

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr
Bridgend County Borough Council

**Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Addysg, Blynyddoedd Cynnar
a Phobl Ifanc**

Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate

Supporting children with online safety



Agenda

- **Mobile apps:** categories of apps and age-restriction
- **Child development and maturity:** are children ready for social media and over-aged apps?
- **Monitoring apps:** mobile apps to be aware of, emerging technology, restriction and configuration of devices
- **WhatsApp:** what parents and carers need to know, risks and advice
- **School Health Research Network (SHRN):** Digital and social media concerns for primary-aged children
- **Reporting and Removal:** tools to share with children
- **How can families support children:** Family Agreement

Objective

Make parents and carers aware of the online risks posed by social media in-appropriate (and over-aged) mobile apps.

Intended outcomes

Parents and carers are provided with a better understanding in respect of:

- the types of mobile apps children are using;
- mobile apps to be aware of and those that pose risks;
- mobile app age-restriction settings;
- encouraging thinking – are children ready for social media and over-aged apps;
- encouraging thinking around the use of WhatsApp;
- the concerns for Bridgend children who are engaged in in-appropriate online behaviour; and
- how to report and remove harmful content.
- family agreement to build trust and promote online good habits



Mobile app categories and mobile app age-restriction



Mobile app categories

Lifestyle Apps enhance daily life through apps focused on health, fitness, travel, finance, and hobbies, streamlining and improving various lifestyle aspects.

Social Media Apps connect, share, and communicate virtually, fostering online communities and relationships through platforms for updates and conversations.

Utility Apps provide practical tools for specific tasks, offering efficiency and convenience in areas such as calculators, weather updates, torches and QR code scanners.

Games/Entertainment Apps provide interactive and enjoyable content for leisure, including video games, multimedia streaming, and other forms of digital entertainment.

Productivity Apps boost efficiency and organisation with tools for note-taking, project management, document editing, and time tracking in both personal and professional contexts.

News/Information Apps deliver up-to-date content, including news articles and videos, offering a digital source for staying informed and customisable content preferences.

Educational Apps are designed to facilitate learning and skill development in various subjects and disciplines. These apps often provide interactive lessons, quizzes, and resources, catering to users of different ages and levels of expertise

Mobile app categories

We (as parents and carers) must be mindful of and understand that **Lifestyle Apps, Social Media Apps, Games & Entertainment Apps, News & Information Apps** will be those that can be potentially dangerous for children.

These category of apps will expose children to:

- inappropriate content;
- compromise their privacy;
- lead to excessive screen time;
- learned-bad habits;
- connect children with strangers (including other children, older children and adults); and
- provide features that can be used for cyberbullying.

It is critically important that children are using age-appropriate mobile apps, those that are suitable for their development and maturity.

Mobile app age restriction – Why are there age limits imposed on mobile apps?

What are the age restrictions on social media?



13	13+	16	18
Facebook Twitter Instagram Snapchat TikTok Kik Ask.fm Houseparty Periscope Tumblr Reddit Pinterest	Whatsapp YouTube WeChat Whisper Yubo  (13+ means with parental consent)	LinkedIn 	Tinder Bumble 

