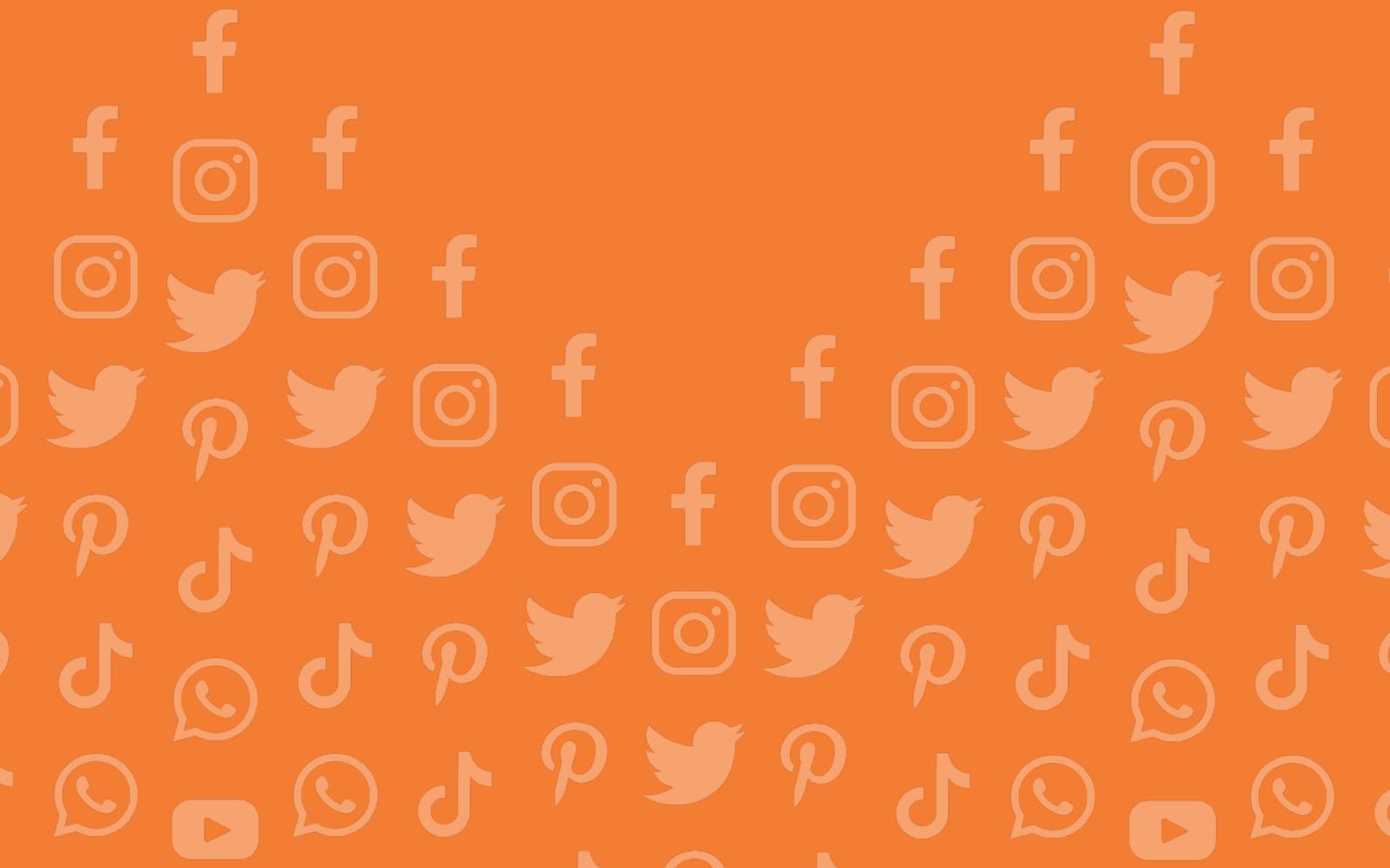


EMOTIONAL HEALTH & WELLBEING AND SOCIAL MEDIA

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS





Social media can be lots of fun, informative and engaging! During our research for the film, young people told us that....

- “It (Youtube) makes me laugh. If I’ve had a bad day it makes me feel better.”
- “It’s educational.”
- “There’s a positive side to social media - like the communities I can join.”
- “I can find like-minded people.”
- “It’s good for things like mental health/sexuality information.”
- “It’s useful for careers – watching inspirational people.”

63% of young people believe that social media is a good source of health information.

Many of you will have heard or read the negative headlines about social media. Some research suggests that social media is as addictive as tobacco and alcohol.

One study of more than 6,000 children aged 12 to 15 found those who used social media more heavily were more likely to report issues such as depression, anxiety and loneliness, as well as aggression and anti-social behaviour, than teenagers who did not use social media. Other studies suggest that girls are more susceptible than boys.

We know that 43% of young people changed their behaviour because of something they had seen on social media.

