

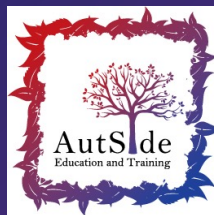


Staying Safe Online

a session for parents/carers of neurodivergent
young people



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Agenda



01 Introduction / Overview

02 Gaming, streaming/vlogging

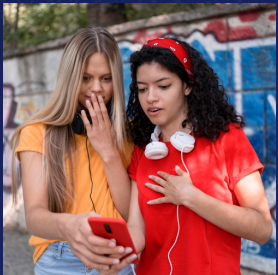
03 Digital Security & Privacy

04 Cyberbullying

05 Grooming / Exploitation / Radicalisation

06 Social Media Use

07 Setting healthy boundaries



For a lot of us, there is a separation between our online and offline lives, but for children who have grown up in the internet age, this distinction often doesn't exist, it's all just life...



I believe that technology and the internet is a precious and positive resource, with many benefits, however as with offline life, there is good and bad, and it comes with its own specific dangers

I am of the belief that the positives offered outweigh the negatives, but regardless of your stance, we live in an increasingly tech dominated world, and our online lives continue to grow and merge with our existing reality at unprecedented speed



This means that shutting out the online world and the use of technology is increasingly difficult and unrealistic, so the key is to prepare and support our children and young people in this developing space



95%

Of teenagers aged 12–17 are estimated to be online*



60%

of children aged 8–11 have their own social media profile*



01

Introduction / Overview





Online Safety




- ❑ Online safety is a topic of concern for everyone, of all ages
- ❑ But it affects the most vulnerable in society more keenly
- ❑ This means young people are especially at risk
- ❑ The issues and safeguarding measures for neurotypical and neurodivergent young people are often the same, with similar safeguarding measures recommended
- ❑ However, with additional needs come additional factors to consider, risks to be aware of and safeguarding measures to take







Specific Benefits and Risks of the Online World for neurodivergent young people

<i>Benefits</i>	<i>Risks</i>
Meet people with similar (often niche) interests	Additional vulnerability to online predators
Manage anxiety	Comparisons to neurotypical peers
Practice social skills in a 'low risk' environment	Bullying can be constant with no reprieve
Learn about their own condition and find their community	Risk of developing extreme views or entrenched beliefs (echo chamber effect)
Mobile gaming can help them become/stay active and engaged in the outside world	May find some of the abstract concepts difficult to understand
Can learn and develop new skills, express their creativity and build self esteem	Can have difficulty with differentiating fantasy / reality





Additional risks for neurodivergent young people online



- Increased vulnerability linked to difficulties understanding safe and positive relationships*
- Difficulty with 'Theory of mind' – understanding other people's beliefs and intentions, which becomes even more of a challenge in an 'online world'*
- Social isolation which may lead to an increased/excessive online use*
- Difficulty in accessing whole school teaching around online safety*
- Difficulty in communicating if/when something has happened online that they are not comfortable with*
- There are no definitive rules for every online situation which means that each potential situation needs an individual decision-making process, which can be challenging*
- Dopamine hits can be even more 'addictive' for people with ADHD so likes, positive comments, followers or the thrill of progressing and instant reward linked to gaming can be more important to manage than ever*




So, how do we help young people navigate the online world?

UNDERSTAND THE RISKS

ENSURE YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW WHO TO TURN TO FOR HELP

HELP THEM LEARN FROM THEIR ONLINE EXPERIENCES - GOOD AND / OR BAD



SUPPORT THEM EVEN IF WE DON'T FULLY SHARE THEIR INTEREST OR IMMERSION IN THE ONLINE WORLD

START THE DIALOGUE EARLY AND KEEP THE CONVERSATION OPEN

BE A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUR CHILD



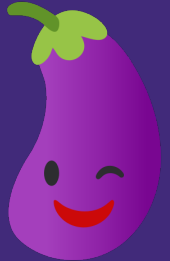
Online socialization and communication

- ❑ For neurodivergent people, socialisation and communication can be a particularly difficult area to navigate
- ❑ Often there are difficulties with metaphors, sarcasm, idioms and slang
- ❑ Ensuring they have a good grasp of 'internet lingo' and emoji speak / meanings is vital, so they do not end up in miscommunications or become vulnerable unknowingly
- ❑ There is even 'less information' available in online communications, no body language, facial expressions or tone of voice so even if they usually struggle with this, the complete removal of any of this information will likely have an impact

