MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM

NHS
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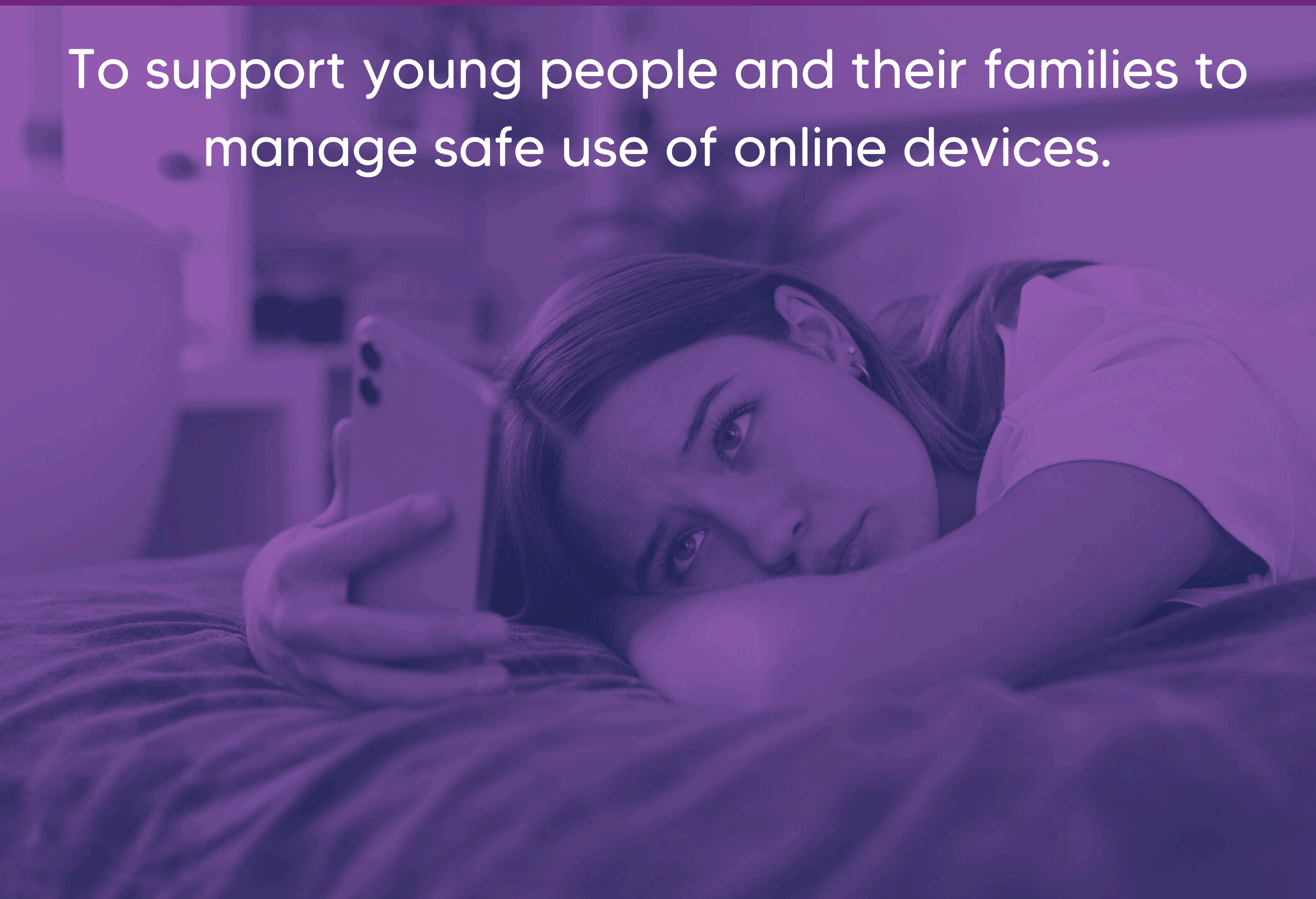
Supporting young people to be safe online

Parent/carer Guide

To support young people and their families to manage safe use of online devices.



