

Supporting Young People's Wellbeing Online

Melanie Clarke – Trainer

Jonah Sharma – Youth Ambassador

www.charliewaller.org





About us

Charlie Waller was a dynamic, funny, kind and successful young man, with a close and loving family. To the outside world, he had everything to live for. Yet in 1997, at the age of 28, Charlie died by suicide. He was suffering from depression.

In response to this tragedy, his family founded the Charlie Waller Trust, to open up the conversation around depression initially, and to ensure that young people are able to understand and look after their mental health and to spot the signs in others.

Charlie sits at the heart of our story, our vision and our purpose.



Let us introduce ourselves...

Melanie Clarke

Charlie Waller: Mental
Health Trainer

Former senior leader in
education for over 13 years

Safeguarding Lead for multi-
academy trust

Jonah Sharma

Youth Ambassador at CWT

Based in Manchester

Social media user for about 10
years!



Before we begin...

- This webinar is being recorded. Links to the recording and slides will be sent to everyone who registered for today's session.
- Personal experiences and contributions should be treated confidentially.
- Respect different perspectives and experiences.
- Sensitive issues may be discussed. Please take care of your own wellbeing and participate in a way that feels right for you.
- Be aware of where to access support.



You are **NOT** to
blame!



Quick quiz



What percentage of adults believe that social media is a BAD thing overall?

A: 12%

B: 22%

C: 32%

D: 42%

Age of Adult — % who think social media is a bad thing overall

18–24

24%

25–34

31%

35–44

25%

45–54

30%

55–64

37%

65+

38%

([More in Common, 2024](#))

Quick quiz



What percentage of adults think social media has had a negative impact on the lives of children under the age of 15?

A: 39%

B: 49%

C: 59%

D: 69%

Age of Adult — % who think social media has a negative impact

18–24

67%

25–34

63%

35–44

60%

45–54

69%

55–64

71%

65+

79%

([More in Common, 2024](#))

Teenagers struck by depression 'epidemic'



Teenagers struck by depression 'epidemic'

Third of middle-class girls suffering distress

Oliver Wright Policy Editor

The number of middle-class teenage girls suffering from anxiety or depression has surged in the past decade with more than a third now experiencing symptoms of "psychological distress".

A government study into the mental wellbeing of 30,000 teenagers, seen by *The Times*, found that girls were more than twice as likely as boys to suffer symptoms of mental ill health.

The proportion of girls with anxiety or depression has risen by 10 per cent in a decade. Those from more affluent and better-educated families had worse symptoms than those from less-advantaged backgrounds.

Experts said that the study provided the clearest evidence yet of a "slow-growing epidemic" of mental health issues in schools and called for a new strategy to reverse the trend. Some blamed the proliferation of social media in the past ten years, which prevents young people from "switching off" from the pressures of school and made them more insecure.

Others suggested that the global recession had put more pressure on young people to achieve, while reducing their confidence that they could control their own destinies.

The study, which was undertaken by the Department for Education and was one of the largest of its kind, involved in-depth interviews with thousands of

THE TIMES

Monday August 22 2016 | thetimes.co.uk | No 7595

Max 26C min 5C

SOUVENIR SPECIAL Olympics

Golden memories of Team GB and Rio 16-page pullout

Social media blamed for surge in teenage depression

Continued from page 1

most struck by the rise in depression and anxiety among the cohort, who will continue to be studied as they finish their education. "While girls were already displaying greater levels of psychological distress than boys in 2005," they wrote, "it is striking that their situation worsened between 2005-14".

The report also highlighted class distinctions. "There may be some ways in which having lower social status may be associated with lower levels of expectation for school success and lower levels of associated pressure," it said. "Another possible explanation is that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may be more resilient in the face of [stress factors] associated with a more challenging economic and school environment."

Last year *The Times* published its

Analysis

Life appears much better for today's teenagers than for those born only a decade earlier (Nicola Woolcock writes).

Teenage pregnancy rates, smoking and drinking are down. More than ever are going to university. However, it may be this lack of risky behaviour and an innate ease with technology that is fuelling some mental health problems.

While no one would argue that heavy drinking and smoking or multiple sexual partners are good for mental health, they provided an outlet and a form of rebellion for previous generations.

If slip-ups for their parents were confined to lazy memories, now everything is recorded on social media.

Plus today's serious generation is working harder than ever at schools — particularly girls.

Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, a professor of cognitive neuroscience, told *The Times*: "It has been argued that risk-taking, in particular, is an important evolutionary behaviour."

Now, with all the pressure that comes with everything being recorded for posterity, something has to give — and that is often mental health.

Time to Mind manifesto, calling for an immediate "state of the nation" study to be carried out to see how many children were suffering psychological problems and of what kind. It also sought investment in early intervention services.

Marjorie Wallace, chief executive of the mental health charity Sane, said that the charity had been contacted by head teachers worried about their schools. "There definitely does seem to be something happening — it's a slow-growing epidemic," she said. "Over the period covered by the report we have seen a very disturbing change in admissions to hospital for self-harm in under-16s that have gone up by 52 per cent."

A government spokesman said: "We are putting a record £1.4 billion into transforming the dedicated mental health support to young people."

Leading article, page 27

The Times,
August 2016
The first national
headline linking
social media use to
teenage depression

Social media is doing very bad things to young people's mental health, experts warn



Jasper Hamill Thursday 20 Sep 2018 2:19 pm



50
SHARES

Social media is having a 'negative' effect on young people's mental health, according to new research by the Centre for Mental Health.

