

## Online Safety

Children and young people are growing up in a continually growing digital world. There can be lots of advantages to this. They're able to source information and support at the click of a button, connect with friends and family all around the world, express their creativity and access entertainment in an instant.

But sometimes the online world can be a scary place, especially for children and young people. Being online can sometimes lead to cyberbullying, misinformation, scams and disturbing content. In a stem4survey of 1,025 young people, 9 out of 10 (93%) said they had been scared by online content. They were most worried about disinformation, misinformation and fake news (59%).

### How can we make sure our children have a positive and safe online experience?

There are many ways we can help protect children and young people from potential harm online. We can explain the importance of not sharing personal information with strangers or posting it on social media. This includes information like phone number, address, live location, name of school. Encourage your child to come and talk to you or another trusted adult if they have any concerns, especially if they're being asked to share information or photos with people they don't know.

A lot of Apps have a minimum age requirement to join, especially most social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok and Snapchat. If your child does set up an account on an App, there are generally privacy settings like the option to hide location, not allow friend requests, limit those who can see content and set their accounts to private.

### Cyber bullying & how to support young people

Cyber bullying is bullying that takes place online and can have a negative impact on our mental health. Cyberbullying can include:

- Sending mean texts or instant messages to someone
- Pranking someone's mobile phone
- Being rude or mean to someone in an online game
- Hacking into someone's gaming or social network profile
- Spreading secrets or rumours about people online
- Pretending to be someone else to spread hurtful messages

If your child is experiencing any form of cyberbullying, there are some things you can do or encourage your child to do straight away.

- They can block the person. Many sites and social media platforms have the option to block, mute or freeze communication and can even do so without the person knowing
- Encourage your child to tell you or another trusted adult, rather than try to deal with it themselves.
- Report the cyberbullying to the site or App.
- Don't respond to the bullying, especially when feeling angry, upset or frustrated.

## How can too much time online affect our children's behaviour?

Spending too much time online can affect the way children behave and interact with others. You may find they're having fewer face-to-face conversations with family and friends, or they become more withdrawn. They may also find it hard to enjoy being in the moment and hard to focus on offline activities and tasks.

The impact of spending too much time on social media may affect the way young people think about themselves. They could constantly compare themselves to others, which can negatively impact their self-esteem. They could also become anxious, stressed or depressed if they're feeling the pressure to respond to messages.

## Encouraging children to switch off

It can be hard to persuade children and young people to leave the online world and turn off their screens, and it can often end in tears and frustration. To help cut back screen time without a fight, you can:

- Set clear rules and boundaries for screen time. Discuss with your child how long they can spend online. It'll be easier for them to switch off if they know when and how they'll next be able to go online.
- Enjoy screen free meals. You could all agree to put your phones in a box, away from temptation.
- Plan something to do after they turn their screens off. If children and young people don't think they have anything else to do, they're more likely to want to fill their time online. Let them have a say in what they do so that ending screen time isn't seen as something negative.
- Limit your own time online. It's hard to reduce your child's time online if they see you spending time scrolling on social media too.
- Stay engaged in what your child's doing online. By checking in with them about what they're interested in and any challenges they face, the more likely they are to come to you when they're worried about something.
- Talk to them about the impact of spending too much time online. As they get older and more digitally savvy it's important to encourage them to be more responsible and aware of how their screen use can impact them and those around them.

## Extra support

There are lots of useful resources and websites for online safety for children and young people. Here are a few of them:

### Get Safe Online

For information and advice on online safety

[getsafeonline.org](https://www.getsafeonline.org)

### NSPCC

Advice to help you learn about online safety as a family

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

### Young Minds

A guide which aims to support adults to talk to young people about their online interactions and friendships

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/professional/resources/how-to-better-understand-young-people-and-their-online-communities/>