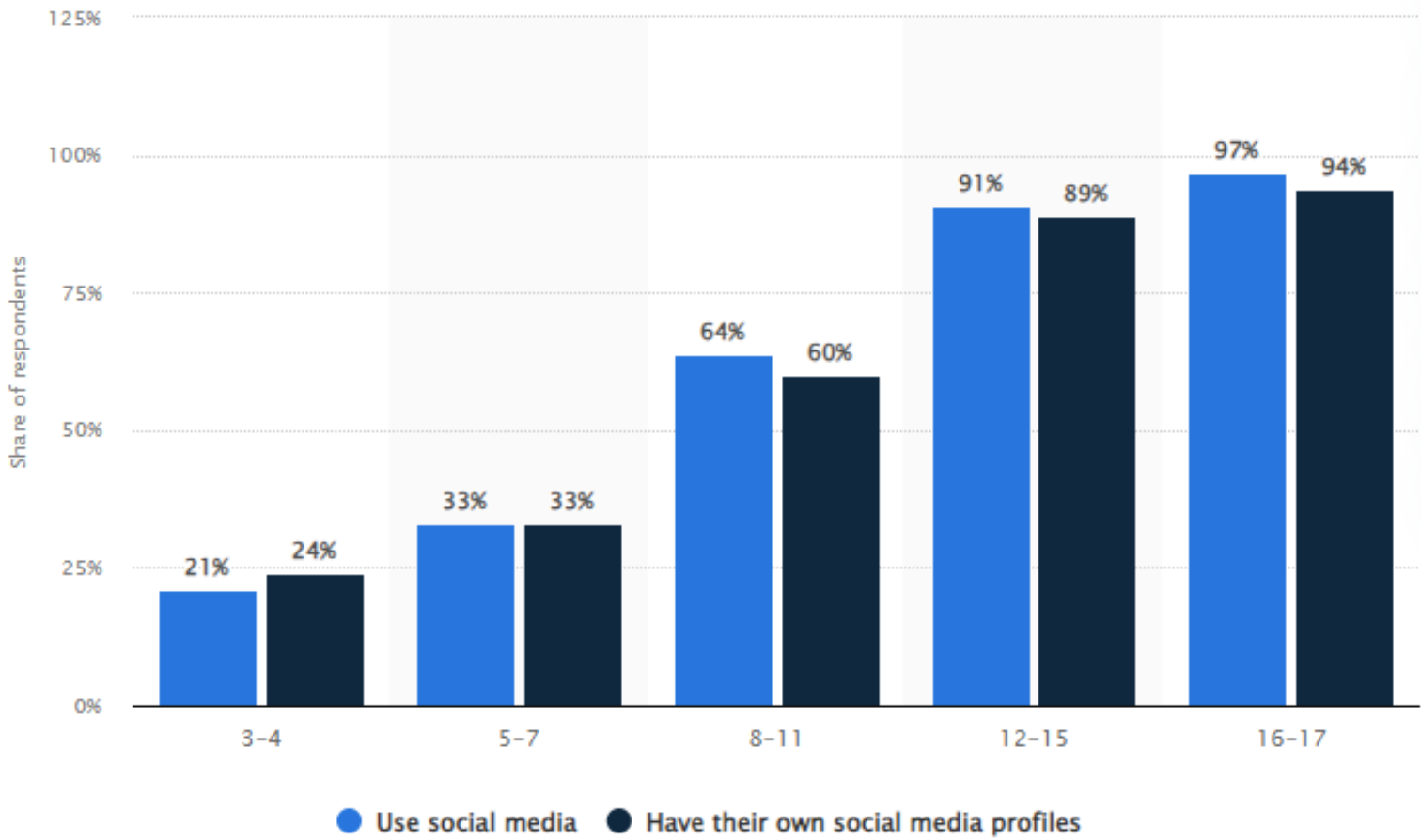


The primary reason – age requirements are there because of data protection laws.

Online services are not allowed to collect or store children's personal information, if they are under the age of 13 without parental consent.

Data protection laws also say that only children aged 13 and over can sign up to some online services without parental permission.

<https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/articles/is-my-child-ready-for-social-media>



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[Additional Information](#)

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Age Restriction: consequences of age falsifying

- algorithms deliver age-related content and online content can be inappropriate;
- online platforms can absolve themselves of responsibility for users falsifying age or fraudulent sign up of apps;
- younger users are subject to cyberbullying and online harassment (and often do not recognise it);
- the permanence of the decisions young people make on social media (digital footprint, damaging future prospects/opportunities);
- unrealistic expectations (for things that are seen, read, heard, experienced);
- development of addiction and unhealthy lifestyle (FOMO);
- underage communication with older users and strangers; and
- younger users are more likely to give away personal details.

Development and maturity



Development and maturity – is your child ready?

Here are some things to think about, with your child, when making the decision to allow them to use mobile apps and social media.

What are their social skills like?

- Children who struggle with social interaction offline, may find online friendships difficult.
- Online interactions have few visual cues, so it can be difficult to tell if something is inappropriate.
- Children who struggle with self-regulation or peer pressure, and boundaries of what is acceptable behaviour may not be ready for social media.

How do they deal with negative experiences?