The charity has published a briefing paper which called for urgent research to help young men and women 'navigate the challenges of 21st century life'.

The report comes in the wake of research by Ofcom and the Information Commissioner's Office which found that 45% of UK adults had experienced some form of online harm.



Are sites like Facebook or Twitter making the younger generation anxious and unhappy? (Photo: Getty)

The Centre for Mental Health paper said: 'Evidence about the roles social media play in relation to our mental health is still emerging.'



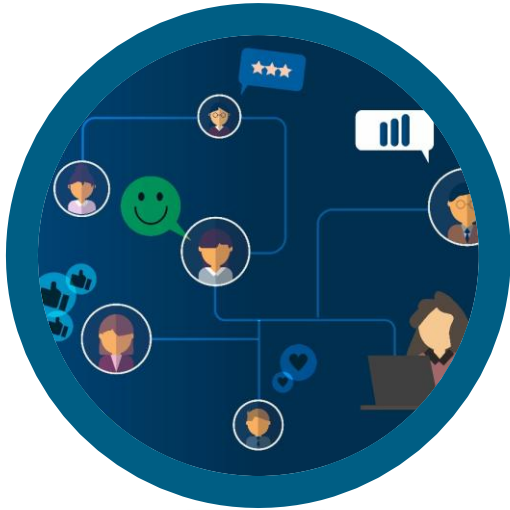
Home > News > World Happiness Report 2026 shows a complex global picture of social media and happiness

19 March 2026

World Happiness Report 2026 shows a complex global picture of social media and happiness



Opportunities and threats



Social media: benefits for connection

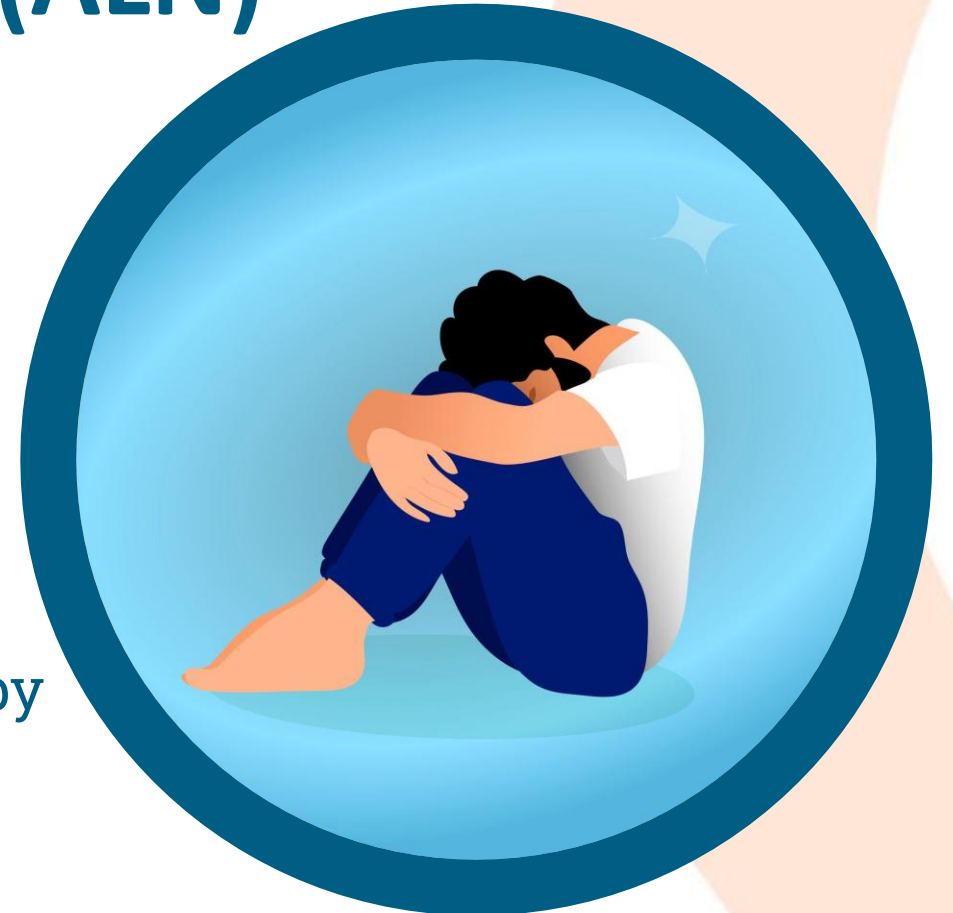
- Broaden connection and understanding of the world
- Removing boundaries to develop connections
- Strengthen relationships
- A place to seek support
- Campaigning for social good
([Internet Matters, 2024](#))



Social media and young people with additional learning needs (ALN)

- Online socialising is asynchronous
- Physical distance reduce concerns about negative judgements
- For young people with ALN, asynchronous communication can reduce anxiety by allowing time to process information and consider responses.
- This can reduce feelings of stigmatisation, by allowing them to draw attention to their strengths and avoid negative attention

(Bannon et al., 2015; Astleitner & Schlick, 2025)



Social media and personality development

“The ease with which possible identities can be crafted online may fragment adolescents' personalities”. However, a counter argument is that experimenting with an online personal identity, young people “...can validate their identities against a vastly expanded social sounding board” which can help them formulate and develop their identity.

(Valkenburg & Peter, 2011, p.123)

There are reported health benefits of social media too including social connection, identity formation and support (particularly for marginalised groups). (Nagata et al., 2025)



Social Media - we are all different!



