

Supporting a Young Person's Mental Health in Using Social Media

Social media, such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube and online gaming are familiar features in young people's lives. It can help young people to connect with others and learn new things, but it can also be addictive, pressurising and intrusive and can potentially lead to low self-esteem and social disconnection. Cyberbullying is using technology to deliberately hurt, humiliate, harass, or threaten someone else.

Social media and mental health problems:

Some research suggests that excessive use of social media could increase loneliness, depression and anxiety, especially with the rise of cyberbullying. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders now includes 'Internet Gaming Disorder'.

10 TOP TIPS for supporting a young person's mental health in using social media:

- 1 Set a positive example:** Establish technology free time yourself. Avoid using your own phone when talking or doing activities with young people.
- 2 Talk about pros and cons.** Talk about positive and negative experiences of social media. Discourage too much 'passive' screen use requiring little thinking or engagement.
- 3 Set clear boundaries.** Write up an agreement for positive and safe screen use, agreeing time spent on social media and making judgements on age appropriateness.
- 4 Share screen time.** Enjoy connection and conversation with young people by exploring sites they enjoy using with them and playing online games together.
- 5 Balance social life on and offline.** It's important to take a break from social media and spend face to face time with friends, doing something fun together.
- 6 Create healthy screen time alternatives.** Encourage non screen based interests and activities, spend time outdoors, doing exercise and self-directed play.
- 7 Don't compare yourself with others.** Social media often shows selected highlights, not the reality of someone's life. Comparing ourselves can negatively affect our self-esteem.
- 8 Maintain healthy sleep routines.** The blue light from screens interrupts sleep patterns. Avoid going online before bed and avoid having screen technology in bedrooms at night.
- 9 Stay safe online.** Talk to young people about keeping their personal information private. Show them privacy settings and how to report or block offensive content. Remind them that people they've met online might not always be who they say they are. If appropriate, set up parental controls and check the PGI ratings.
- 10 Cyberbullying.** Encourage young people to never respond or retaliate, instead they should block the bully, save or make a note of the message (including time and date) and report it.

Self-help links:

- www.youngminds.org.uk/our-policies/social-media-guidance
- www.thinkuknow.co.uk
- www.themix.org.uk/search/social+media
- www.saferinternet.org.uk
- www.respectme.org.uk/adults/online-bullying