- Children will see or experience things they don't want to on social media, including embarrassing pictures, mean comments, inappropriate content, pornography, self-harm, risk-taking (copy-cat), disturbing news and influential behaviour.
- How will they deal with these negative experiences? Can your child critically evaluate what they see and take a safe course of action?

Will they come to you if they need help?

- Can you come to an agreement with your child about mobile apps use – *screen time, type of content, age-appropriate only, supervised use of over-aged apps (YouTube), device location at night, what does unsupervised device time look like?*
- Can you supervise and monitor their online activity – in person or remotely (with monitoring apps and restrictions)?
- Can they come to you if they are ever worried about something they have experienced on social media?
- What trust protocols are in place for reporting?



Nude image of you online?
We can help take it down.



A National
Crime Agency
command

Development and maturity – are we (parents) ready?

Here are some things to think about, with your child, when making the decision to allow them to use mobile apps and social media.

Find out about the social media site or mobile app.

- Before you or your child sign up to a social media account, make sure you check it out, including the age requirements, and are you aware of any potential risks?
- Research the mobile app – use ‘App Guide For Families’ (See Roblox)
<https://hwb.gov.wales/keeping-safe-online/in-the-know/>

Take time to be proactive.

- Be prepared to spend time with your child online.
- The safest way to introduce them to social media, is to find a site or app you can use together.
- Build trust by being online with your child, take an interest in what they are experiencing and how they behave when engaged.

Get to know your child's friends, both online and offline.

- Be sure you know who they are digitally interacting with online.
- Be ready to reinforce any rules or boundaries when needed and communicate with other parents within those online friendship groups.

Be a great role model.

- Children learn from those around them, so what *you do on mobile apps and social media* will influence their online behaviour.
- Make sure your social media accounts are a good example to your child by taking some time to check your friendships, privacy settings and the things you have posted.
- Set examples for your child with your own screen time use.
- Set examples for behaviour – you could ask your child's permission to post pictures of them on your account, to encourage them to do the same with others.

Understand monitoring and restriction technology.

- Can you maximise software restriction settings on a device?
- Can you impose age-appropriate app download settings, restrict in-app content, set screen time limits, link your device and accounts to your child's device and accounts?



Mobile apps to be aware of



SNAPCHAT



Snapchat is one of the most popular apps. Promises disappearing photos, videos and stories but doesn't prevent screenshots. Snap Map can let others know your location.

TIKTOK



TikTok is a very popular app. Used for sharing short videos with very limited privacy controls. Users are vulnerable to explicit material.

DISCORD



Discord is a messaging platform for kids to hang out and talk about gaming. Features chat rooms, direct messaging, voice chat and video calls. Can expose kids to inappropriate or explicit content.

ROBLOX



Roblox is an online gaming platform that has a chat function. Underage users have reported solititation from sexual predators.

LIVEME



LiveMe is a live-streaming video app for users to share videos. Uses geolocation so a broadcaster's exact location can be seen by users. Users can earn "coins" to "pay" minors for photos.

OMEGLE



Omegle is an online chat site that does not require registration. Users can chat anonymously via video, private chat, or group chat. Child pornography has been an issue with this site.

CALCULATOR%



Calculator% can hide photos, videos, files, and browser history. Only one of several secret apps used for this purpose.

MEETME



MeetMe is a dating social media app. Allows users to connect with others based on geographic proximity. Users are encouraged to meet in person.

YUBO



Yubo is a popular app among teens. Called "Tinder for teens" it is designed to allow teens to flirt with each other. Has been frequented by sexual predators.

WHATSAPP



WhatsApp is a messaging app where users can send texts, photos, voicemail, make calls, and video chat worldwide. Uses an internet connection and can track location if enabled.

KIK MESSENGER



Kik Messenger allows anyone to contact an direct message a child. Kids can bypass traditional text messaging features. Kik gives users unlimited access to anyone, anywhere, anytime and doesn't track phone numbers of users.

BADOO



Badoo is a dating and social networking app to chat, share photos and videos, and connect based on location. Intended for adults, teens have been known to create profiles.

ASK.FM



ASK.fm is known for cyber bullying. Users are encouraged to allow anonymous people to ask them questions.

SKOUT



Skout is a location-based dating app and website. Users under 17 are unable to share private photos, however kids can easily falsify their age.

