throughout Europe and thus contributes to an enhanced landscape of positive online content for children. It furthermore provides a unique repository of the European landscape of positive content, an important basis for further whitelists, children’s browsers and search engines for children. This will offer wide-ranging opportunities as a sustainable, extendable and open-access tool for diverse future utilisation.

PROMOTING POSITIVE CONTENT

Also, POSCON raises awareness of this topic among producers, providers, stakeholders and parents. Ideally it will lay the foundation for further projects which will establish the topic of positive content even more intensively on the national as well as the transnational level.

The project started in October 2012 and runs until November 2014. POSCON is funded by the European Commission within the Safer Internet Programme (ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/creating-better-internet-kids).

LEGAL

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