



Keeping Young People Safe Online: Social Media & Messaging Apps.

- 1.Introduction
- 2.What are the main social media platforms and what are they used for?
- 3.Which social media platform poses the greatest threat to children?
- 4.Under 13s
- 5.How to protect young people.
- 6.How can foster carers encourage children to use social media positively?
- 7.Are there any positives to social media?
- 8.What are Influencers?
- 9.Good Influencers
- 10.Bad Influencers
- 11.The rise and fall of Andrew Tate
- 12.Practical steps for dealing with content
- 13.Teach Critical Thinking
- 14.Statistics related to the dangers of social media
- 15.Struggling with Cyber Bullying
- 16.Involved in Cyber Bullying?
- 17.Body Confidence
- 18.Stranger Danger
- 19.Screen Addiction
- 20.Online Grooming
- 21.Gambling and Scams
- 22.Inappropriate content, and participation
- 23.Parental controls
- 24.Helpful resources

Social media has become a prominent form of both entertainment and communication for children and young people, but with this increased connectivity comes the risk of online danger.

As a foster carer, it is likely that you are going to be tackling social media-related issues in your home at some point. There are many different social media channels, all with a slightly different emphasis; and whilst we all know that the internet can be a dangerous place for young people, social media channels can create further issues due to messaging capabilities, amongst other things.

Whilst there are multiple risks to young people, the most significant may be receiving messages from unknown individuals who could have malicious intent, including cyberbullying, grooming, or phishing scams.

It's crucial for responsible adults to ensure that children are educated about the potential risks and dangers of receiving messages through social media, and to have open conversations with them about how to stay safe while using these platforms. This combined with supervision, and positive behaviour modelling by adults and peers can help to mitigate online risks.

What are the main social media & comms platforms and what are they used for?



There are an estimated 4.9 billion social media users globally. They are spread across many different social media platforms. We have listed the current most popular:

Facebook: A social network for connecting with friends and family, sharing updates and photos, and discovering content and communities.

Instagram: A photo and video sharing app, which allows users to post and view visually appealing content, as well as explore and interact with a wide range of topics and communities.

Twitter: A microblogging platform that allows users to post and interact with short text-based posts, also known as tweets. This platform is constantly evolving and is now under the ownership of Elon Musk.

TikTok: A short-form video sharing app that allows users to create and share 15-second to 1-minute videos, often set to music. This is used by adults and young people alike. The company is Chinese owned and there are significant questions regarding the security of data entered into this platform.

Snapchat: A multimedia messaging app that allows users to share photos, videos, and messages that disappear after being viewed. The most obvious risks here are bullying and sexting.

YouTube: A video sharing platform where users can upload, view, and share videos on a wide range of topics.

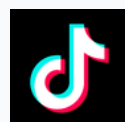
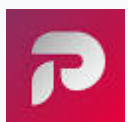
Pinterest: A visual discovery and bookmarking platform, allowing users to save and organise images and ideas on a wide range of topics, such as fashion, food, and home décor.

Reddit: A social news aggregation platform where users can submit and vote on content, such as text posts and links, within various communities, or "subreddits".

WhatsApp: A cross-platform instant messaging app that allows users to send and receive text messages, voice messages, photos, and videos.

Parler: A social media platform that positions itself as an alternative to mainstream platforms, emphasizing free speech and non-biased content moderation.

Clubhouse: An invitation-only, audio-based social media platform, allowing users to join or host live voice chat rooms on a wide range of topics.



What are the main social media & comms platforms and what are they used for?



There are an estimated 4.9 billion social media users globally. They are spread across many different social media platforms. We have listed the current most popular:

Viber: A cross-platform instant messaging app similar to WhatsApp, allowing users to send and receive text messages, make voice and video calls, and share photos and videos.

Telegram: A cloud-based instant messaging app that allows users to send and receive messages, photos, and videos, as well as create and join groups.

WeChat: A Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media, and mobile payment app, offering a wide range of services, such as instant messaging, shopping, and gaming.

LinkedIn: A professional networking platform, connecting individuals with others in their industry, as well as providing job and career-related content. The risk of fake job offers and opportunities should be considered.

Xbox and PlayStation have messaging systems that allow players to communicate with one another. These systems are built into the gaming platforms and are accessible to users once they have signed into their accounts.

The messaging systems on Xbox and PlayStation allow players to send text messages or voice messages to one another while playing games or using the gaming platforms. Some games also have built-in chat features that allow players to communicate with one another during gameplay.

Twitch is a popular live streaming platform that is primarily used for video game streaming, but also includes content in other categories such as music, talk shows, and creative arts. Twitch has a built-in chat system that allows viewers to interact with the streamer in real-time while they are broadcasting.

Roblox is a massively multiplayer online platform that allows users to create and share their own games and virtual worlds. It's designed primarily for children and teenagers, but has a large and diverse user base. Like other online platforms, Roblox can expose users to potential risks such as cyberbullying and exposure to inappropriate content.