Every parent / carer wants to help their child navigate social media safely and positively. You might feel that young people know a lot more about the various platforms than you do. **So how do we work with our children to support healthy use of social media?** The following is drawn from recommendations with parents like yourself and young people alongside other research.



1. HAVE THE CONVERSATION

Make sure your child knows they can talk to you about any concerns they might have when using social media.



Asking questions and listening to their concerns is probably one of the most valuable thing we can do as parents. Below, you'll find our suggestions for some to areas to cover in a conversation with a child/young person.

Take into account their developmental stage: **this is an ongoing conversation so begin early if you can.** The parents we spoke to during our research all felt that this should be before they have a phone.

"If they are old enough to use a phone, they are old enough for the conversation."

However, **don't feel it's too late to start.**

Once you've had the conversation **set yourself a regular check in** - social media platforms change very quickly which is why you need to adapt what you discuss and keep the conversation going on this.



2. BE A ROLE MODEL

How 'attached' are you to your mobile?

Our research shows that **leading by example is key.** It is proven to make a difference – if they see you making conscious decisions about how you use social media it gives them more of a chance to learn how to navigate through it effectively themselves.

Try some of the suggested actions listed below yourself and talk about that experience with them.

TOPICS FOR YOUR CONVERSATION

Talk about both the positive and negative aspects of social media with them. Ask positive questions such as, e.g. What's your favourite part of social media? What do you get out of it? When you ask positive questions you're more likely to get valuable individual insight.

Talk about the pitfalls, the skills and tools they need to protect themselves.

Go through the various platforms available with your young person and ask questions about how and why they use them. Here are some examples of platforms young people told us about:



- Youtube (it's bigger than Facebook and influencers use this for posting content)
- Instagram
- Facebook
- WhatsApp



- Twitter
- Pinterest
- Reddit
- Snapchat
- LinkedIn
- TikTok

Remember social media is constantly evolving so ask which platforms are being used with your child. When they do use it, encourage them to ask themselves questions about what they are doing:

- Do I/you need to be looking at this right now?
- Can it wait?
- Do I/you need to be on it 24/7?
- Would I be happy walking about with what I've posted on a big placard for all the world to see?

Encourage them to reflect on these questions "How much do I share? What is personal? When I'm older will I mind everyone knowing this/seeing this? Am I ok with all my connections/friends? Am I the same person online as I am in the rest of my life?".

Is their automatic location device on? Ask them - is that a good idea?

Ask them if they know where they could go for advice if they feel unsafe online/who they could talk to? The film mentions www.Kooth.com, how do we know if it is a good site? Nearly 7 out of 10 young people report receiving support on social media during tough or challenging times.



Discuss how marketing works. Marketers work with sophisticated technologies using information from social media sites without your knowledge or permission. Companies use this to data to generate income. It's not always in their best interests. Young children (as young as 5) can work out what an advert is so encourage them to spot when they are being sold to and if that's what is right for them.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TOGETHER

- **Work out with your child how much time they spend on the internet per day.** Your phone often has this function built in or there's an app that can help you do this. Do it together and compare results – you might be surprised.
- **Suggest logging out times** – we all need downtime. Some phones can be programmed to switch off automatically at particular times. As the film suggests, getting off it two hours before bedtime can help.
- Choose to **block automatic ads** – talk about who is gaining from this.



- **Regularly help them to review their privacy settings** – show them how to use these and talk about what is private now and possibly in the future.
- **Make sure they know how to block** anyone they don't know on each site they use.
- **Check they aren't posting personal details** – phone numbers, addresses, locations, schools or clubs.
- **Check they are using strong passwords** – learn what a strong password is.
- Help them to **choose a time that they check social media** and **turn off notifications**, rather than checking every time they receive a notification.



Constantly checking for notifications or status updates is a negative action. As mentioned in the film, notifications are designed to trigger a small hit of dopamine and can be addictive. Such addiction is anxiety inducing for many people. If your child is struggling with this then here are our top tips.

TOP TIP 1: If you point out they have a problem with over use are they likely to become defensive. Our top tip is to avoid making statements or accusations – these don't encourage change. Instead show compassionate curiosity. Again, **ask positive questions**, e.g. What's your favourite part of social media? What do you get out of it? What do you think is too much to share?

TOP TIP 2: Can you **ask what's the problem they are trying to solve?** Is it boredom, is it that they want to be liked, become famous? What supports healthy wellbeing?

TOP TIP 3: Talk about how to make choices... sometimes waiting a bit, seeing how you feel and then responding if you feel it's really necessary can be effective.

TOP TIP 4: Ask how do they feel when they post images? What does it make you feel when you see perfect images of family life posted by friends/associates? There might be lots of common ground to talk about.

TOP TIP 5: Encourage them to **think about what would happen if they don't post** something – have they really missed out?

TOP TIP 6: Talk to them about breaking the habit. Recognise it is about motivation and making behavioural changes so discuss what might be their reward once they make those changes. We all respond to rewards.

TOP TIP 7: Do you really **believe that change is possible?** If you don't, then it won't happen. It requires a positive mindset to support your child with this. They are capable of change.