- Most studies which explore the link between social media use (SMU) and self-esteem have found weak or inconsistent results
- Viable hypotheses for these mixed findings is that the effect of SMU differs from adolescent to adolescent, and depends on how positive the content they post.
- **88%** - no or very small effects
- **8%** - negative effects
- **4%** - positive effects

([Valkenburg et al, 2021](#); [Bij de Vaate et al., 2023](#))



Social media: positives for mental health



Young people suggest social media reduces stress, allows for social connectivity, provided information about mental health and allows for peer-to-peer support.

(O'Reilly et al., 2023)



Social media: negatives for mental health



However, social media has also been associated with high rates of:

- Depression and anxiety
([Nagata et al., 2025](#))
- Eating disorders
([Mushtaq et al., 2023](#))
- Substance abuse
([Vannucci et al., 2020](#))
- Poor sleep
([Ahmed et al., 2024](#))



Social Media: further negatives

The introduction of Facebook led to increased use of mental healthcare services among students predicted to be most susceptible to mental illness.

Students were more likely to report experiencing impairments to academic performance resulting from poor mental health.

Facebook fosters unfavourable social comparisons
(Braghieri et al., 2022)



Technology: not all screen time is equal



Hours spent on social media and internet were more strongly associated with:

- Self-harm
- Depressive symptoms
- Low life satisfaction
- Low self-esteem

Compared with hours spent on gaming and TV use, particularly in girls.

(Twenge & Farley, 2021; Tormoen et al., 2023)



Technology: cyberbullying

- Increased risk of self-harm in individuals who are victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying. (Winstone et al., 2024)
- More than **50%** of middle school students witness cyberbullying. (Doumas and Midgett, 2020)
 - Witnessing cyberbullying is positively associated with depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Doumas & Midgett, 2023)



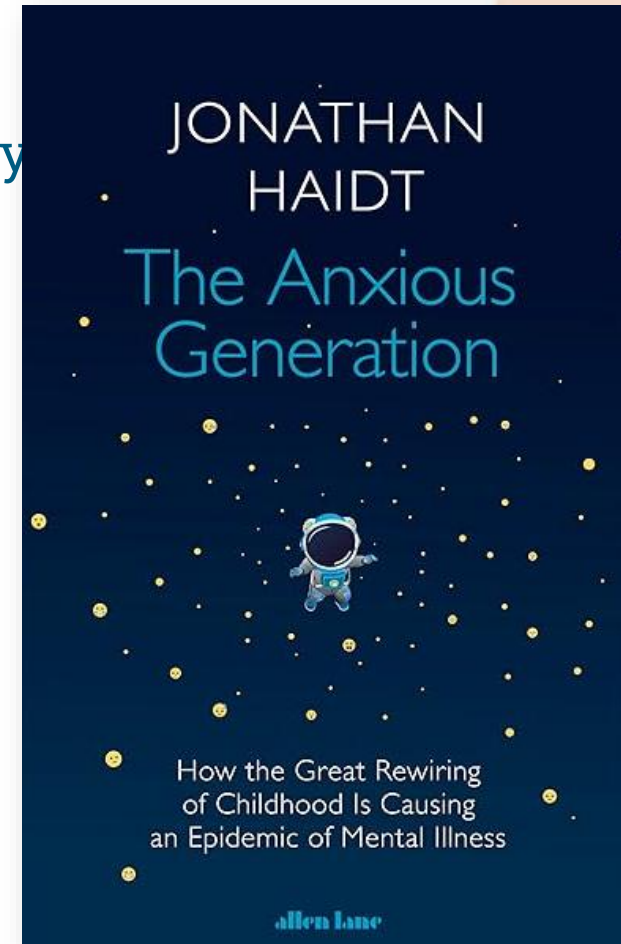
The 'great rewiring of childhood'

Gen Z: Born after 1995:

- Use of smartphones vs. flip phones in adolescence
- Rise in anxiety, depression and 'fragility' since early 2010

Impact of:

- Decline of play-based childhood
- Social media
- Increased screen time
- Cyberbullying
- Increased social comparison
- Sleep disruption
- Overprotection in 'real' life and under protection in 'online' life



Policy changes...

- Only as far back as 2019, research suggested that the association between digital technology use and adolescent wellbeing was negative but too small to warrant policy change. (Orben & Przybylski, 2019)
- From Spring 2027 (Gov.uk, 2026):
 - under 16s will no longer be able to use certain social media sites via their own accounts (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube).
 - high-risk interactive features in gaming (e.g., chat function with strangers) will be restricted for under-16s and turned off by default for 16/17 year olds.
 - default settings for social media for 16/17 year olds will involve midnight-6am “curfews” but these can be overridden by users as non-mandatory.



Technoference

“Technoference (technological-interference) refers to incidents in which technology use interferes with interpersonal exchanges”

(Zayia et al., 2021)



Quick quiz



What percentage of adults spend far too much/a bit too much time on their phones?

A: 28%

B: 38%

C: 48%

D: 58%

Age of Adult — % spend far too much/bit too much time on phones

18–24

68%

25–34

81%

35–44

69%

45–54

63%

55–64

49%

65+

34%

([More in Common, 2024](#))

Technoference's impact on child development



Parent/carer technology use was associated with:

- Poorer cognition, prosocial behaviour and attachment
- And higher levels of internalising problems (e.g. negative feelings), externalising problems (e.g. behaviour that challenges) and screen time.