YIKYAK



YikYak is an anonymous chatting app that lets users within a five-mile radius read publicly posted messages. Known to be a breeding ground for bullying and promotion of sexual assault and violence.

YARN



Yarn is a reading app that tells stories via fake text messages. Topics can be scary or sexual in nature. Can also watch short videos or listen to audio.

MONKEY



Monkey is a video chatting and social media app that allows kids and teenagers to connect with strangers online. Has a video chat feature and duo chat feature. Actively pushes its users to record themselves live.

WHISPER



Whisper is an anonymous social network that promotes sharing secrets with strangers. User location is revealed so people can meet up.

BUMBLE



Bumble is a popular dating app similar to Tinder, however women are required to make the first contact. Kids have been known to create fake accounts and falsify their age.

HOOP



Hoop is an app that connects with Snapchat to allow users to "make new connections". Known as "Tinder meets Snapchat" Hoop allows kids as young as 12 to form connections with total strangers. Hoop claims users over 18 won't be shown kids' profiles.

App guides for families – <https://hwb.gov.wales/keeping-safe-online/in-the-know/>

Vault apps

Secret vault apps allow hidden storage of photos, videos, browsers and galleries away from the 'front screen' of a device (or smart phone).

The apps can be used to hide online activity.

Watch: [Calculator% Photo App - Social Media Safety Guide](#)



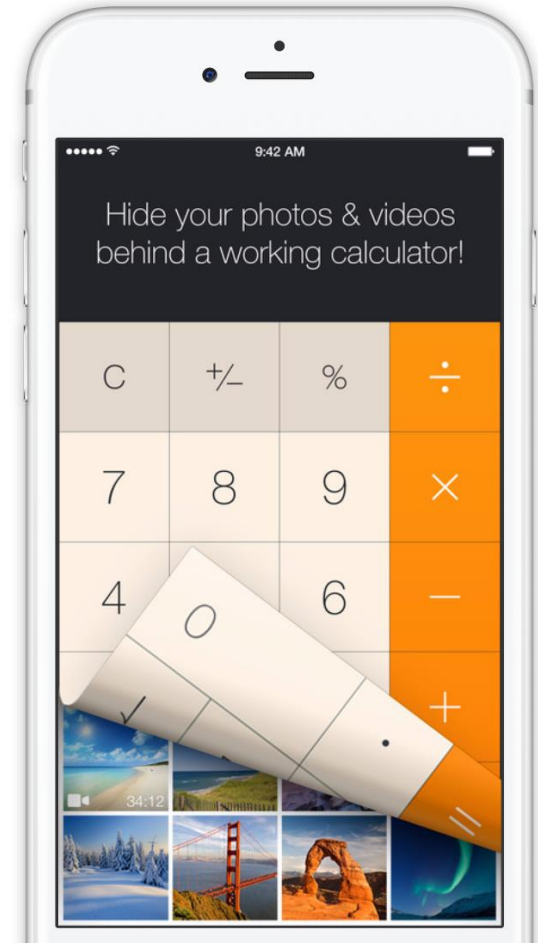
CalculatorPro: Photos Vault 4+

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Parents' Guide to **Confide**

By [Neilie Johnson](#), Common Sense Media Reviewer ⓘ

age 16+ ★★★★★

Privacy-focused messenger secure, but sketchy for kids.

App | [iPhone](#), [iPod Touch](#), [iPad](#), [Android](#) | [Free](#) | [Other](#)

[Add your rating](#)

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/app-reviews/confide>



What parents and carers need to know



WhatsApp – Should young children be using WhatsApp?

Child safety on WhatsApp

WhatsApp says the minimum age to use it is 13+, but younger children can still download it and use it with ease.



What's the problem?

- There's a risk of bullying, particularly in group chats;
- There's a risk of seeing content of a sexual nature, or showing violence and hatred;
- There's a threat to safety if your child shares their live location, particularly with people they don't know in person;
- They may receive spam or hoax messages;
- In group chats, any users who aren't in your child's contacts can see messages they post in the group, and your child will be able to see messages they post;
- Children can be added and removed as a form of exclusion and bullying; and
- Schools are dealing with incidents that happen outside of school time.
- Young children are not developmentally ready for unmonitored and unrestricted social media.