The popularity of social media and messenger services ebbs and flows, there are constantly new players in the market, and who often use influencers to attract their user base.



Which social media platforms pose the greatest threat to children?



It's important to note that no social media platform is completely safe, and all can pose risks to children.

The threat level for children on social media platforms varies, but some platforms can pose greater risks than others. Here are a few that are generally considered to be of higher concern for children's safety at the moment.

TikTok: With its emphasis on short-form, often lip-sync or dance videos, TikTok can expose children to potentially inappropriate or harmful content, as well as cyberbullying. There are multiple news reports that claim that TikTok has been reportedly linked to the death of children who have taken part in the viral blackout challenge. The blackout challenge was not the first stupid and dangerous challenge to go viral on TikTok, others included sticking coins into power sockets, and covering raw chicken in cold and flu remedies.

Snapchat: Snapchat's ephemeral nature can encourage sexting and other risky online behaviors, and its filters and lenses can expose children to inappropriate content.

Instagram: Instagram can expose children to a wide range of potentially harmful content, including cyberbullying, self-harm, and inappropriate images and videos.

YouTube: While YouTube has a wide range of educational and entertaining content, it can also expose children to inappropriate or violent content, as well as online predators in comments and live streams.

Twitch: There are no ways to moderate live streams as they happen, so what might start as a harmless stream could easily start showing offensive content with no warning. At this time there are no safety settings in place to protect children from unwanted contact.

Xbox & PlayStation Live, Anything that streams live carries a risk of children coming across inappropriate content, additionally live streams have chat functions that can create a seemingly friendly environment of people with a shared interest to spark a conversation with a stranger.



The use of social media by children under the age of 13 is a topic of debate, with both potential risks and benefits to consider.

According to a study by the charity Childwise, 61% of 8–12 year olds in the UK now have a social media profile, a significant increase from the 34% recorded in 2015. This has led to concerns about the potential negative impact social media can have on young children.

From a risk perspective, social media can expose children to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and online predators at a bare minimum.

Additionally, social media use has been linked to the following:

- decreased physical activity
- disrupted sleep patterns
- negative impact on mental health
 - anxiety
 - depression
- reduction in body confidence
- excessive screen time.

Most social media platforms have a minimum age requirement of 13

Ultimately, the decision of whether a child under 13 should be on social media should be based on careful consideration of the potential risks, and the ability of the child and their parents or carers to manage those risks effectively.

If a child under 13 does use social media, it is important for parents or carers to closely monitor their activity and have open and honest conversations about their online behaviour, and the dangers they face online, to help them stay safe.



As a foster carer, it's important to be aware of the potential risks associated with social media usage and to take steps to mitigate these risks.

Monitor social media usage: Regularly check in on your child's social media accounts, and monitor their activity to ensure they are using these platforms safely and responsibly.

Teach safe online practices: Educate young people about the dangers of social media, including cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and online predators, and teach them how to protect themselves online. This can include things like avoiding sharing personal information, not accepting friend requests from strangers, and reporting any concerning behavior to you or the platform's moderators.

Set rules and consequences: Establish clear rules and expectations for your child's social media usage, such as approving all friend requests and limiting screen time. If your child violates these rules, it's important to enforce consequences, such as revoking social media privileges.

Be a positive role model: As a responsible adult, it's important to set a positive example for your child when it comes to social media usage. This can include things like avoiding negative or harmful online behavior, using social media in moderation, and being mindful of what you post and share.

Awareness of the dangers: You need to be aware of the potential risks children face on social media, such as cyberbullying, online predators, exposure to inappropriate content, and many more.

Communication: Open communication with young people can help kids feel comfortable discussing their online experiences and seeking help if needed.

Age-appropriate use: Establish age-appropriate guidelines for social media usage, including limiting screen time and monitoring content. The majority of social media platforms require users to be 13+.

Privacy settings: Teach children to adjust their privacy settings to limit who can see their posts and contact them. Additionally, ensure all appropriate parental locks and settings are in place.

Stay informed: Stay informed about updates and changes to social media platforms, and educate children on how to use them safely.

By taking these steps, you can help protect young people from the potential dangers of social media and ensure they use these platforms in a safe, responsible manner.

There are positive ways to use social media and messaging apps, and we can encourage young people to use social media in a positive manner by doing the following:

Modelling positive behaviour: Carers should lead by example and use social media in a responsible and positive manner themselves. This can include avoiding negative or harmful online behavior, using social media in moderation, and being mindful of what you post and share.

Encouraging creative expression: Social media can be a great tool to express themselves creatively, whether it's through photography, writing, art, or other forms of self-expression. Finding positive peer groups with similar interests can create longlasting friendships.