Worth noting, effect sizes were very small to small!! Parental and carer behaviour is as understandable as young person's behaviour – this is not about blame, and it is an opportunity to model behaviour we want to see.

(Toledo-Vargas et al., 2025)



Technoference's impact on smartphone addiction



- Adolescents who perceived more **technoference** in parent-child relationships reported higher level of smartphone addiction.
([Shao et al., 2024](#))
- Again, this can't be interpreted as causal but is interesting information for us to be aware of to shape our decision-making.



Technoference and working from home after hours

Adolescents aged 15-18 years old reported lower self-esteem, life satisfaction and higher level of internalised and externalised symptoms if their fathers worked after hours.

They reported just increased externalised symptoms if their mother's worked after hours.

(Rodrigue et al., 2026)



Phubbing (phone snubbing) and smartphone addiction



“Phubbing can be described as an individual looking at his or her mobile phone during a conversation with other individuals, dealing with the mobile phone and escaping from interpersonal communication.”

There is a bidirectional relationship between parental phubbing and adolescent loneliness.

(Wang et al., 2025)



Nomophobia

NO MOBILE PHONE PHOBIA

Term used to describe a fear of being detached from mobile phone connectivity.

(Bhattacharya et al., 2019)



Quick quiz



What percentage of adolescents have 'problematic' smartphone use?

A: 28%

B: 37%

C: 48%

D: 57%

Technology: 'addiction'

- A University of Cambridge survey of 7000 young people from the 'Millennium Cohort Study' asked about their use of technology.
- **48%** agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *"I think I am addicted to social media"*.
A higher proportion of girls (**57%**) agreed compared to boys (**37%**).

([Turner et al., Astle, 2023](#))



Addiction: different substances

- Alcohol use disorder in adolescents
5-6%
- Cannabis dependence in adolescents
12-14%
(Hutchinson et al., 2020)

Hutchinson, D., Teague, S., Champion, K., et al. (2020) Alcohol in adolescence. In Adolescent Addiction (Second Edition) Epidemiology, Assessment and Treatment, Pages 45-109. Academic Press.



Mobile phones: mood, sleep and stress



- Intense or frequent mobile phone use is associated with depressive symptoms. (World Happiness Report, 2026)
- Mobile phone use at bedtime may be associated with sleep problems including shorter sleep duration and lower sleep quality. (Thomée, 2018)
- High levels of mobile phone use in adolescents is associated with increased stress (higher cortisol awakening response) and inflammation (higher levels of interleukin IL-6). (Afifi et al., 2018)



Mobile phones: sleep, stress and health



Blue light is now understood not to disturb sleep as much as we used to think; it is now understood that phones before bed may be unhelpful more because they maintain distraction from sleep rather than the 'blue light keeping us up'. ([Bauducco et al., 2024](#))



Smartphone addiction scale (short version)



Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Weakly disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1 Missing planned work due to smartphone use	1	2	3	4	5	6
2 Having a hard time concentrating in class, while doing assignments, or while working due to smartphone use	1	2	3	4	5	6
3 Feeling pain in the wrists or at the back of the neck while using a smartphone	1	2	3	4	5	6
4 Won't be able to stand not having a smartphone	1	2	3	4	5	6
5 Feeling impatient and fretful when I am not holding my smartphone	1	2	3	4	5	6
6 Having my smartphone in my mind even when I am not using it	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 I will never give up using my smartphone even when my daily life is already greatly affected by it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8 Constantly checking my smartphone so as not to miss conversations between other people on Twitter or Facebook	1	2	3	4	5	6
9 Using my smartphone longer than I had intended	1	2	3	4	5	6
10 The people around me tell me that I use my smartphone too much.	1	2	3	4	5	6

(Kwon et al., 2013)

Mental Health Collaborative

Social media and mental health



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZfzafKFjs8>

How do **you** manage your time online?



Technology: alternatives

- Face to face interaction
- Talking
- Telling stories
- Playing board games
- Reading
- Sport and exercise
- Making and crafting
- Spending time outside
- **What do you do?**



Managing social media: What can help?

Actively comment and reply to others

- Looking at posts without engaging with them is linked to self-comparison and lower self-esteem.
- Passive scrolling removes the positive mood-boosting benefits that come from person-to-person interaction.
- Try to comment and reply with positive messages, which can help foster connectivity.

(Kaiser Permanente, 2021)



Managing social media: What can help?



Start using the 'unfollow' button

- Avoid 'toxic' social media accounts or individuals
- Make use of the 'unfollow' button is recommended if viewing their content triggers negative feelings.
([Kaiser Permanente, 2021](#))
- Now, some platforms have 'limiting' tools, such as restricting or muting an account so you don't see their posts and stories.



Managing social media: What can help?

Turn off push notifications

- Take control of your account and only check it when you feel like it.
- Turning off notifications is recommended as a healthy boundary to set with social media use.
- This may be particularly important if the person has been feeling lonely, anxious, or sad.