WhatsApp safety guide for parents



13+

WhatsApp's minimum age in the UK

58%

Kids aged 3-17 who use WhatsApp

37%

Kids under 13 who use WhatsApp



5 tips to keep kids safe on WhatsApp



1 **Review privacy settings** WhatsApp has a range of privacy and security settings to keep users safe. Customise groups, app access, live location and more.



2 **Customise contacts** Show your child how to report and block unwanted contacts. Then, work with them to add their friends and family. Review and talk about their contacts regularly.



3 **Talk about personal information** Make sure your child understands what personal information is. Talk about the importance of keeping that information private on WhatsApp.



4 **Show them where to get support** If something goes wrong or they see something worrying on WhatsApp, make sure they know to come to you, and talk about other sources of support.



5 **Check in regularly** Once you've done all of the above, check in with them regularly to review settings and how they use WhatsApp.

The risks

Unwanted contact

Pressure to respond

Location sharing

Inappropriate content

Cyberbullying

Oversharing

UK Online Safety Bill and The Office of Communications (Ofcom) regulator

- Latest research^[1] shows that the average age at which children first see online pornography is 13;
- A quarter come across it by age 11 (27%);
- One in ten as young as 9 (10%);
- Nearly 8 in 10 youngsters (79%) have encounter violent pornography depicting coercive, degrading or pain-inducing sex acts before turning 18;
- Under the Online Safety Act (passed 2023) social media must filter content by means of 'age assurance' – through age verification and age estimation;
- UK Online Safety Bill Will Mandate Dangerous Age Verification for Much of the internet;
- Future tighter legal controls will be introduced – self-declaration of age is no longer good enough;






<https://www.onlinesafetyalliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/whatsapp.pdf>

<https://www.onlinesafetyalliance.org/whatsapp-should-parents-be-concerned/>

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2023/implementing-the-online-safety-act-protecting-children>

WhatsApp
Parent / Carer Advice



What is WhatsApp?

WhatsApp is a free messaging app. It allows you to send text and multimedia messages (video, images and voice recordings) to people in the contact list on your phone. It also allows users to set up group chats where the administrators can invite up to 256 people to share messages and images publicly within the group. Although the age limit for WhatsApp was recently raised to 16 it is popular with primary age children and above. So what are the risks?

16

Reasons for concern

- Group administrators can invite people your child does not know into group chats. Some of these people may not have innocent intentions or may be older and post age-inappropriate messages.
- Some WhatsApp groups can contain images and messages which can cause distress to children. These might include violent images or videos, abusive messages and sexual content.
- Chain messages are often shared through WhatsApp. These pressure children to post them on to their contacts, e.g. by claiming that failure to do so can result in the child or a family member dying. Many children find such messages distressing but also feel they must share them with others due to fear of the threat.
- WhatsApp does not allow users to decide whether to join a group. Your child will be automatically added to any groups that their contacts add them to. If your child leaves the group the administrator can add them straight back in.
- Your child may be in WhatsApp groups in which huge numbers of posts are made. The alerts this generates can be an unnecessary distraction and can disrupt sleep.
- WhatsApp's default privacy settings are that anybody can see your child's profile photo and when they were last online.
- WhatsApp 'dare games' have become popular with children. These involve the child making a quiz about themselves to share with others and this can lead to oversharing of personal information which can be publicly available.
- Children can add and then remove other children from groups as a form of exclusion and bullying.

Safety Tips

- As with all Internet activity, talk to your child about how they use WhatsApp and any issues they have encountered.
- With your child, look through the groups they are members of and discuss any areas of concern you have. You may agree that it would be best to leave the group.
- Go to the settings (by pressing the three dots in the top right of the screen) and ensure your child's profile is set to 'contacts only'.
- To leave a group: Open the group in WhatsApp. Press the three dots in the top right of the screen and select 'Group Info'. Scroll down to 'Exit group'.
- If an admin adds your child back into a group they have left, your child can ask them not to do this. If they keep adding them then you can prevent it by blocking the admin. To do this, WhatsApp provide the following guidance:

1. Go to the group in WhatsApp, then tap or click the subject of the group.
2. Tap or click the phone number of the admin you wish to block.
3. If prompted, tap or click **Message (phone number)** or **Send Message**.
4. A blank chat with the admin will open up. Tap or click the phone number at the top.
5. Tap or click **Block** > **Block**.