TLDR

LOL

NSFW



**Remember, the internet is
forever....**

**So, creating a healthy digital
footprint is essential**

*30% of
secondary
school pupils
admit that
they **regret**
things they
have said
online*



Building a healthy digital identity/footprint



- ❑ A digital identity or footprint is all the information stored about us online. Our children are likely to have extensive digital footprints as these days this information often begins from an early age
- ❑ Your digital footprint will follow you throughout your life and across settings – so it is important to think about what you are sharing and how it might affect you in the future
- ❑ We grow and develop as we get older, but unlike us, our children's milestones and mistakes are being captured and disseminated far more widely than we had to consider/experience
- ❑ Discuss healthy online behaviours, thinking before you post and keep the conversation about this open – use examples of how this has affected other people, real or fictional to illustrate the concept further



02

Gaming & Streaming / Vlogging





Gaming



- ❑ *Think about the types of games/content consumed – multiplayer online games, world building, first person shooters, strategy, casual, mobile etc.*
- ❑ *PEGI ratings will help you understand suitable ages and particular content triggers*
- ❑ *Many games and apps have messaging/chat/trade features – this means risk, check the specific game or website T&C's or FAQ's for more advice on the individual platform features/rules etc.*
- ❑ *Remember games are not just wasted time, there are lots of games that can build skills, social ability, decision making, reflexes, muscle memory, coordination, strengthen planning, prioritising ability and memory recall. Apps and games can also be educational in terms of 'gamified' learning such as Duolingo etc.*
- ❑ *However gaming can be addictive so healthy limits are vital, and there is concern that games which feature violence can increase real world aggression, though research is divided on this it is a concern*



Vlogging/Livestreaming



- ❑ Vlogging is sharing recorded video content via platforms such as Youtube
- ❑ Livestreaming is sharing live video such as via twitch, instagram go live or facebook live

You may find your child engages with this this kind of content in many ways, such as:

- ❑ Creating their own Youtube channel
- ❑ Livestreaming with their friends
- ❑ Watching gamers livestreams
- ❑ Watching videos online such as makeup tutorials, unboxing videos, ASMR or GRWM/DITL

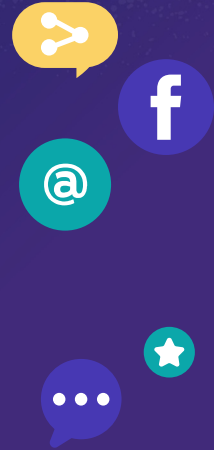
This can be positive in terms of expressing themselves, connecting with others, learning about specific topics or developing interests or even developing skills and income as they get older.

However, it is vital you talk about what this entails and are all clear on the risks and regards, and how to handle it all as a family. Some young people have unrealistic expectations of wealth and success when they watch famous youtubers/influencers etc. and do not understand this is the minority and that it entails a LOT of hard work too!



02

Digital Security & Privacy



Protecting personal information

- ❑ Be aware of location sharing settings/ geotagging etc.
- ❑ Choose strong memorable passwords and never share them
- ❑ Be vigilant about sensitive information such as Date of birth , address etc.
- ❑ Don't overlook other identifying features such as a school or work logo, a recognizable landmark etc.
- ❑ Smart devices are increasingly used whether speakers, televisions, kitchen appliances or toys – ensure you have checked parental controls and privacy/sharing settings on these too
- ❑ Discuss the importance of protecting financial information and be aware of the risks of 'in app purchasing' – most systems have restrictions available to disallow this, and some providers will consider a refund where an item(s) have been purchased accidentally by a minor
- ❑ Be aware of viruses, ransomware etc. and install and update your antivirus protection, check your firewall regularly