(Kaiser Permanente, 2023)



Managing smartphone 'addiction'



1. Set goals for smartphone use
2. Turn off smartphone at certain times of day
3. Don't take smartphone to bed
4. Replace smartphone use with other activities
5. Play "phone stack" when out with friends
6. Remove social media apps from phone
7. Set limits of phone checking
8. Accept 'fear of missing out' (FOMO)
(Robinson et al., 2021)



Ten tips for a digitally healthy household



1. The younger the child, the more support they'll need
2. Extra support may be needed at certain ages (e.g. 10-13 years)
3. Promote fun non-technological activities
4. Stay alert for any signs of inappropriate use of the digital world
5. Switch devices off at night and at least an hour before bedtime
6. Work out some rules together
7. ...and then respect the rules yourself!
8. Be aware of the positives and the negatives
9. Have a regular family digital detox
10. Aim for digital resilience



Practical strategies

Collective parental/carers action:

- Don't give smartphone until high school
- Delay opening social media accounts as long as possible
- Give children and young people far more time to play with each other
- Open dialogue
- Set good examples with our own tech use as adults

Encourage children and young people to:

- Learn from failure
- Balance their use of technology



Getting help for yourself

- If you're finding it hard to manage your smartphone and online activity by yourself, get support.
- Cognitive behavioural therapy can be helpful in stopping compulsive behaviours and developing more adaptive ways of coping with stress.



How can adults speak to young people about this? What doesn't work?



1. **One off lessons** on social media or that rely heavily on pre-made PowerPoint slides with little room for discussion
2. Talking about social media in a purely **negative or fear-based way**
3. Messaging that feels **patronising or like young people are being blamed**
4. "Just spend less time on your phone" without acknowledging how **unrealistic** that can be
5. Using **outdated examples or platforms** that young people no longer relate to
6. **Dismissing positive aspects** of social media (community, support, creativity)



How can adults speak to young people about this?



Possible topics to discuss

1. **Algorithm awareness** – Not just “what you see” but why you see it
2. **Comparison culture + identity** – Body image, lifestyle pressure, success etc.
3. **Private vs public accounts** – Finstas, close friends, etc.
4. **Online friendships + support networks** – Especially in terms of pros / cons on mental health
5. **Content fatigue / burnout** – Always being “on” and effects of social media on mood (not feeling fulfilled etc)



How can adults speak to young people about this?



Key takeaways from our Youth Ambassador!

1. **Short, more frequent and honest conversations** tend to be much more effective. Even brief check-ins or discussions can feel more meaningful when they're linked to what's happening in young people's lives at the time.
2. **Approach with curiosity and kindness.** It's not about blaming anything or anyone but learning how to navigate this part of a young person's life.
3. **It's okay to not have all the answers.** Sometimes the best thing you can do for your young people is hold your hands up and ask them to help teach you.
4. **Social media is not going away but it does have a place.** It's finding that balance between reality and how we use the internet for good.