OSA
Online Safety Alliance

www.onlinesafetyalliance.org
Online safety education for school staff, pupils and parents

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School Health Research Network (SHRN)

Digital and social media concerns for primary-aged children



School Health Research Network (SHRN)

- **Partnership:** A collaboration between Cardiff University, Welsh Government, and Public Health Wales.
- **Purpose:** To improve the health and well-being of young people through school-based research.
- **Scope:** Includes all maintained secondary schools and many primary schools in Wales.
- **Key Activity:** Conducts the Student Health and Well-being (SHW) survey every two years.
- **Focus Areas:** Mental health, physical activity, nutrition, substance use, sexual health, and social relationships.
- **Impact:** Data informs national policies and supports schools in health and curriculum improvement planning.

Social Media and Well-being: Exploring SHRN Data to Better Understand the Digital Lives of Children and Young People

The Rise of Social Media at Young Age

- Half of children aged 3-12 in the U.K. use social media despite the minimum age requirement of 13
 - Aged 3-7: 34%;
 - Aged 8-11: 63%;
 - Aged 12-17: > 90% (Ofcom, 2024)
- 99% of 12- to 15-year-olds are connected to the internet
- Nine in ten own a mobile phone before the age of 11
- 1 in 5 adolescents are on a social media platform “almost constantly”



Primary School Survey

Effects of Social Media Use & Online Communication

On Emotional Difficulties

	Model 1a		Model 1b	
	O.R.	S.E.	O.R.	S.E.
Grade	.94	.03	.94	.04
Gender - Girl	1.76***	.07	1.78***	.07
Gender - Other gender identity	4.03***	.56	4.05***	.56
Urban	1.14**	.06	1.15**	.06
Family affluence	.93***	.01	.93***	.01
Friendship quality	.94***	.01	.94***	.01
Social media use	1.09***	.01	1.08***	.01
Freq: Online communication	.95**	.01	-	-
Freq: Family			.97**	.01
Freq: Friends			.99	.01

On Behavioral Difficulties

	Model 1a		Model 1b	
	O.R.	S.E.	O.R.	S.E.
Grade	.99	.05	.99	.05
Gender - Girl	.62***	.03	.62***	.03
Gender - Other gender identity	1.85***	.29	1.86***	.29
Urban	1.20**	.08	1.20**	.08
Family affluence	.91***	.01	.91***	.01
Friendship quality	.93***	.01	.93***	.01
Social media use	1.20***	.02	1.20***	.02
Freq: Online communication	.97	.02	-	-
Freq: Family			.96*	.01
Freq: Friends			1.02	.02

Scores above '1' suggest a positive association for emotional and behavioural difficulties (that is, poorer outcomes)

Comparisons between primary and secondary learners

- Social media use is negatively associated with mental health among both secondary (11–16) and primary school (7–11) students.
- Online communication is positively associated with mental health:
 - Friend interactions benefit secondary school students.
 - Family interactions benefit primary school students.
- The negative impact of social media on mental health is stronger for girls than boys in both primary and secondary school students.

Possible Actions

- **Strengthen digital literacy:** Educate students to engage in positive and supportive online interactions, promote responsible social media use, and encourage critical thinking about online content.
- **Encourage offline socialisation:** Perceived social support offline is negatively associated with social media addiction.
- **Support for girls' mental health:** Implement gender-sensitive mental health initiatives and counselling services to address the stronger negative impact on girls.

Primary school children's recommendations to schools and families

Recommendations – Schools & Families

Physical Activity

1. More variety in PE & after-school clubs
2. Utilise all resources available
3. Families to spend more time together physically active in the local area

Social media

1. Self-discipline not to use inappropriate apps

2. More restrictions from parents
3. Education for parents on enforcing restrictions and increasing knowledge of use and harms

Sleep

1. Children to stick to a routine

In summary:

Children perceive support from **teachers/parents = role models** can help them combat screen time addiction, online behaviours and reduction in social media use.

How can families support children?



Family agreement

A great way to start positive family conversations around safe and responsible internet use, and to agree clear expectations and boundaries.