You're doing brilliantly if you're this far in with your child!

TOP TIP 8: Give change a chance - Because of the dopamine addiction breaking habits (learning to stop the constant checking and posting etc.) may put their body through discomfort. Missing that hit of dopamine may have a temporary adverse effect as their bodies don't receive the chemical reward. It will subside.

TOP TIP 9: Can you talk to them about when they have made changes to behaviours and how that worked? When the going gets tough or they experience a set-back **remind them** of those times and **that it's possible**. Brains like being reminded of positive actions – it helps to build behavioural change.

TOP TIP 10: Ask what they feel like when they post images? What does it make you feel when you see perfect images of family life posted by friends/associates? There might be lots of common ground to talk about.

TOP TIP 11: Discuss with friends/family ways to do this and enlist their help. Make it action orientated - so not focusing on problem but **focus on solutions/options**. You might find friends want to join in with having mobile free times/zones for example.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THESE WEBSITES



www.internetmatters.org/advice/14plus/resources-for-parents



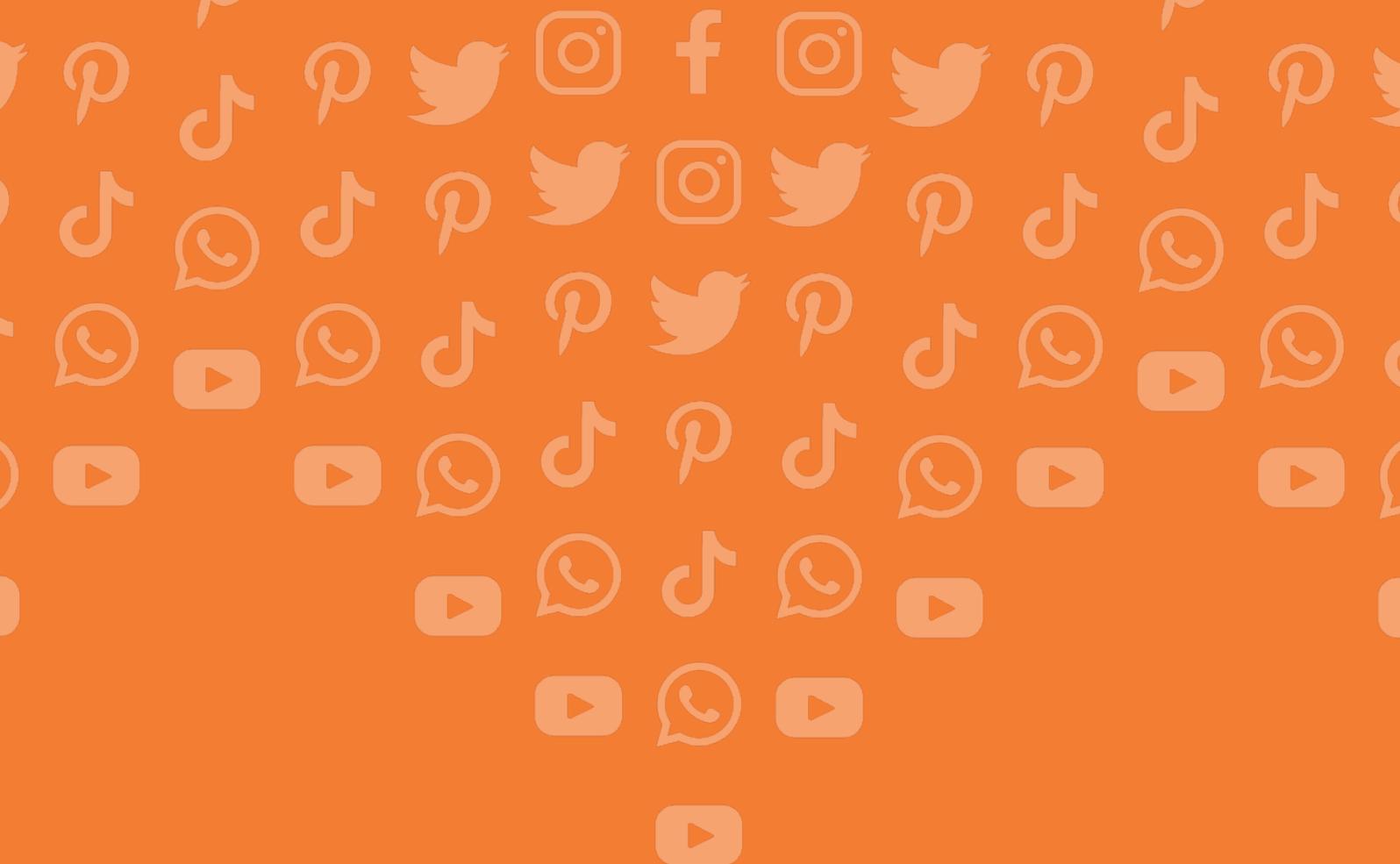
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