Supporting your child with SEND to thrive online
Digital wellbeing

Thrive Online

💡 Things to know

Going online can have a positive impact on the way young people feel. It can allow them to express themselves in the way they want to, communicate with others, and make them feel calm, entertained, or happy. It can also have a negative impact, depending on what they see, how they interact, what they do online, and how long they spend online. Young people's feelings, thoughts, behaviour, and physical and mental health can all by impacted by being online.

Being on a device or going online may help some young people with SEND to self-regulate, can reduce anxiety or stress, and can be an important tool for socialising. Young people with SEND may find recognising their emotions and what triggers them online challenging and need additional support with managing their digital wellbeing.

👍 Things to do

Be interested in your child's life online. Ask them what they enjoy doing on their devices. They could write a list, draw a mind map, or collect online images. This will give you an insight into the apps and services they are using and what might affect their digital wellbeing. Childnet's **My Life Online** resource will help.

Explore positive online content together. Help your child to find age-appropriate games, influencers and websites they can relate to, and help them to feel good about themselves.
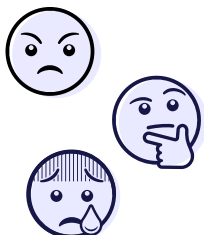
Help your child to recognise how tech impacts their feelings. When your child has an emotional reaction, you could help them by describing their behaviour to them. For example, "You threw your games controller because you are angry about losing in your game. It's okay to be angry but it's not okay to throw things." You could use cards or symbols to support this discussion.

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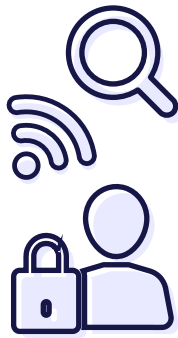
🎧 **Childnet**

Set parental controls. This will help filter out potentially harmful content which could have a negative impact on your child's wellbeing. These can be put in place across all the devices, services and networks that your child is using. Explain to your child what these filters do and how they help keep them safe online. For some young people, it may be helpful to negotiate and agree controls together. Guides on how to set these up can be found on **Internet Matters**.

Use device and wellbeing settings. Explore device and app settings menus to find ways to support your child in having a balanced and positive time online. Turning off notifications can limit the need to constantly feel connected. Muting/blocking accounts can be a positive step if someone's online content is not contributing to positive wellbeing. Downtime and app limits can prevent the use of apps at certain times, including overnight.

Help your child make good choices. Some things online will make your child feel sad, or scared. These are normal emotions that your child is allowed to feel. It is unrealistic to try and shield them from everything that is upsetting or worrying online, and at some point in their lives they will need to be able to make sensible decisions for themselves on how to look after their own wellbeing. Help them to learn how to build resilience by acknowledging what has upset them, and show them ways they can manage these situations. This may be turning off or putting down the device, walking away, and telling a trusted adult.

Screen time limits. Agree on a sensible amount of time each day that your child can spend online. Help them to follow this by using verbal reminders, visual timers, and any screen time settings within their device or favourite apps and games. Once the time is used up, these settings will show your child a reminder to stop.

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Things to say

> **Things online can affect how you feel. Some things might make you feel happy and other things could make you feel unhappy.**

Ask your child about the things online that they enjoy the most and make them feel good and the things which they don't like to see or make them feel sad, worried or upset.
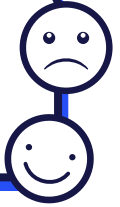
> **I'm feeling [emotion] after being on my phone today.**

Be a role model and reflect openly on your own emotions after using technology as well as asking your child about theirs.

> **Our bodies have warning signs that show us when things are affecting us negatively.**

Explore the signs your child might get from their body if something online is affecting them negatively. These could be a headache, their heart beating faster, sweaty hands etc. Explain that these signs mean they need help, and they should come to you.

> **Sometimes you might feel pressure because of the things you see online.**

Explain that being online can put pressure on people: this might be to keep up with the latest trends or look a certain way. Often people edit their photos and videos and use filters to change the way they look online. Remind your child that this isn't a true reflection of real life, and we often only see the best parts of someone's life online.

> **I'm here to help if things go wrong online.**

Remind your child that if anything goes wrong online or something is making them sad, worried or upset, to talk to you or another trusted adult, like a teacher. Explain that there are things they can do if someone has been unkind or something is inappropriate. Show them how to report online and how to block other people or players.

> **A balance of time online and offline is good for us.**

Find the screen time settings with your child on their devices, so they can see how long they spend on different apps. If you have put screen time restrictions in place, explain the reasons why – that a healthy balance with technology is good for our wellbeing.

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