Why are parental controls important?

The online world gives us access to a huge amount of information and services, but the scale of information available also means that there is content inappropriate for children. Accessing inappropriate content can lead young people to be unsafe or potentially have a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing.

Talk to your child about your own experience of the online world. Show them sites and apps that you like, and explain why you like them. Show them how to use the internet in a positive way - to research things, to do homework, to talk to family, and to find out about the world. This helps them to have a critical eye.

What are parental controls?

Parental controls allow you to block and filter upsetting or inappropriate content. They work across your WiFi, search engines, apps and devices.

Parental controls can help you to:

- Set what time of day your child can go online and how long for
- Create content filters to block apps that may have inappropriate content
- Manage the content different family members can see

Setting up parental controls

WiFi – home internet providers will offer parental controls for your family as standard so that you can:

- Control the content your family sees (some providers allow different settings for different users)
- Set up any device with parental controls that is connected to your home WiFi (remember that this only affects the WiFi access and doesn't include access via 4G or 5G etc.)

Search engines - even harmless searches can sometimes lead to unexpected and inappropriate results. If you're concerned:

- Use the parental controls and filters in search engines like Google to make sure the content your child sees is appropriate for their age

Apps - pretty much all social media, apps and online services such as film and TV streaming services have features such as:

- Content filters
- Chat filters
- Privacy settings

You can find out more by exploring the setting on each app or look at their website for information. You'll find this information in settings, family features, privacy settings or security.

Instagram has a Parental Guide for Teens which helps explain the features available.
For **Netflix**, you'll need to go to their website to set up parental controls.
Microsoft Family Safety lets you create a family group so you can manage multiple settings, such as setting screen time limits, blocking inappropriate content, set app and game limits and more.

Mobiles, tablets and computers – all mobiles, tablets and computers have parental controls, they can differ but should include:

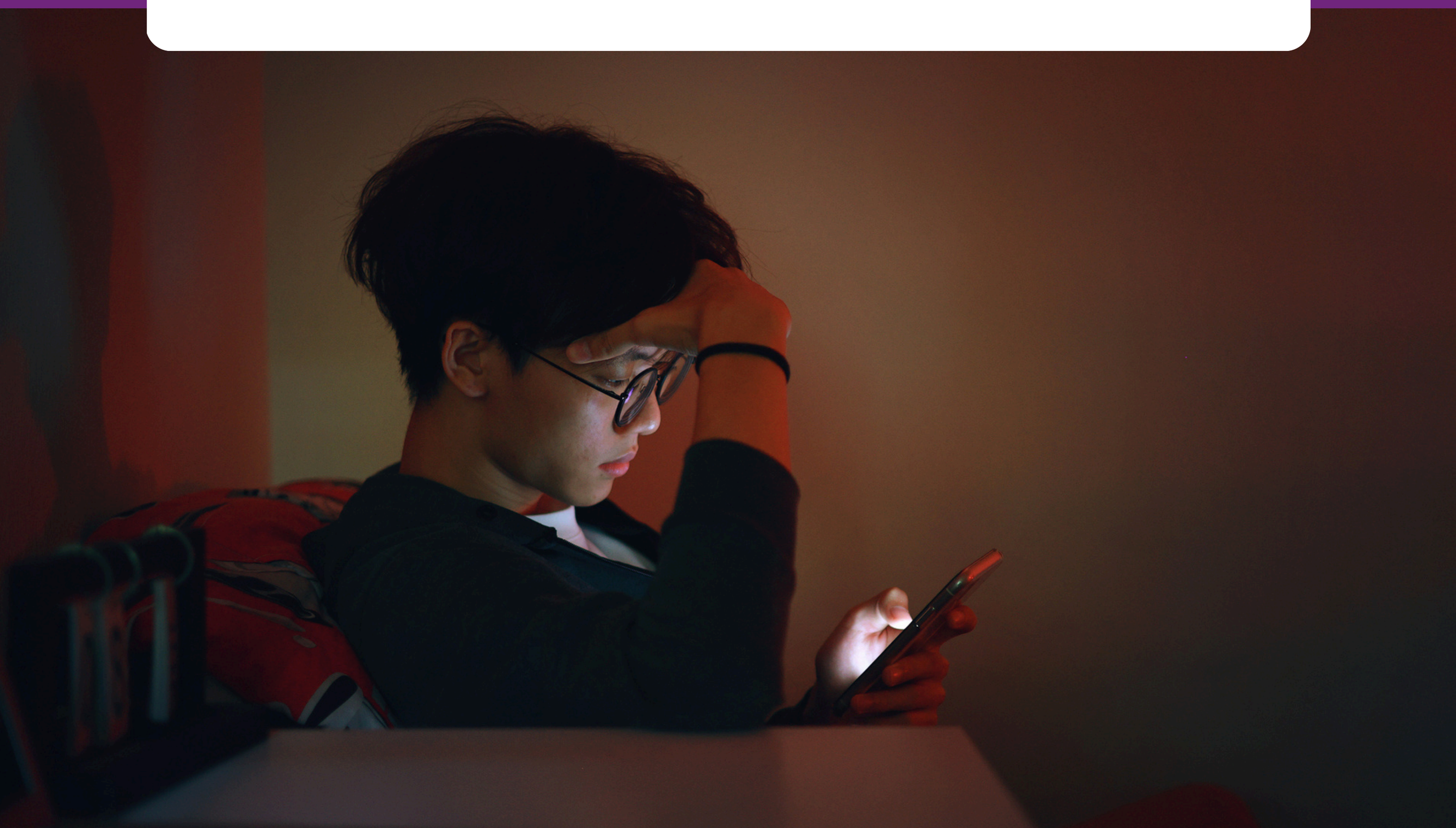
- Blocking of in-game or in-app purchases
- Location settings and what information your child is sharing
- Screen time limitation settings