Promoting positivity: Connecting with friends online is second nature to some generations; encourage children to use social media to connect with others in a positive way, such as through sharing interests, expressing kindness and gratitude, and building healthy online relationships.

Fostering critical thinking: Critical thinking is a skill that needs to be taught, so teach young people to think critically about the information they encounter on social media, and to question the validity and reliability of the sources they engage with. Get them to question everything, the information, the source, the "why", and a reality check.

Balancing screen time: Encourage young people to limit their social media usage and engage in other activities, such as physical exercise, reading, playing with friends in person, or spending time in nature.



Are there any positives to social media?



Considering everything you have read in the booklet, you are probably wondering if there is anything positive about social media at all!

A report by Ofcom found that social media had a positive impact on young people's learning, with 57% of those aged 12-15 saying they used it to find out more about topics they were studying in class. Additionally the report found that social media had a positive impact on young people's relationships with their friends, with 59% saying it helped them to stay in touch with friends and keep up with the news

There are other ways that social media can have a positive impact

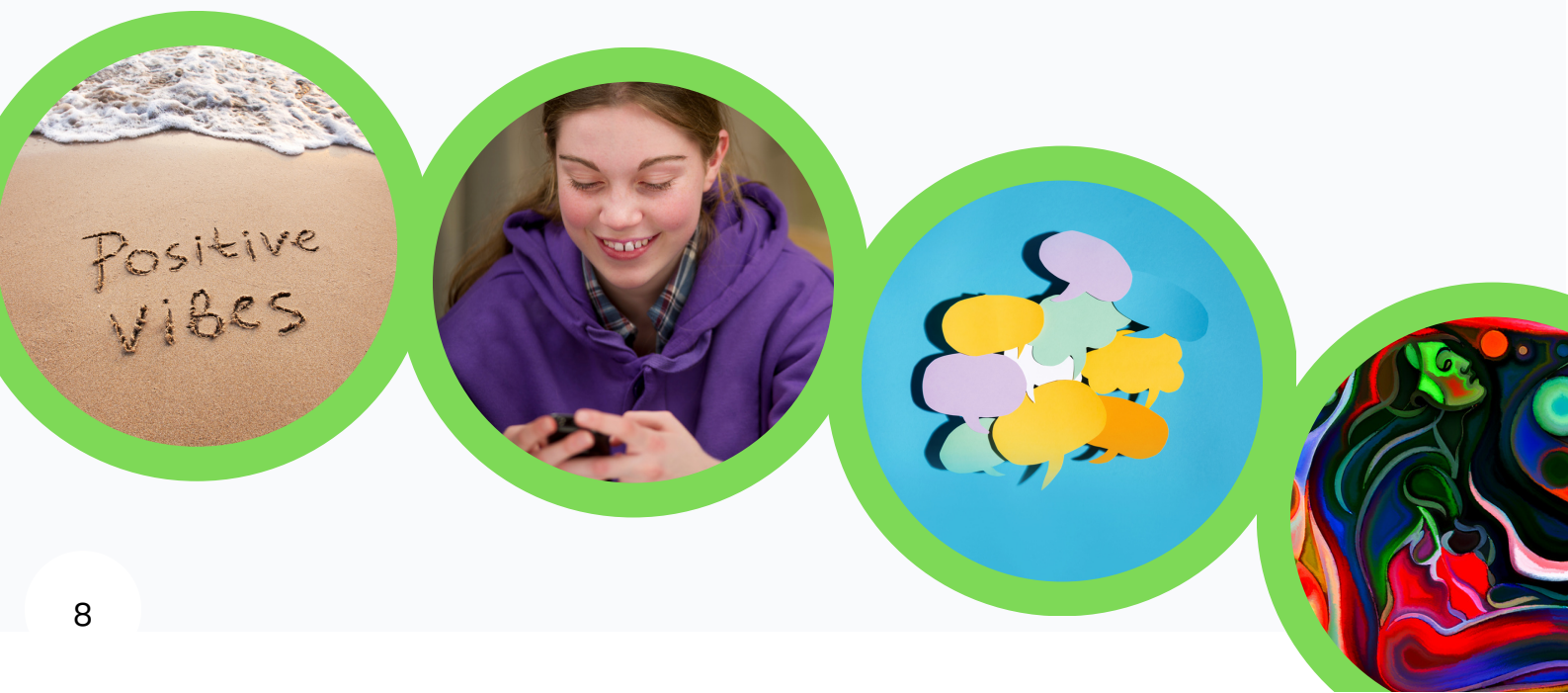
Connection: Social media allows young people to stay connected (where appropriate) with friends and family who are far away or who they may not have seen in a while.

Networking: It is an excellent platform for professional and personal networking, helping people build connections and help find first job opportunities.

Self-expression: Social media provides a variety of platforms for young people to express themselves creatively through mood boards, images, videos, and posts.