What is a VPN?
A VPN is a Virtual Personal Network.
Can be used to provide an added layer of protection – but it can also be used to hide activity

Trigger warning

Pornography, sexual contact



Online Sexual Content & Pornography

- ❑ *Sexual content online includes any material that shows sexual behaviour. This includes sexual language, photos and videos.*
- ❑ *On social media this might be content on other peoples' feeds, adverts, direct messages or comments. This can range from content such as sexual comments, photos of couples kissing, photos of influencers in sexy poses/underwear to adult pornography and nude images of under 18s.*

Seeing sexual content online, whether they wanted to see it or not, can have both short and long-term impacts:-

- ❑ *Short term – curiosity, enjoyment, disgust, discomfort, anger, insecurity, jealousy*
- ❑ *Long term – body image, how we feel and behave in sex and relationships – what is healthy and normal?, desensitisation, negative impact on beliefs and values – i.e. around gender and race, in viewing women purely as sexual objects etc*



Online Sexual Content & Pornography



- ❑ *We need to be able to have these discussions with our children and young people as unfortunately research shows more and more teens are being exposed to sexual content and even pornography at younger ages. They need context to be able to put the content they see into perspective and understand it does not always depict realistic, safe and healthy sexual relationships or attainable beauty standards.*
- ❑ *We also need to challenge the misogyny and racism that sadly can be perpetuated through some pornographic content. Young men may feel inadequate and ashamed when comparing themselves to pornographic portrayals of male sexual performance, whilst young women may feel pressured into engaging in sexual acts they are uncomfortable with or feeling their bodies do not compare with those online.*
- ❑ *Ensure children and young people feel able to come to you or another trusted adult for advice and support if they have seen something confusing and / or upsetting online. Ensure they know how to report inappropriate content or unsolicited sexual content and regularly monitor and review your parental controls etc.*

"learning sex from pornography is like learning how to drive from The Fast and the Furious. A terrible idea".

*Jameela
Jamil*



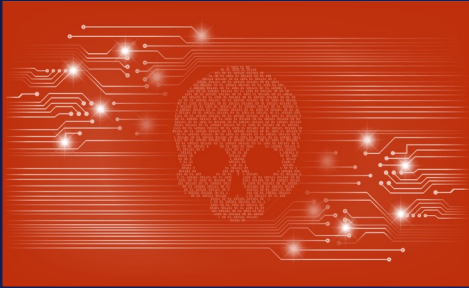


Sexting / “Send Nudes”



- ❑ *Sexting can take multiple forms from sexually explicit conversations to sending/receiving images/videos of a sexual nature.*
- ❑ *Risks of unsolicited sexual/graphic images – sending and / or receiving*
- ❑ *The rise in popularity and the mainstreaming of online sex work via ‘camming’ or ‘webcamming’ and sites like ‘only fans’ is a concern for young people who may be influenced by celebrities and influencers without understanding all of the factors and risks in the decision to participate in this kind of work*
- ❑ *Revenge porn has become more of a problem as social media has become more widespread – i.e. the sharing of privately shared nude images or sexual content widely after a relationship breakdown*
- ❑ *Talk to your young people about this topic, offer resources that help them understand the risks and how to mitigate them, as well as how to seek help if being pressured, coerced or finding their content has been shared without their consent – different apps and websites will have their own reporting procedures and your child’s school , college or FE institution should have their own guidance/policies and procedures to support you as a family in such an event*

Digital Security and Illegal Activities



Digital Piracy

Digital piracy is the illegal downloading of copyrighted content such as music, tv shows, movies, audiobooks and so on via file sharing software/sites.

Risks include possibility of legal action, viruses, trojan horses etc.