Our obsession

Content warning: expletive toward end of the video

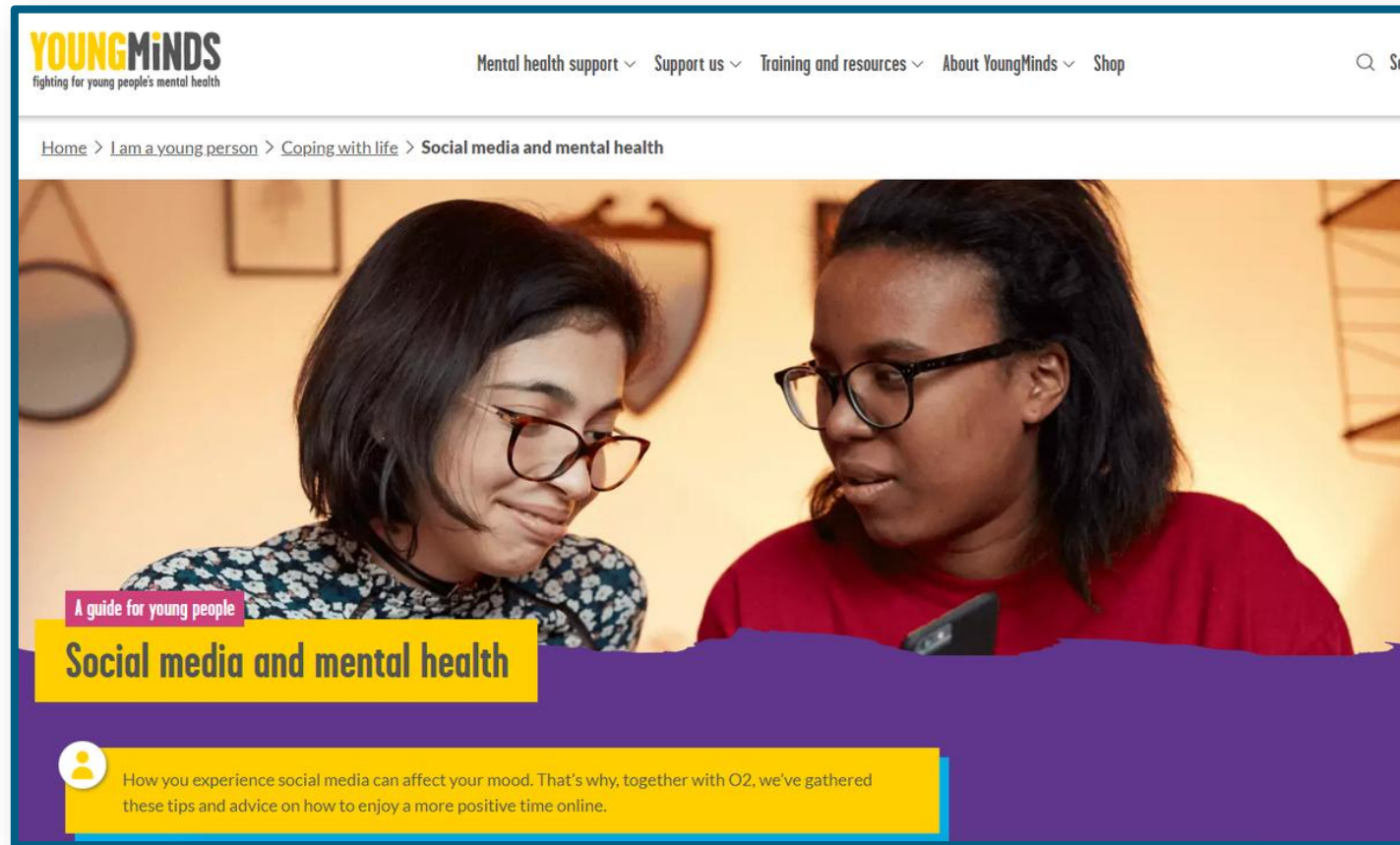


<https://vimeo.com/660684265/c2037d54e4>

You are **NOT** to
blame!



Other resources



<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/social-media-and-mental-health/>

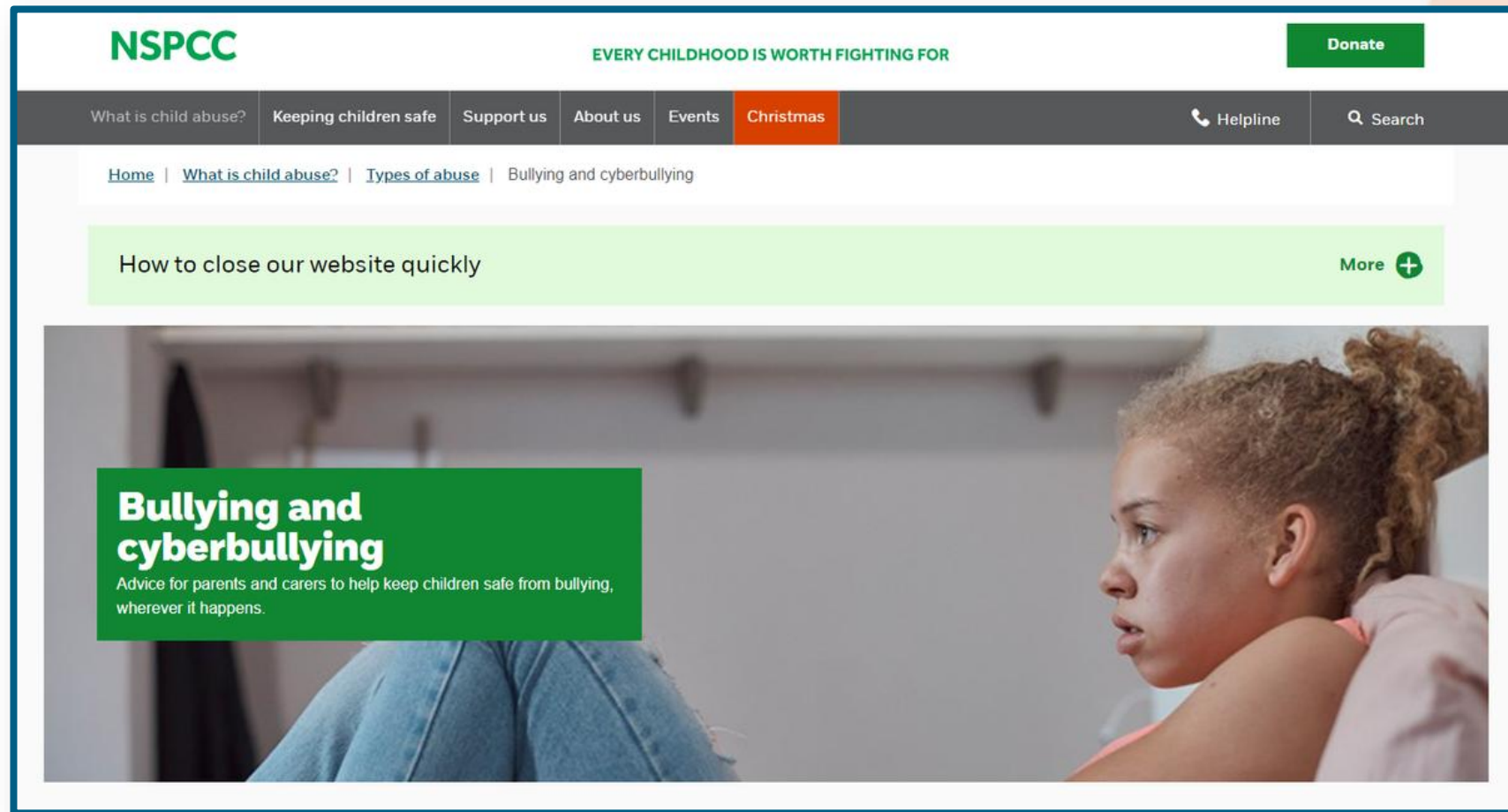
Other resources



<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/managing-social-media/>

October 2026 - Charlie Waller webinar: Supporting young people's wellbeing online