Access to information: Social media quickly became a news and ideas distribution tool, and it contains a wealth of information, with users sharing news, articles, and ideas from around the world.

Raising awareness: Social media can be a powerful tool for raising awareness about important issues and causes, some of which are not picked up by main stream news outlets.



What are Influencers?



Influencers are individuals who have a large following on social media and use it to promote products, services, and their personal brand. Influencers can range from celebrities to everyday individuals; they often receive money or goods for promoting products or services from other businesses or organisations

The dangers of influencer culture: Sadly, Influencer culture can promote unrealistic standards, spread false information, and lead to the exploitation and manipulation of social media followers. For example, influencers may promote products that are unhealthy or not safe (such as diet fads) and their followers may blindly follow their advice without considering the potential consequences. Additionally, influencer culture can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, as followers are exposed to a constant stream of idealised images and lifestyles. The reality is that a significant number of influencers are not living the lives they project, or are financing them with debt. The impact of influencer culture has been significant on young people, especially with crossovers from reality TV shows.

Encouraging positive use of social media: To encourage positive use of social media, you can promote body positivity, responsible spending habits, and critical thinking skills. This can include following influencers who promote healthy habits and avoiding influencers who promote unrealistic standards. Encouraging critical thinking when evaluating influencer content is essential!

How to critically evaluate influencer content: To critically evaluate influencer content, young people should consider the source of the information, check for accuracy, and evaluate the overall impact of the content. This can include looking for multiple sources to verify information, evaluating the quality of the content, and considering the potential impact of the content on their own well-being and the well-being of others. It is important to remind young people that they do not need to engage with every piece of content that preferred influencers promote.

The importance of informed consent: Influencer culture requires informed consent, meaning that influencers must be transparent about sponsored content, and followers must be able to make informed decisions about the content they consume and share. Influencers should be upfront about any compensation they receive for promoting products or services, and followers should be aware of the potential for exploitation and manipulation. There are ongoing issues regarding transparency and influencers.

Reporting harmful content: If a young person encounters harmful content, they should report it to the social media platform and seek support if needed. This can include flagging content that promotes hate speech or violates community guidelines, seeking support from organisations that provide resources and support to those who have been impacted by harmful content, and taking steps to protect their own well-being and the well-being of others.

Tips for identifying trustworthy influencers



To identify trustworthy influencers, young people should look at the content being posted, look for signs of authenticity and transparency, and consider the influencer's history and reputation.

For example, trustworthy influencers should provide honest and accurate information, disclose sponsored content, and have a clear and consistent brand message. Some influencers who are modeling positive behavior online include:

Mental health advocates: Influencers who use their platform to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues. They often share their own experiences and offer support and resources to their followers.

Body positivity advocates: Influencers who promote body positivity, self-love, and diversity in terms of body size, shape, and appearance. They aim to challenge unrealistic beauty standards and encourage followers to embrace their bodies as they are.

Environmental advocates: Influencers who use their platform to raise awareness about environmental issues and encourage eco-friendly practices. They may share tips for reducing waste, using sustainable products, and living a more environmentally conscious lifestyle.

Social justice advocates: Influencers who use their platform to advocate for social justice issues such as racial equality, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights. They may share educational content, participate in varying levels of activism, and use their platform to amplify marginalised voices. Social justice advocates have forced significant change across the world via their use of social media to motivate like-minded individuals.

Philanthropic influencers: Influencers who use their platform to raise awareness and money for charitable causes. They may partner with non-profit organisations, share information about causes they support, and encourage their followers to get involved.

By following and supporting these types of influencers, young people can engage with content that promotes positive values and behaviours and encourages them to make a positive impact on the world.



Negative influencers are individuals who use their social media platforms to promote harmful ideologies, engage in and encourage harmful behaviour, or spread false or misleading information.

Some examples of negative influencer behaviour that young people will encounter on social media include:

Cyberbullying: Using social media to harass, intimidate, or threaten others.

Hate speech: Using social media to spread hate or incite violence against specific groups of people based on factors such as race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

Misinformation: Spreading false or misleading information, particularly during a crisis or pandemic, which can have severe consequences for public health and safety.

Body shaming: Promoting unrealistic beauty standards, and criticising others for their appearance.

Substance abuse: Promoting or glorifying the use of drugs, alcohol, or other harmful substances.

Specific accounts can be blocked, but there is an overwhelming number of wannabe influencers using hate and controversy to gain attention and traction. You can encourage young people to follow positive influencers by redirecting them to positive accounts and by modelling positive online behaviour.

It's important to be mindful of the content we, as adults, consume and the influencers we follow and support on social media. Take care to avoid promoting or supporting individuals who engage in negative behaviour or spread harmful ideologies. By doing so, we can help create a more positive and inclusive online community.



Andrew Tate has been a controversial figure for a good few years. He is known for creating controversial and sometimes inflammatory content on social media. He rose to prominence in the early 2010s for his participation in various reality TV shows and his outspoken personality on social media. He crowned himself the king of toxic masculinity.