Hacking

Hacking is risk that goes both ways – many neurodivergent young people are technologically talented and there have been several high profile cases of autistic hackers



Phishing

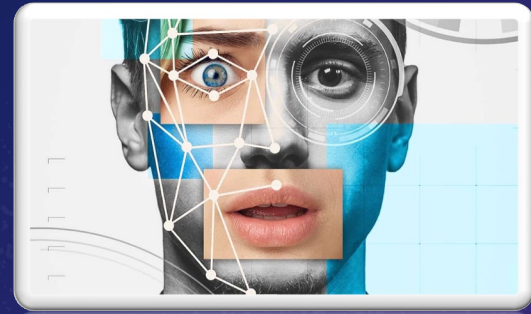
Phishing is the practice of sending fraudulent communications that appear to come from a legitimate and reputable source, usually through email and text messaging. The attacker's goal is to steal money, gain access to sensitive data and login information, or to install malware on the victim's device.



Misinformation/ Fake News

It is more important than ever to teach young people to develop and use critical thinking skills, particularly online.

We have easier access for people to share content, and sources are often not fact checked or trustworthy, people also tend to read headlines without digesting or analysing all the content and information gets reposted widely without verification



Deepfakes or Synthetic Reality

A deepfake or synthetic reality is where digital content is tampered with, such as a video of a person in which their face or body has been digitally altered so that they appear to be someone else, typically used maliciously or to spread false information.

Unfortunately, these are becoming more prevalent and better quality .

Make your child aware of deepfakes and educate the family on indicators that content is altered.





Artificial Intelligence (AI)



- ❑ AI is a developing technology that is now in an unprecedented growth era
- ❑ This raises concerns for humanity, globally as a whole as governments, authorities and organisations scramble to keep up with advancing technology
- ❑ For your young people, main concerns may be utilising AI such as ChatGPT to obtain information without factchecking the results, plagiarizing work or content created by AI which can lead to disciplinary action by educational establishments, employers etc.
- ❑ Another concern could be distinguishing 'relationships' or conversations with online AI chat bots as different to reality. This can be a route to scam or exploit for via bot farms, or even where the site is legitimate there are reports of people growing overly attached to the time they spend with specific AI profiles, affecting their desire to socialize with other humans



03


Cyberbullying





What is Cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is the repetitive and intentional hurting of a person or group of people that happens online.

- Unlike face to face bullying, cyberbullying can be pervasive – affecting young people at home, school, even on holiday and can happen at any time of the day or night*
 - It can be hugely public – sometimes being shared with large groups of people online*
 - It can sometimes be difficult to identify a cyberbully due to the anonymity the internet can provide*
- 

What's that?

Trolling:

posting or commenting online to deliberately upset others. Trolling can lead to a pile on, when others join in the attack.

Flaming:

also known as roasting, is the act of posting insults, often including profanity or other offensive language, on the internet.

Keyboard warrior:

a person who makes abusive or aggressive posts on the internet, typically one who conceals their true identity.



The impact of Cyberbullying



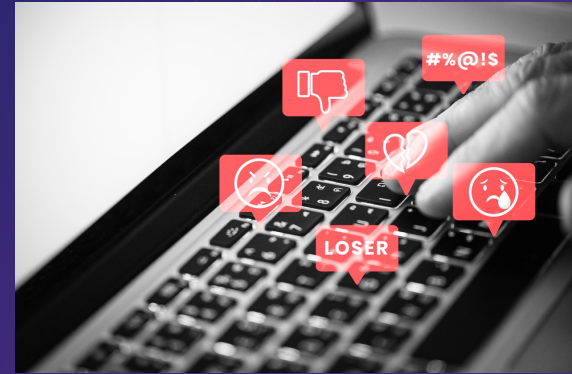
Cyberbullying can have a huge impact on a child or young person in several ways.

- Mentally & Emotionally – experiencing a range of emotions such as shame, guilt, fear or anger*
- Physically – the stress cyberbullying can cause can have real physical impact such as difficulty sleeping, headaches, stomach problems*
- Socially – they may become withdrawn and isolated, or avoid things they once enjoyed*



What to do if I suspect my child is being cyberbullied....

