



As a Trust, we are committed to promoting the safe and responsible use of the Internet and social media, working alongside parents to assist and support their children and help to keep them safe. As such, we like to remind and reiterate some of the main points of Online Safety in our newsletters.

Is being online affecting our child's mental health?

There are many positives to being online, but we do need to be aware of the negative aspects including those that may impact our child's mental health and wellbeing, for example:

- **Social media** (spending too much time on social media, comparing ourselves to others, filtered images and desire to achieve likes).
- **Cyberbullying**
- **Seeing inappropriate content**
- **Constantly connected/information overload**
- **Excessive screentime**
- **Negative impact on our sleep**

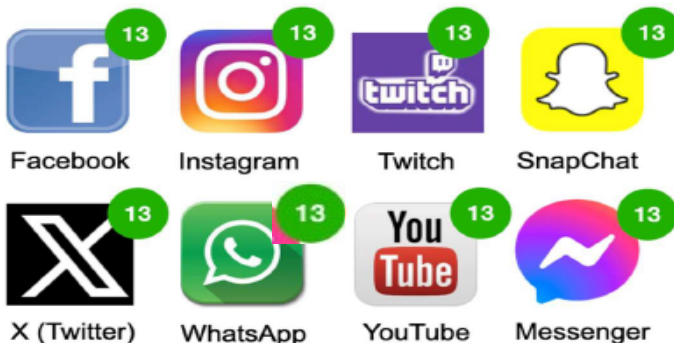


Further information

- Childnet discusses digital wellbeing in more detail and includes top tips and conversation starters: <https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/digital-wellbeing/>
- The NSPCC provides further information about mental health including signs to look out for and how to get further support: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/depression-anxiety-mental-health/>

Get to know Age Ratings

Age ratings are in place to help protect your child, so we thought we'd provide you with a little reminder of how important it is to check the age ratings of what your child is accessing online. Here are the age ratings of some of the more popular apps that young people are accessing. **Did you know that WhatsApp has an age rating of 13?**



Whether your child is viewing films, accessing apps, playing games online, using social media or downloading other apps – check the age rating first to see if your child is old enough. In addition, the likes of PEGI include further content descriptors, which will give you an indication of the type of content that your child might view e.g. violence, if accessing the app/game etc.

Poppy Playtime

It is important that you are aware that whilst the name and characters suggest a playful game, it is a survival horror game with graphics that may not be suitable for your child. It includes characters such as 'Kissy Wissy' and 'Huggy Wuggy.' Please view this game before allowing your child to play it as it may not be appropriate for them – particularly young children.

Children may be playing the game or just watching videos of it on sites such as YouTube or playing replicated versions on Roblox for example.

Further information

Safer Schools NI have produced this informative: <https://saferschoolsni.co.uk/huggy-wuggy-online-safety-review/>

Talking to strangers online

There are many apps/websites where your child may come across strangers contacting them. Some platforms will allow you to set who can contact your child as well as switch off communication so ensure appropriate settings are explored and set up. This article from ThinkUKnow talks about how to protect your child from adult content and contact: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Concerned-about-your-child/Online-contact-and-staying-safe/>

Online Gaming Safety Tips: For parents/carers of neurodivergent young people

Internet Matters have published guidance outlining the benefits and risks of online gaming and how you can support your neurodivergent child. You can read the guide here:

<https://www.flipsnack.com/internetmattersorg/guidance-for-parents-of-neurodivergent-gamers-internet-matters/full-view.html>

Encountering violent online content starts at primary school.

New research commissioned by Ofcom reported that "all children who took part in the research came across violent content online, mostly via social media, video-sharing and messaging sites and apps. Many tell us this is before they have reached the minimum age requirement to use these services."

You can read more about Ofcom's findings here:

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2024/encountering-violent-online-content-starts-at-primary-school>

Talking about online toxicity

Vodafone have published an article highlighting research which shows that "69% of preadolescent boys have encountered misogynistic content online". This article discusses how to approach this issue with your child and what to do if they start repeating negative views seen online.