His role in promoting unhealthy alpha male culture and misogyny to young males will have far-reaching consequences, which includes the lessons he taught in his "Hustlers University". He is currently in jail awaiting charges for his alleged role in sexual assault, human trafficking, and organising a crime gang.

However, in recent years, Andrew Tate has faced significant backlash for his controversial content, which has included hate speech, threatening behavior, and promoting dangerous ideologies. This has led to him being banned from multiple social media platforms and facing numerous legal consequences. Although, at the time of being banned his Instagram account had 4.6 million followers. Currently, the #andrewtate hashtag has 12.7 billion views on TikTok.

The rise and fall of Andrew Tate highlights the dangers associated with the creation and distribution of harmful content on social media. This includes the spread of hate speech, the promotion of dangerous ideologies, and the potential for legal consequences.

For users, it is important to be mindful of the content they consume and share on social media, and to avoid promoting or supporting harmful ideologies or individuals who engage in harmful behaviour. This includes using critical thinking skills to evaluate the information encountered on social media, and being mindful of the impact that the content they share may have on others.



It is important to be informed, thoughtful, and proactive in how we engage with social media and the information we encounter online, no matter what our age.

Here are some practical steps users can take to be mindful of the content they consume and share on social media:

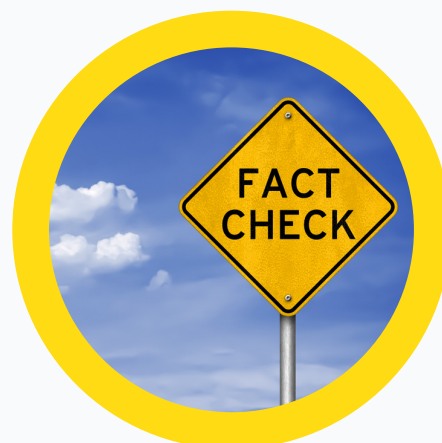
Evaluate sources: Before accepting information as true, it is important to evaluate the source of the information and determine if it is credible and trustworthy. This includes looking for multiple sources to verify information and checking the reliability of the source.

Fact-check: Before sharing information on social media, it is important to fact-check the information to determine if it is accurate and trustworthy.

Avoid sensational content: Sensational or inflammatory content is often used to spread false or misleading information. Avoid sharing this type of content and encourage others to do the same.

Be mindful of the impact: Consider the impact that the content you share on social media may have on others, and avoid sharing content that could be harmful or offensive.

Speak out against hate speech: If you encounter hate speech or harmful content on social media, it is important to speak out against it and encourage others to do the same. Report the content to the platform and consider reaching out to the individuals responsible for creating the content to express your concerns.



There are some practical steps responsible adults can take to foster critical thinking in relation to social media:

Teach media literacy: Teach children and young adults to critically evaluate the information they encounter on social media, including how to identify credible sources and evaluate the accuracy and reliability of the information.

Encourage fact-checking: Teach children and young adults to fact-check information before accepting it as true, and to look for multiple sources to verify the information.

Discourage blind belief: Encourage children and young adults to question what they see and hear on social media, and to avoid blindly accepting information without critically evaluating it first.

Discuss current events: Encourage children and young adults to engage in discussions about current events, and to critically evaluate the information they see related to these events on social media.

Promote skepticism: Teach your child to be skeptical of information, especially information that is sensational or seems too good to be true, and to use critical thinking skills to determine if information is accurate and trustworthy.

By taking these steps, responsible adults can help children and young adults develop critical thinking skills in relation to social media and information they encounter online. This can help them make informed decisions and avoid falling victim to misinformation or online scams.



Statistics related to the dangers of social media.



These statistics highlight the need for parents, carers, educators, and society as a whole to be aware of the potential dangers of social media and to take steps to protect children from these risks.

Cyberbullying: According to the UK's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), 1 in 5 children aged 10-15 has experienced cyberbullying.

Mental health: A study by the Royal Society for Public Health found that social media use is linked to increased rates of anxiety, depression, and poor sleep in UK young people.

Online grooming: The NSPCC reports that one in ten children aged 7-17 have received a sexual message or image online.

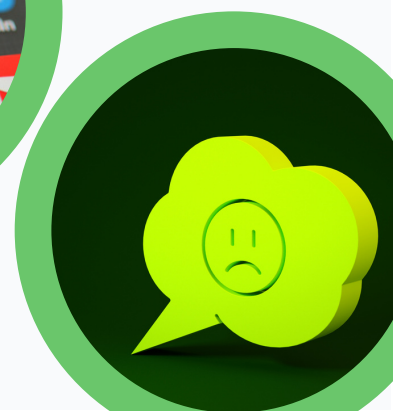
Exposure to harmful content: Research from the UK's Children's Commissioner found that over half of 8-12-year-olds have seen violent or frightening content online.