Other resources



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

Other resources

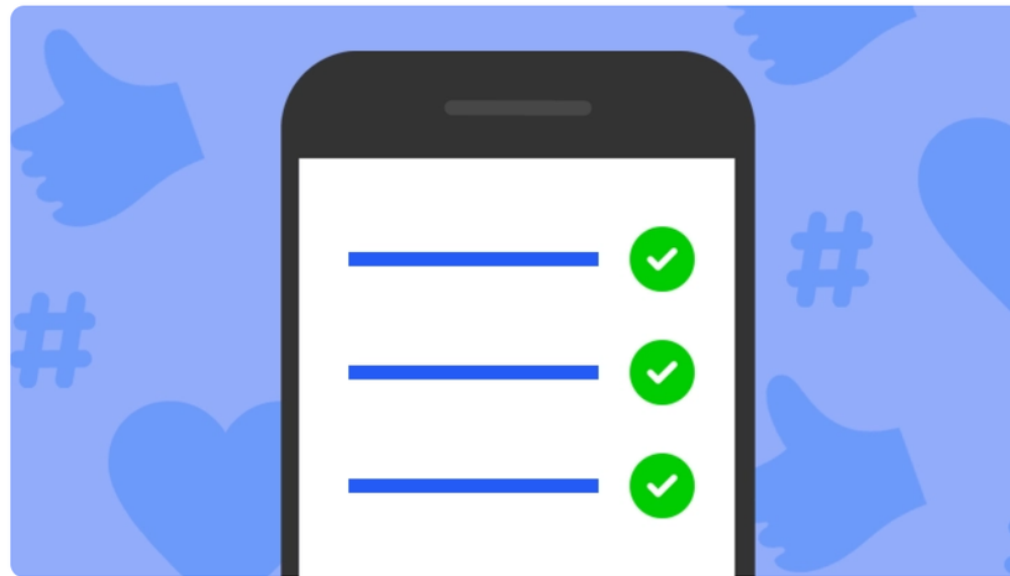


Because children deserve **a safe digital world**

Supervising teens' social media

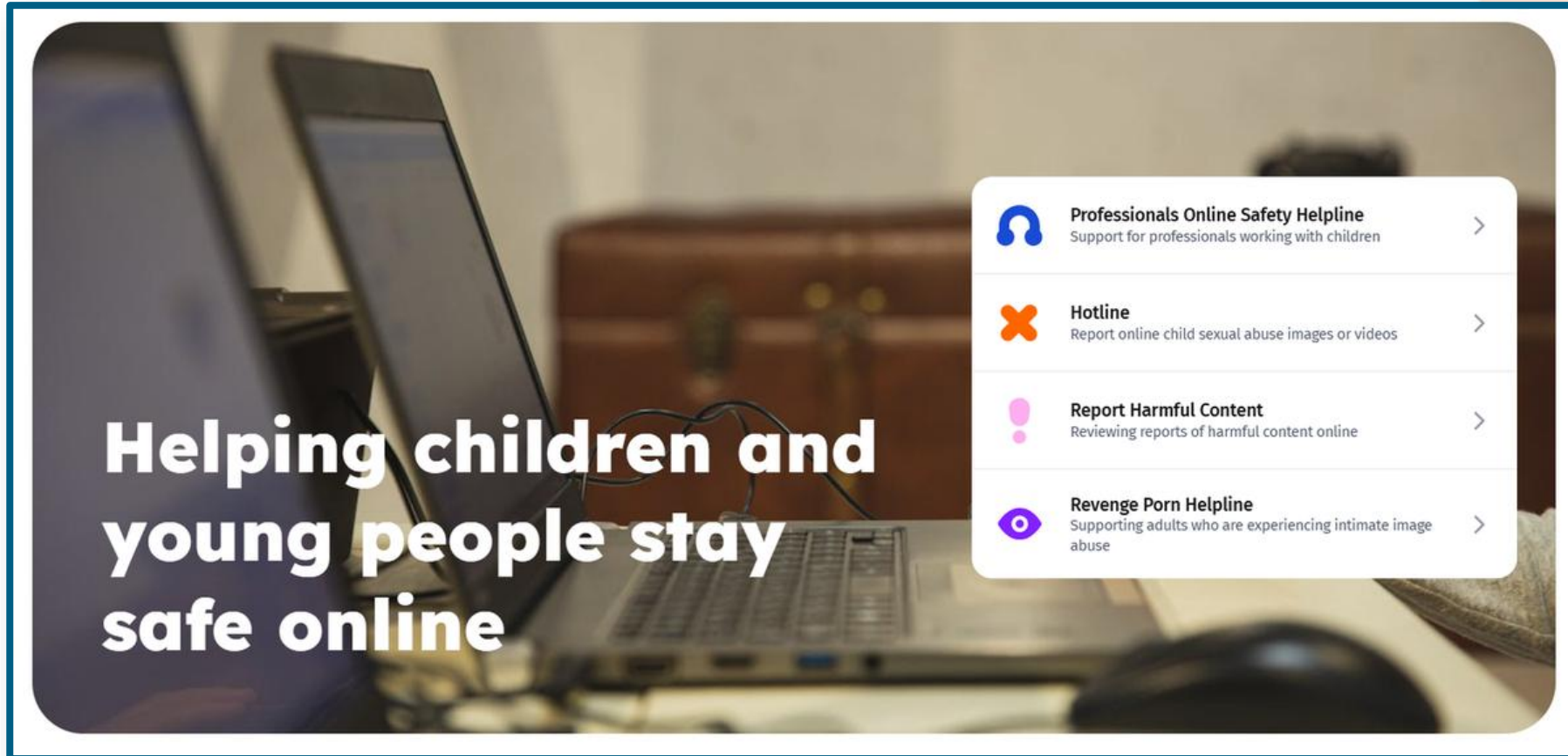
See what tools are currently available to help manage your teen's safety if they use social media.