You can get more information from your mobile provider or the UK Safer Internet Centre.

Game consoles – most games consoles have access to the internet, meaning your child can go online and chat with other players. Many consoles have parental controls which allow you to:

- Turn off chat functions to stop your child from having chats with people they don’t know
- Manage age restrictions
- Turn off purchases or set limits

Check the consoles website for the parents section which will give you details of features.



Supporting young people to use social media in a healthy way

Young people use social media for various reasons. For some, it serves as a way to find support, gain reassurance, stay connected, or cope with social anxiety.

However, for others, social media use can become addictive, driving unhealthy comparisons. It may expose them to bullying and increase feelings of isolation, potentially worsening their mental health.

Negative impacts and risks

There are potential risks that social media can have on the mental health of children and young people, which can also impact their ability to succeed and flourish. These risks include:

- Disrupted sleep - young people who use social media at night may not be getting sufficient sleep, this can negatively affect their academic performance, and heightens the risk of developing depression and anxiety
- Accessing harmful content - they may access content that is violent, racist, hateful or features pornographic material
- Grooming or online abuse - they may not be aware of who they speaking to, or of that person’s intentions and are therefore at risk of being groomed online, potentially leading to unsafe situations
- Cyberbullying - they may engage in or be subjected to bullying behaviour online, like offline bullying, cyberbullying raises the risk of developing depression and low self-esteem
- Body image - they might compare themselves to celebrities, influencers, or role models they admire, leading them to edit or alter their own images to fit the "body ideals" often promoted online

Spotting and acting on the warning signs

You know your child well, and may well recognise it if something is wrong. It’s important to act on the warning signs. If you start to feel concerned:

- Talk to your child openly.
- Take your time before forming a judgement.
- Listen to what they have to say.
- Make sure to be fully supportive.

Support services

Local Support

Hull & East Yorkshire Mind
01482 240200
heymind.org.uk

Hull Thrive
howareyoufeeling.org.uk

Young Healthy Minds
eastridinghealthandwellbeing.co.uk

National Support

Childline
0800 1111
childline.org.uk

Young Minds
youngminds.org.uk

Anna Freud
annafreud.org

Kooth
Podcast
on Spotify