Social media addiction: A study by The Royal Society for Public Health found that nearly 70% of UK young people feel that social media has a negative impact on their sleep quality.

Online harassment: Research from the UK government found that 25% of young people have experienced online harassment.

Body image concerns: A survey by The Royal Society for Public Health found that 70% of UK young people believe social media has a negative impact on their body image.

Sexting: Research from the UK government found that one in four young people have taken part in sexting.



Online bullying, also known as cyber bullying, is a form of bullying that occurs through digital devices such as smartphones, laptops and tablets.

Cyber bullying can take many forms, including:

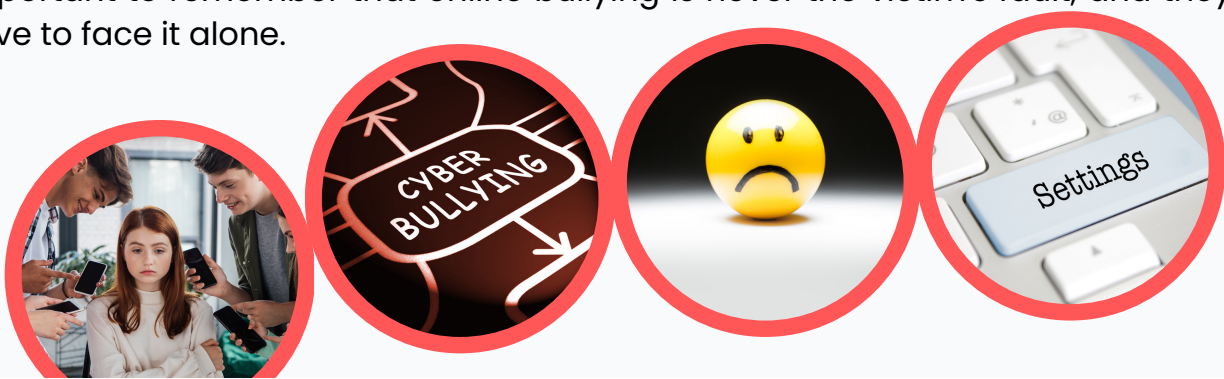
- cyberstalking
- harassment
 - spreading rumours, or lies about someone
 - pranking by phone or messenger
- hate speech, including racial and religious slurs.
- hacking into people's social media or gaming accounts.
- doxxing
- being rude to people online

Online bullying is a growing concern among parents, guardians, teachers, and police. The main motivating factors for young people to get involved in cyber bullying are: Revenge, Group Thinking combined with Peer Pressure, Boredom, Daring, a need to feel Powerful, and a Lack of Empathy.

How do we deal with cyber bullying?

- It is important to remember that the first step is to stay safe and protect your personal information.
- It is important to take screenshots of any messages or posts as evidence that can be used later.
- It is essential to reach out for support; the team at Affinity are here to support you. The school or college can also provide assistance and support. We have also included a page of additional online resources, such as Childnet International, that can provide support and guidance at the end of this booklet.
- Limit the bully's access to you online. Unfollowing or blocking the person who is bullying, or adjusting the privacy settings to limit who can see online activity such as social media posts or send messages through the platforms

It is important to remember that online bullying is never the victim's fault, and they should not have to face it alone.



Unfortunately, one of the young people in your house may be cyber bullying someone.

If you find out that a young person is involved in cyber bullying, it is important to take immediate action.

Here are some steps you can take:

Talk to the young person involved: Open up a discussion with them and listen to their side of the story. It is entirely possible that they do not understand what they are doing is wrong, things may have got out of hand, and they don't know how to make it stop; or there could be other players involved pulling the strings and creating additional issues. Explain how cyberbullying can hurt others and the consequences it can have.

Save evidence: No matter what side of the bullying situation the young person is on, save any evidence, such as screenshots or messages.

Report the issue: Depending on the nature and severity of the situation, access to platforms and websites can be revoked if they receive a report of bullying. Cyber bullying can also be reported to the police; whilst cyberbullying is not a crime in itself, it can be considered harassment, which is a crime both on and offline.

Teach the young person empathy: Encourage the young person to put themselves in the shoes of the person being bullied; to understand the impact their actions can have on that person both now and in the future.

Seek help: The staff at Affinity are here to help and support you and the young people in your care; there is also a list of resources in this booklet that might help.

Monitoring online activity: Young people are less likely to misbehave online if they know someone is checking on their activity. By regularly monitoring online activity and keeping an open line of communication, you can help them to help them stay safe and behave responsibly online.



There is a growing body of research that suggests social media has a negative impact on body confidence, particularly among young people in the UK.

According to a 2020 survey by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH), 62% of young people aged 14–24 reported that social media has a negative impact on their body image.