- Encourage your child to save the evidence and show you
- Don't deny access to technology
- Tell your child not to reply/retaliate:
A lot of bullies are looking for a reaction – the bigger the better, ignoring them can defuse the situation in some cases
- Report, block and take a screenshot
- Speak to the school or college



What to do if I suspect my child is participating in bullying others online

It can be just as devastating to find out your child has been engaging in bullying others in any way, including online. Here are some tips for how to respond:-

- Acknowledge the reality
- Stay calm
- Communicate openly
- Look for underlying drivers / circumstances
- Find out as much as you can about the bullying to help you navigate the situation and respond appropriately – investigate the extent
- Reinforce right and wrong behaviour and how bullying impacts others
- Seek support if needed/available i.e. from your child's school for example



Online Targeting



Doxxing

Doxxing is the intentional publishing/sharing of someone's personal details online such as name, address, telephone number, place of work and so on, often in an attempt to rally others to harass and bully the person in question on a mass scale

Swatting

Swatting is the false reporting of a crime at someone's location in an attempt to cause trauma or harm via law enforcement agencies





04

Grooming / Exploitation / Radicalisation




Trigger warning

Abuse, grooming, sexual abuse



Grooming / Exploitation / Abuse

- ❑ Unfortunately grooming, sexual abuse and financial exploitation are huge concerns in the online space, for adults of all ages and abilities but even more so for vulnerable children with additional needs
 - ❑ As a parent there are things you can do to mitigate the risk
 - ❑ You should also be aware of the warning signs that your child may be experiencing grooming or abuse
 - ❑ If you are worried your child may be experiencing grooming or exploitation you can find more information and support on the CEOP website, which also has a portal to report this and get help
 - ❑ If you find confirmation your child has been sexually exploited do not delete anything but report it immediately – any screenshots, images etc. are valuable evidence
 - ❑ Always ensure your child knows no matter what has happened they are not to blame, that they should not feel guilty or ashamed and that they will not be punished or made to feel stupid
- 

Extremism

An increasing area of concern is children and young people being drawn into extremist views/ideologies or actions online. This can be direct or indirect and we know that for some neurodivergent people there is overlap in the characteristics of their condition and the vulnerability factors linked to extremism.

There are ways to get support if you are concerned your child may be developing radicalized views, such as contacting your child's school or social worker.



Managing Friend / Message requests / Online Interactions

Friend and / or message requests or public comments can happen in a number of ways online such as via:

- *Social media – i.e. facebook friend request, direct message request on Instagram ‘sliding into DMs’,*
- *Websites – this could be a blog, content sharing site*
- *Vlogs – either on your child’s vlog if they have one or in the comments of one they watch/subscribe to*
- *Livestreams – again on your child’s livestream or on a shared event such a football livestream etc.*
- *In games – multiplayer online games such as Roblox can be particularly problematic*

Teach your child to be vigilant when chatting to others online – think about critical questions such as:–

- *Do they know them personally?*
- *Do they have shared friends?*
- *Does their profile look real or fake?*
- *How old are they?*
- *Why do they want to talk to you?*

What is ‘Catfishing’?

Catfishing is the creation of a ‘fake’ profile or persona online, or the impersonation of another person – maybe someone you know or a celebrity.

This can be used to groom and exploit people. Always be aware of the possibility of catfishing.

Support the concept with visuals

WHAT TO DO IF I RECEIVE A FRIEND
REQUEST/MESSAGE FROM SOMEONE I
DON'T KNOW/RECOGNISE?

