

## Online safety guide:

The internet offers young people connection, entertainment, and learning, but it also brings risks that can affect their well-being.

Supporting your young person's mental health means staying aware of how the online world shapes their mood, identity, and sense of safety.

### What parents and carers can do:

- **Create open, judgment-free conversations:** Talk regularly about their online world - what they enjoy, what worries them, who they talk to. Stay curious, not critical.
- **Set healthy boundaries together:** Work as a team to create screen time limits, no-phone zones (like bedrooms), or app-free time before bed.
- **Teach critical thinking:** Help them question what they see online - what's real, what's edited, and what's *actually* being sold.
- **Model healthy use:** Let them see you taking breaks from screens, prioritising in-person connection, and talking openly about boundaries.
- **Know the platforms they use** Stay up to date with apps, games, and social media. You don't have to know everything, but showing interest builds trust.

## Parent checklist:

### One-page parent checklist:

#### Stay informed

- Know which apps/games your young person uses
- Learn about privacy settings and parental controls
- Understand age ratings and risks of popular platforms

#### Keep communication open

- Ask open, non-judgmental questions
- Talk regularly about their online life
- Encourage them to come to you with concerns

#### Support healthy boundaries

- Set screen time rules together
- Create phone-free zones (for example, bedrooms, at mealtimes, etc...)
- Encourage breaks from screens, especially before bed

#### Watch for warning signs

- Changes in sleep, mood, or appetite
- Becoming secretive or withdrawn
- Decline in schoolwork or friendships

#### Be a role model

- Show balanced tech use yourself
- Take your own screen breaks
- Talk openly about digital well-being

#### Respond calmly when issues arise

- Reassure them they're not in trouble
- Save evidence of bullying or inappropriate content
- Help them block/report, and seek support if needed

# Mental Health Support

## Leaflet 9



Information to support  
your child if you are  
concerned about their  
online behaviour

## A healthy balance:

Encourage a healthy digital balance. Whilst the internet certainly has its uses, it can become addictive. Try to promote offline hobbies and time with friends. Spending time outdoors is also beneficial. If your young person does continue to use their device, use tech tools to manage usage if needed (for example, parental controls, screen time settings, etc...). Remind them that their worth isn't measured by likes, followers, or views. To open up the dialogue about their internet usage, you may wish to try the following conversation starters;

- 'What's your favourite thing to do online right now?'
- 'Have you ever seen anything online that made you feel uncomfortable or upset?'
- 'How do you decide who to follow or block?'
- 'How do you feel after using [app] - better, worse, or the same?'

If something goes wrong for your young person when they are using the internet, reassure them they can always come to you, even if they've made a mistake. Stay calm. Your reaction will determine whether they open up again. Try to save evidence of bullying or inappropriate contact.

## Mental health:

The online world can seriously impact your young person's mental health, so it is important to be aware of the following;

- **Social pressure:** Constant comparison on social media can lower self-esteem and increase anxiety.
- **Cyberbullying:** Hurtful messages, exclusion, or harassment can affect a child's mood and sense of self.
- **Unrealistic body or lifestyle ideals:** Filtered images and influencer content can distort reality and fuel disordered eating or perfectionism.
- **Fear of missing out (FOMO):** Feeling left out of group chats or posts can trigger loneliness.
- **Doomscrolling:** Constant exposure to bad news or distressing content can raise stress levels and create fear about the future.
- **Sleep disruption:** Night-time scrolling or alerts can interfere with rest and increase emotional vulnerability.

Signs that your young person's online life may be affecting their mental health;

- Sudden changes in mood
- Becoming secretive about their phone or online activity
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Falling behind in school
- Sleep problems or exhaustion
- Low self-esteem, body image concerns, or anxiety spikes

## Child friendly guide:

The internet is part of your world and it should be a space that supports, not harms, your mental health.

Try these top tips;

- Follow accounts that uplift and inspire you
- Turn off notifications when you need a break
- Ask yourself: 'How do I feel after scrolling?'
- Don't scroll yourself to sleep - your brain needs rest
- Unfollow/block anyone who makes you feel bad about yourself
- Remember: It's okay to log off and take time offline

You should talk to someone if...

- You feel anxious, low, or unsafe online
- Someone says or sends things that feel wrong
- You're unsure about a situation or choice
- You feel like you can't stop scrolling
- Your feelings are valid. You don't have to handle it all on your own.

## Support services:

If you have concerns regarding something you see when online, Childline, the NSPCC and CEOP all offer guidance and support