Another study by the charity YMCA found that 70% of young people felt pressure to conform to beauty standards set by social media. In 2019, a report by the Mental Health Foundation found that comparing oneself to others on social media was a common cause of body dissatisfaction, with 72% of 18–25-year-olds surveyed reporting this as a factor.

These statistics highlight the need for responsible adults to be aware of the potential impact of social media on body confidence and to support young people in developing positive relationships with their bodies and social media.

Editing images using software such as Photoshop, or social media platforms' own filters (including those that work on video content) has played an overwhelming role in creating a rise in body confidence issues. The transition into the teenage years is a difficult enough time without having a constant stream of manipulated images tell you what the current (and ever-changing) beauty standards are. Influencers having regular cosmetic surgery to fix flaws that no one can see continue to undermine the confidence of young people and adults alike.

Eating disorders: There had been a lot of discussions and studies surrounding the topic of whether social media causes eating disorders. An article stated "While social media alone is not usually the cause of an eating disorder, it can significantly worsen an existing eating disorder or trigger a new one. Particularly in youths already battling an eating disorder or struggling with feelings of anxiety or depression."*



Previously we could easily identify if the person in front of us was a stranger; but now, hidden behind usernames and fake profile pictures, we often have no idea who we are actually speaking to.

Stranger danger is a major concern for children and responsible adults when it comes to social media. The anonymity of the internet allows individuals to pretend to be someone they are not, which can put children at risk of exploitation and harm.

Social media can be a dangerous place for children if they do not know how to protect themselves. Children need to be taught about the dangers of talking to strangers online and the importance of keeping personal information private. That includes:

- Their full name
- Which school they attend
- Any part of their address
- Specific details of clubs they attend on a regular basis
- The name of friends and family
- Names of pets
- Share their usernames from other platforms

Stranger danger on the internet can take many forms, including online bullying, grooming, and cyberstalking.

Grooming is when a stranger builds a relationship with a child in order to exploit or harm them. This can be done through social media, online gaming, or other online platforms. It can be hard for children to understand that the person claiming to be the same age as them online, could actually be a grownup looking to cause them harm.

It is important for Carers to educate their young people about internet safety and monitor their online activities.

Carers should also discuss what to do if their child encounters a stranger online or if they feel uncomfortable with any online interaction. The key is to help children understand the risks of talking to strangers online and to empower them to protect themselves while they enjoy all the benefits the internet has to offer.



Screen addiction is a growing concern, as more and more people spend increasing amounts of time on digital devices and social media platforms.

Research has found that excessive screen time can have negative impacts on physical and mental health, including disrupted sleep patterns, eye strain, and decreased physical activity levels. Additionally, the content on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram can have negative effects on mental health, such as low self-esteem and increased anxiety and depression.

To prevent screen addiction and minimise the negative effects of social media, it's recommended to establish limits on screen time, prioritise face-to-face interaction and physical activities, and be mindful of the content being consumed and shared on platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

TikTok is a popular social media platform, particularly among younger generations, where users can create and share short-form videos.

Some statistics on screen addiction and TikTok:

- Screen addiction affects an estimated 8.2% of the global population, with young people being particularly vulnerable.
- In one survey of TikTok users, 47% reported spending more than 2 hours per day on the platform, with 15% spending more than 4 hours per day.
- A study found that TikTok use was positively associated with symptoms of internet addiction, particularly among young people.
- Research has shown that excessive screen time can lead to decreased physical activity levels and increased sedentary behavior, which has negative impacts on physical health.
- Social media use, including on platforms like TikTok, has been linked to increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, particularly among young people.



Grooming should be an ever-present concern in respect of the internet, children and young adults who are considered vulnerable are sought out and targeted

Online grooming refers to the act of building an emotional connection with a child or a young person through the use of digital technologies for the purpose of sexually exploiting them. This can include sending sexual messages, images or videos, or trying to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the child.

Online grooming can happen on social media, messaging apps, gaming platforms, and other online spaces where young people spend time. It's important for children and responsible adults to be aware of the risks of online grooming and to take steps to protect themselves.

This can include:

- talking to children about the dangers of online grooming,
- monitoring their online activity,
- and encouraging them to speak out if they experience anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.

What is the most likely way a child or young person will be approached?

Online groomers often use tactics to build trust and rapport with their target, which can make it difficult for children and young people to recognize the danger. Some common tactics used by online groomers include:

Pretending to be someone they are not: Online groomers may pose as a celebrity, or someone in a position of authority, such as a teacher or support staff.

Offering gifts or attention: Online groomers may shower their target with compliments, gifts, or attention in an attempt to gain their affection and trust. This can be achieved digitally on certain online platforms and games, as well as through direct purchased via online gift lists.

Creating a sense of urgency: Online groomers can use practices such as threatening to harm themselves or others if the child does not comply with their demands.

Isolating the child: Online groomers may try to separate the child from their friends and responsible adults, in order to increase their control and manipulate them.