ACCEPT REQUEST

REJECT REQUEST

TELL A TRUSTED ADULT



05

Social Media Use



The average child posts around **26**
times a day on social
media BUT only **6** out of
10 followers are real friends*

Social Media Platforms



Discord



instagram



Snapchat



Youtube



Facebook /
Messenger



TWITCH



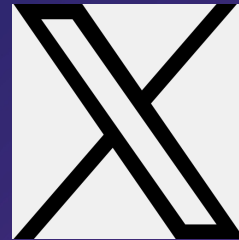
Whatsapp



tumblr



Reddit



X (was
Twitter)



Tiktok



Linked in





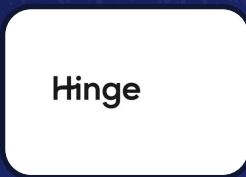
Dating / “Hookup” Apps



Tinder



Bumble



Hinge



Match.com



Plenty of Fish



Grindr

Reinforce with your child concepts such as how to set up a bio safely, which apps are best for specific things that the principles of dating on or offline are the same – honesty, empathy, respect, consent etc.

Meeting IRL (in real life)

Your child/young person may have developed friendships, connections or relationships online they wish to bring into the ‘real world’.

Help them do this safely with key rules:

- Discuss with/inform a trusted adult*
- Take someone with you*
- Meet in a public place*
- Never meet a stranger in secret*

Discuss beforehand what they will do if something doesn't feel right.



Pressures /Dangers of Social Media

- ❑ *Comparison, Self esteem, Body positivity, perfectionism*
- ❑ *Feeling lonely and isolated when seeing other peers' meetings/gatherings/groups etc.*
- ❑ *When monitoring be aware of the possibility of fake or 'alt' accounts – i.e. young people having one 'airbrushed' profile for parental purposes then a hidden second account such as a 'Finsta'*
- ❑ *Viral trends – tide pod challenge etc.*
- ❑ *Influencers who are not qualified or are spreading harmful information – the 'wellness industry' undoubtedly has its positives but it can be harmful when uneducated or dishonest people gather a following – the latest crisis is a spate of wellness vloggers/content creators suggesting that sunscreen is harmful and that it is marketed purely for profit which flies in the face of scientific evidence carries real risks to those who may believe such information. Belle – cancer?*
- ❑ *The echo chamber effect – alpha male podcasts for example*
- ❑ *Cancel culture – unfortunately culturally we seem to be more and more unforgiving and cancel culture is an increasing problem, meaning what we say and do online can come back to bite us*



Selfies

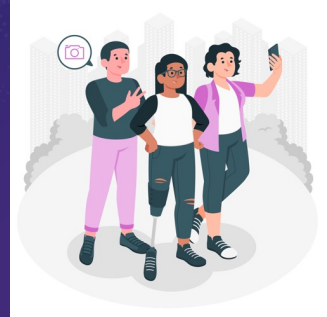


Getting the perfect 'selfie' can seem like this generation's quest for the holy grail

In and of itself taking selfies here and there isn't necessarily a bad thing

However there can be concerns:

- ❑ Comparisons with others and unrealistic expectations
- ❑ Hyperfocus on getting the perfect shot
- ❑ Missing your life by always viewing it from behind a camera
- ❑ Feeling like you are always presenting a filtered curated version of yourself
- ❑ Physical safety – unfortunately, people have been injured or even lost their lives while focused on taking the perfect selfie, so ensuring your teens/young people are aware of this risk and the need to remain aware of their surroundings and not endanger themselves for a photograph is vital, main causes of selfie linked injuries and deaths including falling from heights, transport related fatalities and drowning



Trigger warning

Self harm, suicidal ideation, suicide



What if my child has concerns about a peer?



- ❑ If your child has concerns about a friend or acquaintance online for any reason, such as they appear to be experiencing cyberbullying it may help them to know that :
 - ❑ The most important thing is to be there for them.
 - ❑ Make sure they know that they've got a friend and that they can come to you for support.
 - ❑ *Advise your child to encourage them to speak to an adult about what's been happening, or show them how to use the report and block buttons to stop any further contact.*

- ❑ If there is reference or inference to Self Harm / Suicide they need to know who to approach for support – this could be a parent/carer, teacher, emergency services etc.

