



# Safeguarding and Child Protection



March 2023 Newsletter

## Protecting children in a club, sport or other activity

It's important to look for a club, sport or activity that takes the safety and wellbeing of your child seriously. Always check whether the club or organisation is accredited or otherwise affiliated to a body (e.g. a sports governing body or national voluntary sector or [faith organisation](#)) as this should mean they have the right safeguarding policies and procedures in place.

Even if they're accredited, there are some key things to look for to ensure they take children's safety seriously:

- A [welfare or child protection officer](#) you can contact about safeguarding or with any concerns.
- Clear procedures and processes for raising **complaints and concerns**.
- **Written standards of good practice** – like a [code of conduct or code of behaviour](#). This should outline the boundaries that staff and volunteers should respect when working with children and young people and should address things like discrimination and bullying and social media behaviour.
- Effective **consent and emergency processes**. You should receive a form asking for your consent to the activity, for your contact details, and any relevant medical information about your child from the club or organisation.
- A **safe recruitment process** for staff and volunteers, including [vetting](#). This means they have appropriate references, criminal records checks and the right technical qualifications for the activity.
- Staff and volunteers are **trained in safeguarding** (child protection). NSPCC Learning provides [information and online courses](#) if you work with children.
- Children and young people are suitably supervised (based on their age, ability, the activity and venue) by adults who are trained to care for them.
- The activity takes place in a **safe environment** – and there are separate changing areas for children and adults.

## Worried about a Child?

If you're worried about a child or young person, you can contact the NSPCC Helpline for support and advice for free - call us on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000) or [contact us online](#).

Children can contact [Childline](#) on 0800 111 or online any time to get support themselves.

# Helping children and young people with MANAGING DEVICE STRESS AND ANXIETY

The internet and advances in the capability of digital devices have afforded us arguably the fastest period of technological and social evolution in living memory: creating opportunities for us to interact with people anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day. It's also, however, blurred safety boundaries and added new stresses for young people, who are often less aware of the hidden hazards. With almost half of 10-15-year-olds experiencing bullying online and algorithms pushing content in front of our children every day, it's important to know how to address some of these challenges.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### LIVING ONLINE

The internet is awash with sophisticated algorithms that learn from our online behaviour and try to predict our wants and needs. That's very helpful in some respects, but it can make the online world difficult for children and young people to negotiate. Content can be brought to them at any time – it may not always be appropriate, and children may not have the ability or the support to deal with it.

### PUSHY NOTIFICATIONS

Content is also directed at us through notifications from our apps: letting us know we have a new message or social post to read, for example. While that's useful in some circumstances, it conditions us to keep going back online (and is designed to do so) and can be a near-constant demand on your child's attention. As such alerts become more common, are we experiencing an 'attack of the pings'?

### BLURRED BOUNDARIES

There are now so many ways we can communicate online in real time (like instant messaging apps) or with a delay (such as on social media) that it's possible to be constantly in conversation. Young people often prefer quickfire exchanges of text – but using fewer words can cause distressing miscommunications through the lack of non-verbal cues like facial expressions or tone of voice.

### DIGITAL DEPENDENCY

As devices allow access to immediate external help in challenging situations, it's a concern that children may not be developing the inner confidence to work things out for themselves. Likewise, group membership is hugely important to young people – both in digital and 'real' life – and being excluded from online conversations can cause damaging feelings of loneliness and isolation.

### DISGUISED DISTRESS

Children often haven't yet developed the emotional resources to deal with many of the setbacks of everyday life, so identifying when it's specifically something online that's worried them can be tricky. A certain level of stress is a normal response to a problem: it spurs us into action to keep ourselves safe. If the stress is excessive, though, it can feel overwhelming and potentially lead to anxiety or depression.

### ANTI-SOCIAL SOCIALS

Social media can bring people together in hugely positive ways. Sadly, it does also have a darker side, including 'flame war' arguments which can escalate quickly and have hurtful consequences. With so many people looking on, 'group shaming' situations are also common – while there are continual opportunities for young people to compare themselves negatively with other social media users.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### LEARN THE BASICS

It's impossible to keep up with every online change or every new app. The best option is to make yourself aware of the fundamentals of how the internet operates, so you can help your child to grasp how – and why – content reaches them. Devices and the digital world can be confusing, so learning to understand them better will give you the confidence to talk to your child about them.

### TALK IT OUT

If a child mentions a comment that's been directed at them in a text chat or on social media, it may sound minor but can actually have a much bigger effect than we realise. In our evolved brains, any perceived threat can get internalised while our body reacts as if we were in physical danger – raising stress levels. It's always worth encouraging your child to get any concerns out in the open.

### PUSH DISTRACTIONS AWAY

Notifications to our phones and tablets can be helpful, but they sometimes make one wonder who's really in charge: the person or the device? Checking our phone as soon as it goes off is an easy habit to fall into – especially for young people. Try switching off non-essential alerts on your devices and encourage your child to do the same; you should both feel less triggered and more in control.

### LOOK FOR THE SIGNS

This is tricky – and may depend on the child's age – but any sudden change in behaviour is worth looking out for, if your child seems to be checking their phone or tablet more, doesn't want to be parted from them, or appears unusually secretive, anxious or withdrawn. It could be a sign that something is amiss in relation to their device – and, possibly, that they're in need of extra support.

### KEEP CHECKING IN

Healthy emotional regulation balances three systems: threat, drive and grounding. Down the various rabbit holes of the internet, however, that balance can easily slip away – so it's important to help your child manage their emotions when they're online. Check in with them regularly when they're on their device, and remember that 'distraction' and 'relaxation' aren't always the same thing.

### BE KIND: UNWIND

Be kind to yourselves as parents and carers. Remember that we're all in the same boat, trying to safely guide our children through this complex, fast-moving digital environment. Getting into the habit of having natural, relaxed conversations with your child about their online life (and yours) can level the playing field and make it far easier for them to open up to you about any concerns.

## Meet Our Expert

Dr Carole Fowler-Smith is an experienced counselling psychologist who specialises in promoting safe and ethical online communications. She consults with and often helps with training to businesses and organisations, supporting positive and effective online communications – often by considering some of the more hidden aspects of the virtual medium.



**NOS** National Online Safety  
#WakeUpWednesday