Things to consider

Getting started

- What do we enjoy doing online?
- What apps, games and websites do we use the most?
- What devices, tech, toys or games do we have with internet access?
- Do we already have any rules about use of tech we want to include in our family agreement?

Managing time online

- How long do we spend on our devices?
- How does it feel when we use tech for too long?
- How do we know when our screen use is interfering with family life?
- What can we do to help avoid overusing tech?

Sharing

- What is or isn't okay to share online?
- What should we check before posting images and videos online?
- How do we keep personal information belonging to ourselves and others safe?
- Do we need a family email address to use when signing up to new accounts?
- Do we know how to use privacy settings and strong passwords, and why these are important?
- How can we use features like livestreaming and disappearing content safely?

Online content

- What can we do if we see something online which seems unreliable or untrustworthy?
- When is it okay to download files, games or apps, or click on a link?
- Do we know what the age requirements, or ratings, on the games and apps we use mean?
- Do we need any restrictions on making in-game or in-app purchases?
- Which websites are okay for us to use?

Use the questions below to help guide your conversations, focusing on those most relevant for your family.

Turn over the page for a template where you can record your agreements and expectations in writing.

Communicating online

- Who can we talk/chat/play games with online? Do we only know them online, or offline too?
- How can we keep ourselves safe when communicating with people who we only know online?
- How can we be a good friend when we are online?

If things go wrong

- What can we do if we feel uncomfortable or upset by anything we see or hear online?
- What should we do if someone we only know online asks us for photos, to meet up, or to share personal information?
- Do we know where the report and block buttons are online?

To finish...

- How could parental controls help our family?
- What will happen if one of us breaks the family agreement?
- When should we review our family agreement?

Once you've talked about your family's use of technology and the internet, think about what simple steps you can take going forward. We've given some examples for different ages below...

We agree to... (Under 11s)

I will use my tablet for ____ mins a day.

I will make sure the children's favourite games are bookmarked for them to get to easily.

Who is responsible for this?

Hannah and Izzy

Nan

We agree to... (Pre-teens)

I will tell mum and dad when I see something that worries me.

I will put parental controls in place but review it as the children grow up.

Who is responsible for this?

Tom, Ella and Yasmin

Mum

We agree to... (Teenagers)

I will make sure all my social networking sites are private.

I won't post photos of our children without their permission.

Who is responsible for this?

Amar and Yusuf

Dad

Family agreement

Use this template to put your agreement down in writing. Why not display it somewhere at home like on the fridge or a noticeboard?

Who is this agreement for?

Top tips

- 1 Make sure that both adults and young people are open to changing their online behaviour as a result of your agreement.
- 2 Consider your tone. Are you focusing on negative behaviour or promoting positive behaviour?
- 3 Make sure your agreement works for your whole family and everyone is happy with it.
- 4 Review your agreement in the future to make sure it reflects the current needs and ages of your family.

We agree to...

E.g. Be kind and respectful online.

Who is responsible for this?

E.g. We will all make sure we only post kind comments.

What happens if someone doesn't follow the agreement?

How long will our agreement last for and when will we review it?

Signatures

Think critically and question:

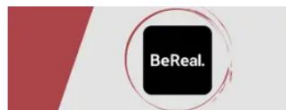
- What apps is your child using?
- Are the apps suitable for your child (age and developmentally)?
- What is your child doing in the apps?
- What is your child seeing and experiencing inside the apps?
- Who is your child communicating with?
- Why does your child want to be online?
- How much screen time is beneficial to your child's health and wellbeing?
- Monitor and build trust, but always maintain a healthy suspicion!

Hwb Keeping safe online

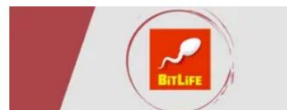
The latest news, guidance, resources and training to help you, your school and your family stay safe, secure and smart online.

App guides for families

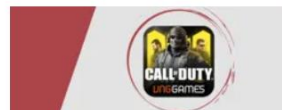
<https://hwb.gov.wales/keeping-safe-online/in-the-know/>



BeReal



BitLife



Call of Duty: Mobile



ChatGPT



Ask.fm

For further support contact:

Mat Jones

Swyddog Arweiniol Digidol (Cymorth Ysgol)

Digital Lead Officer (School Support)

Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Addysg, Blynyddoedd Cynnar a Phobl Ifanc

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