- ❑ It is vital you support them if someone they follow online has displayed worrying behaviour *as your teen may be very concerned and upset , even if they do not know them personally*





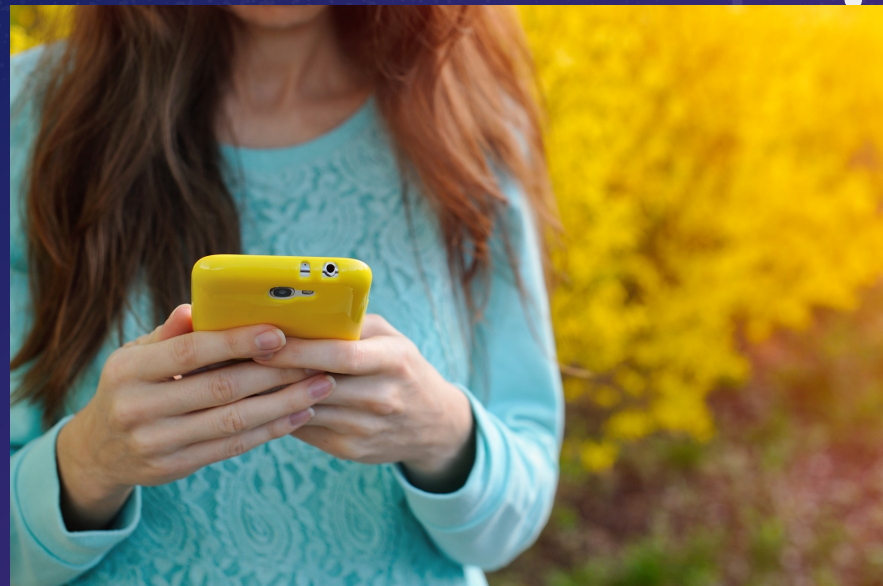
**Model healthy behaviour
by asking your child's
permission to share - and
respecting their answer**

"Sharenting"

**REMEMBER –
PROFILE PICTURES
ARE PUBLIC!**



- ❑ We may spend a lot of time worrying about what our kids are getting up to online, but we also need to be careful in what we share
- ❑ Striking a balance between sharing our lives and proud moments and respecting our children's privacy is essential. Technology has advanced so much in the last decade or two that this generation will be the first whose lives will have been lived entirely online – meaning there is no instruction manual for us as parents either in how much to share, when and with who.
- ❑ Being vigilant about our friends lists, privacy settings and any identifying features in our photographs

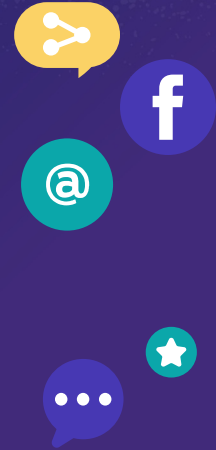


**REMEMBER TO ALWAYS GET PERMISSION FROM OTHER
PARENTS/CARERS' IF SHARING GROUP SHOTS FROM SCHOOL SPORTS
DAYS, PARTIES , TRIPS ETC.**





06 Setting Healthy Boundaries





Supervision and Boundaries

- ❑ *Shared computers in 'high traffic areas' may work for some families whilst for others individual devices are preferred – in which case set rules about access to their device, agreed check ins / monitoring arrangements etc. – be honest and upfront about this with them*
- ❑ *Agreed rules about access to personal devices such as phone, laptop, tablet – Childnet and NSPCC both have 'family agreement' template tools*
- ❑ *Parental controls are available on different devices, via your internet service provider (ISP) and often in different software and apps too – utilize them*
- ❑ *Set protected times for internet/device use – with healthy limits, consider dedicated times for accessing for work/education and separate times for socializing, gaming etc.*
- ❑ *Tech free times and zones – i.e. protected tech free mealtimes or rooms within the home*
- ❑ *Use visuals to reinforce the rules*
- ❑ *Wifi access can be limited, or devices can be off limits at bedtime*

Model healthy habits

- ❑ *Have whole family 'digital detoxes' when you can*
- ❑ *Respect the agreed rules of tech free spaces and times unless an emergency*
- ❑ *Follow internet safety guidance yourself – it's not just young people at risk online*



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