

Social Media: what do we know and what should we do?

Three things to know

* Research shows that high use of social media is linked to poor mental health. One recent study shows that young adults who used social media heavily were three times more likely to be depressed than occasional users. Another study discovered that young people who exceeded two hours of social media use per day were more likely to claim that their mental health was 'fair' or 'poor' than occasional users.

* Sleep is crucial for productive engagement and well-being. Research has shown that social media and screen time in general is linked to lower quality of sleep.

* Each social media site is able to decide how it protects their users; there is no agreed set of child safety rules to protect young people from the risks. Each site will have its own age ratings – for example Whatsapp has recently set its minimum age to 16 years old. Even YouTube has a minimum age requirement, which is 18, but from 13 years old a child can sign up as long as they have a guardian's permission.

Three things to do

* Talk to your child about the positives and negatives of social media. Most young people are very aware of these and know that there are changes they could make to use the internet in general in a healthier way. Being upfront about our own habits (even any unhealthy ones!) and setting goals together can sometimes help to avoid making it a source of conflict. One key aspect of this is discussing how social media can affect our reputation through the digital footprint we create for anyone to access.

* Encourage screen-free time before bed. If possible, having a family-wide screen-free curfew could help model good use of screens and place value on everyone caring for their wellbeing through winding down activities and better quality of sleep.

* Help your child to spend more time on activities they enjoy and which make them feel good. Perhaps encourage them to re-join a sports team they used to like, take up a hobby that they've expressed an interest in, or spend time as a family doing things together: family movie time using films your child has recommended, trips out etc.