EXPLORE TOOLS



<https://www.internetmatters.org/>

Other resources



<https://saferinternet.org.uk/>

Other resources



Empowered or overwhelmed?

The number of parental and empowerment tools is growing fast – but do they create a growing burden of complexity for parents?

[Read more](#)

<https://parentzone.org.uk/>

Recommendations



Age groups	Recommendations	
	American Academy of Pediatrics	World Health Organisation
0-24 months	≤18 months – no screen time except for video chatting 18–24 months – screen time still discouraged However, if introduced, avoidance of solo media use is recommended	No screen time
24 months – 5 years	≤1 hour/day limits, avoid solo media use	≤1 hour/day limits
> 5 years	Emphasis on the patterns of use	Recommendations on adequate sleep and physical activity, less than 2 hours of recreational screen time

(Puzio et al., 2022)

For parents on screen use

(Puzio et al., 2022)



1	No screen time below 2 years of age (unless video-chatting with relatives) Limited in preschool children
2	Focus on: daily routines, family activities, physical activity and adequate sleep quality and quantity
3	House ground rules: • family media plan and/or media use plan for individual members if needed • screen-free zones e.g. bedrooms, dining rooms • screen-free time during daytime • no screens one hour before bedtime
4	Use a reliable source of information such as Common Sense Media (available at: www.commonsensemedia.org) to search for valuable and innocuous programmes, applications, movies and games
5	Consistent parenting practices and parental involvement in screen time Co-watch, co-view and co-browse with children Reteach and talk about the content
6	Obtain information on parental control means and privacy settings Review privacy settings with your children
7	Encourage active, educational and social ways of media use, e.g. e-reading, content creation, interactions with peers and relatives Discourage passive use
8	Pay attention to oppositional behaviours and negative emotions as they may indicate that the child encounters problems online
9	Pay attention to the ergonomic use of devices: take breaks for physical activity, avoid prolonged sitting position, promote neutral position of spine, avoid neck flexion and provide rest to eyes
10	Replace fat and sugar rich snacks with vegetables and water Avoid meal-time screen use

Screen time individual plan for a 7-year-old

(Puzio et al., 2022)



Screen-free time	• On the street • Doing homework • At school (except when needed for studying) • Mealtime • Car travels (except when long) • 1 hour before bedtime • Conversation
Screen-free places	• Bedroom • Dining room
How do I use screen devices?	• Co-watching • Co-playing • Co-browsing • Video-chat with relatives and friends • Visiting websites that were parent-approved (educational, creative, age adequate)
What do I do instead of screen time?	• Reading • Sleeping • Meeting friends • Hobby • Board games • Sports • Taking a walk
Responsibility online	• I respect privacy of others and myself • I report to my parents whenever I encounter violent or inadequate content
Safety matters	• I do not give any personal data (ex. address, photos, telephone number) • I do not engage in new relations on line unless my parents agree to them
1 hour physical activity per day minimum 9 hours sleep per day minimum	

Support

GP

Hub of Hope

<https://hubofhope.co.uk>

YoungMinds

Text: YM to 85258

Online: youngminds.org

Samaritans

Call: 116 123

jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

The Mix

Call: 0808 808 4994

Text: THEMIX to 85258

CALM

www.thecalmzone.net

Anxiety UK

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Beat

www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk

Childline

Call: 0800 1111

Online: childline.org.uk

Self-help resources





Webinar feedback

Please let us know how we did and help us to plan future webinars by completing [this short survey](#)

Give us your feedback



More webinars

Supporting young people with perfectionism:

Practical strategies to build self-compassion, self-worth and wellbeing

Monday 19 October, 12.30pm - 1.30pm

Making Knowledge Matter: Research spotlight

Supporting youth mental health through soothing imagery

Thursday 5 November 12.30-13.30

Find out more at:

<https://charliewaller.org/mental-health-training-support/mental-health-webinars>

Watch previous webinars:

Sleep and mental health in young people

Supporting children's emotional wellbeing

Understanding and managing anxiety in children under 12



The Families Programme



Our work with parents and carers

Learn about our work with parents and carers

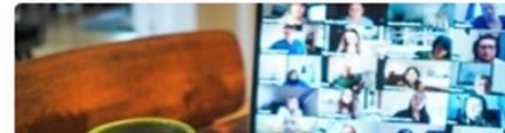
[Find out more](#)



Eating Disorder Carer Skills Workshops

If you're a parent or carer of a loved one with an eating disorder, come to our free workshops to learn vital support skills.

[Find out more](#)



Free Online webinars

We run live webinars for parents and carers

[Book your place](#)



Want to use your parenting skills to help others?

Train to become a parent and carer peer support (PCPS) worker with us!

[Find out more](#)



The PLACE network

Our network of parent and carer peer support support groups

[Find a parent/carers support group near you](#)



Parent Carer Peer Support

Want to know more about parent and carer peer support?

[Learn more](#)

The Charlie Waller Trust

We provide training and mental health resources for:



Learn more at charliewaller.org



Help us continue supporting young people



To donate £10 text
CWT to 70085



To donate online visit
charliewaller.org/donate



Make an
impact!





Help us continue supporting young people

Fundraising for us not only brings in money to help us continue our work – it also raises mental health awareness and what people can do to take care of their wellbeing.

Find out more:

charliewaller.org/get-involved



Get involved!





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