<https://www.vodafone.co.uk/newscentre/smart-living/digital-parenting/how-to-talk-to-your-teenage-sons-about-online-toxicity/>

Social Media Influencers

What is an Influencer?

An influencer is somebody prominent on a social media platform such as YouTube and Instagram, who have a high number of followers. Influencers share their opinions/ideas and may be paid to advertise/promote products through their account. Whilst there are some great influencers, there are some that choose to share their own opinions, which could be misogynistic or racist for example. These opinions can be expressed or interpreted as fact. It is important to talk to your child about the spread of misinformation online and how we should fact check and critically analyse what we see and hear online.

What we see on social media platforms is influenced by algorithms, which predict what type of content we are most likely to interact with. Whilst there are benefits of algorithms, it can mean that once we start looking at certain content, our social media feed can become more aligned with that opinion, so we don't see a balanced picture. You can find out more here:

<https://www.childnet.com/blog/algorithms/>

Further information

The NSPCC have created an article detailing what you need to know about online influencers. You can read it here:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/2023-05-16-the-influence-of-influencers/>



Snapchat

What is

Snapchat?

Snapchat is a social media app used for messaging and sharing photos and videos. You must be 13+ to sign up. Users can send messages (snaps)



to others that can only be seen for a set time e.g. 10 seconds and users can also upload snaps to stories, which disappear after 24 hours.

What should I be concerned about?

There are risks to using Snapchat, including the risk of your child viewing content that is not appropriate for them, location sharing and contact from strangers.

Family Centre features

Family Centre includes features such as allowing you to see who your child is friends with, who they are communicating with (not the contents of conversations though) and who your child has sent messages, photos or videos to in the last week. You will also be able to report any accounts that you are concerned about as well as restrict sensitive content. Snapchat have also published a safety checklist to help support conversations about how to use Snapchat safely:

- <https://parents.snapchat.com/en-GB/parental-controls?lang=en-GB>

New safeguarding features

Snapchat have recently announced their newest features to help protect 13-17-year-olds. The first feature is in-app warnings so a pop-up warning will now be displayed if someone tries to add them as a friend that they don't have mutual contacts with, or the person isn't in their contacts.

The second feature is 'stronger friending protections.' Currently 13-17-year-olds must have several mutual friends in common for that user to show up in search results or as a friend suggestion, but this number has been increased. These two features are available to users aged 13-17-year-olds, this is one of the reasons why it is always important for your child to sign up with their correct date of birth, so they can benefit from any such features.

- <https://values.snap.com/en-GB/news/new-safeguards-for-snapchatters-2023>

Safety tips

Please make sure the appropriate privacy settings are set up on Snapchat and your child knows how to block and report other users if necessary:

- <https://support.snapchat.com/en-GB/article/privacy-settings2>

More information

- <https://www.virginmedia.com/blog/parental-controls/snapchat>

Fake Profiles and Cyberbullying

Setting up a profile impersonating somebody else with the intention of being unkind to others/to cause embarrassment to the individual is a form of cyberbullying.

If your child has set up a fake profile, talk to them about how this is a form of bullying and therefore not acceptable.

It is important that we talk to our children about the issue of cyberbullying and let them know that if they are ever a victim of it then it is not their fault, and they should tell you (or a trusted adult) straightaway. Talk to your child about reporting and blocking tools on social media or online games and show them how to use them to report any form of bullying.

You can read more about cyberbullying here:

- <https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/types-bullying/bullying-cyberbullying/>
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/>

Additionally, Report Harmful Content have listed how you can report impersonation accounts on the different social media networks here:

<https://reportharmfulcontent.com/advice/impersonation/>



Online safety concern?

If you or your child has an online safety concern, please contact your school and let us know. We can then help to support you through how to report or deal with this concern