It's important for children and young people to be aware of these tactics and to report any suspicious behavior to a trusted adult. It's also important for parents and educators to educate themselves about the warning signs of online grooming and to talk to children about the dangers of the internet.



There is a lot of content on social media platforms that we would all prefer children and young adults did not see!

From videos of violence, pornography, extremism of varying forms, the incel movement, and gambling the list could be almost endless.

Social media and "free" games are full of ads for **gambling**, and there was until recently, a significant level of live stream gambling on Twitch with the involvement of Influencers with a teenage audience. Twitch has now banned this, but not every platform has.

There is thought to be a real risk that exposing children and teenagers to gambling and scam advertisements on social media, could lead to the early onset of addiction and financial problems.

Scams are a major issue on social media, from free downloads of games, to doing silly quizzes on facebook to see what sort of animal you are. They are all designed to either get you to click links or provide access to the private data you have in your account profile. **Fake competitions** are very popular, and the chances of a free car being given away, unless the drawing is rigged, are extremely slim! This is an area where critical thinking and understanding the power that influencers have on their followers is vital.

Exposure to some level of **pornography** is pretty much guaranteed on every platform, and there is an almost constant glamorisation from some creators promoting using Only Fans as a way to make a lot of money very quickly.

Extremism found a home on social media platforms quite early on, and the recruitment of disenfranchised youths and adults to various causes has hit the headlines on more than one occasion. Chat room activities should be monitored by a responsible adult.

Sexting is an issue that does not seem to be going away anytime soon. Sexting is defined as "sending, receiving or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photography or videos, primarily between mobile phones." (Wiki) There are multiple issues involved, including consent, the age of the people involved, and the peer pressure to take part. The fact is that once those pictures are sent, there is no getting them back, and the possibility of them being used in revenge porn or blackmail should give everyone pause for thought, it is rarely so. An extremely disturbing report by ITV included the stats: "So-called 'sexts' typed out by children in the UK have risen 183% during lockdown compared to before measures were imposed, with a 55% rise in sexts drafted during normal school hours." It should also not be underestimated the age at which children can become involved in sexting, open and frank communications regarding the dangers surrounding it are essential. Sexting without consent or sexting with others under the age of 16 (informed consent) is another area that should be raised during conversations.

Yes! Many social media platforms offer parental control features.

Many social media platforms offer parental control features that allow parents to block certain activities, such as limiting the types of content that can be viewed or restricting the ability to interact with other users.

However, the availability and specifics of these controls vary significantly between platforms and are not foolproof or tamper-proof. Parental controls are not a substitute for taking monitoring, open conversation, or any of the other suggestions we have put forward.

Not sure how to monitor activity on social media? On many social media platforms, users can access their activity history, including the posts they have made, interactions with other users, and searches conducted. This information can usually be found in the "Settings" or "Privacy" sections of the platform. However, the specifics of what activity is recorded and how it can be accessed vary between platforms, and some information may be deleted automatically after a certain period of time. There is also the possibility of the information being deliberately deleted.

Did you know that some phones allow dual profiles that are accessed by different front-screen logins? Definitely worth a google search to see if the phones in your household allow it.

If you have a child or young adult in the household who seems to be **getting past your parental controls** on your internet hub, as well as other controls you have in place, it is quite possible they are using a VPN app. The use of VPN apps is surprisingly common amongst tech-savvy teens, and can be used to bypass parental controls, and access restricted websites and home wifi restrictions.

Hidden apps: Apps can easily be hidden from the home screens on phones and tablets, but can still be accessible via other menus, so if you are searching to see if banned apps are being used you will have to look a little deeper than the home screens. Aside from just being in the menu systems, there are a variety of apps that can be used to hide other applications from view.



You are not alone, and aside from having access to support from Affinity staff, there are a number of professional resources available online.

UK Safer Internet Centre

A website dedicated to promoting a safer and better internet for children and young people. They offer information and resources for parents, teachers, and young people on a variety of online safety topics.

NSPCC

The UK's leading children's charity, offering advice and support for parents and children on a wide range of issues, including online safety.

Childnet International

A non-profit organization working to make the internet a better place for children. They offer resources for parents, teachers, and young people, including tips for staying safe online.

Internet Matters

A not-for-profit organization that provides information, support, and advice to help parents keep their children safe online.

UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS)

A government-led organization that works to make the internet a safe place for children and young people. They provide information and resources for parents, schools, and organizations.

CEOP – Child Exploitation and Online Protection

CEOP is there to help keep children safe from sexual abuse and grooming online.

*<https://firststepsed.co.uk/the-impact-of-social-media-parent-support/>





Affinity Fostering Services Ltd
North Wing
Ingatestone Hall
Hall Lane
Ingatestone
Essex
CM4 9NR

01245 237 158
info@affinityfostering.com

