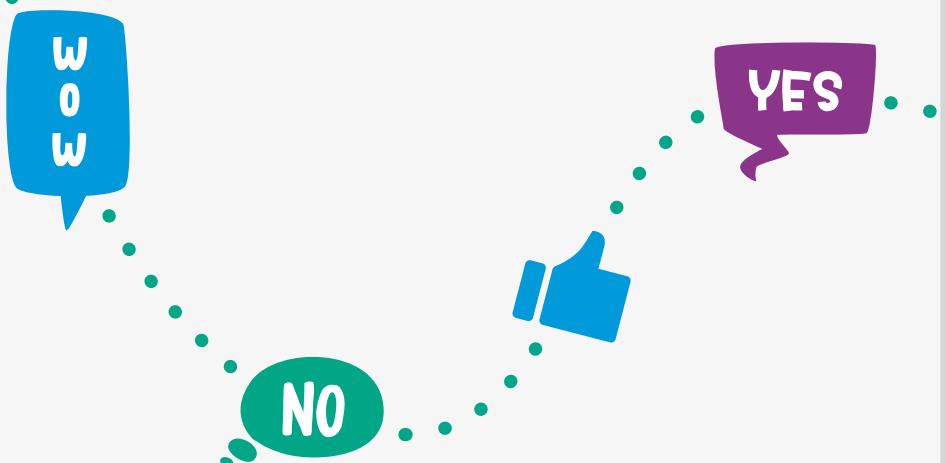






Dame Rachel de Souza
Children's Commissioner
for England



INTRODUCTION

In my role as the Children's Commissioner for England, I hear first hand from children and young people as well as parents and carers about worries and hopes for your online lives.

The online world is difficult to navigate but such a big part of our lives – with opportunities to socialise, learn and play, alongside potential online harms and negative experiences.

With so much information about what might be harmful and what might not be, both for mental and physical wellbeing, parents and carers can feel powerless and fearful about your online lives.

It is not just harmful content you are worried about, it's also habits. How much scrolling is too much scrolling? How much time should we spend on our phones? How can we build more offline activities into our lives? Do we feel comfortable talking to each other especially if something bad happens?

The activities in this pack were created with children and young people to do with your parents or carers to help open up conversations around managing online habits.



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Have a look at the **Digital 5-a-day** together and chat through both of your thoughts, ideas, concerns and needs.

You can also use our [**Digital agreement**](#) activity to set ground rules around your digital use.

The Digital 5 a day has been created from discussions we had with parents and carers and children and young people, and is built on the NHS's evidence-based '[**Five steps to mental wellbeing**](#)', and gives easy to follow steps to achieve a healthy and balanced digital diet. The Children's Commissioner's Youth Ambassadors have shared examples and questions to ask for each of the steps.

YOUR DIGITAL 5-A-DAY

1 CONNECT

The internet has enabled us to maintain friendships and family relationships no matter where we are in the world.

It is important to keep in touch with friends, however staying safe online is more important than any benefit the online world may bring e.g. not talking to strangers and thinking about what you are saying to your friends - might they misunderstand your message? You cannot hear the tone of something that is being said via a message.

TRY THIS!

CONNECT OFFLINE

It is important to maintain relationships in person and to build offline activities into your life. Use our [Getting Off Grid](#) activity to come up with ideas and plan things to do together.

THINK ABOUT ...



YOUR DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

Connecting online can also be via posting and commenting on social media, it is important to think about what you are posting and who can see it, as well as your digital footprint - would you want yourself or anyone else to see that in five, ten or twenty years? Would you be happy if your future boss or someone you work with sees it?

Ask yourself:

How much time do you spend offline compared to online? What can you do with friends and family offline? What benefits can this bring?



2 BE ACTIVE

Playing video games or keeping in touch with friends via social media can be great, however being active is key for both your physical and mental wellbeing.



Everyday you should spend time moving, away from a screen. Spending too much time on a screen can be damaging for your mind and physical health.

TRY THIS!

FIND SOMETHING YOU ENJOY

You don't have to be an athlete to be active, there is something for everyone - swimming, walking, dancing, yoga – begin at a level that works for you and build it into your week.

DO THIS ...

RESEARCH FIRST AND BUILD NEW HABITS

Research an activity or place online together before going out to decide on something you'll find interesting and will be more likely to stick with, then do it!



Ask yourself:

How can you get active? Who can you do these physical activities with? How can you build them into your everyday life?

YOUR DIGITAL 5-A-DAY

3 GET CREATIVE

The internet can teach you many new skills and you can try many different activities online – from coding to building your digital media skills such as creating video content.

DO THIS!

LEARN SKILLS ONLINE

Look at the skills you want to develop online such as content creation, photography, editing, coding, making digital posters. You don't have to spend your time online passively consuming content, you can build skills for later life and be creative.

TRY THIS ...

GET CREATIVE OFFLINE

It is also important to remember that you don't have to rely on the internet to teach you new skills, you can find classes or workshops to go to in person, learn skills from books or other people including different family members, and experiment and play.

Ask yourself:

What skills do you want to develop, offline and online? How can you use your screen time to do these?

YOUR DIGITAL 5-A-DAY

4 GIVE TO OTHERS



The internet offers ideas for local and national volunteering, helping you build skills, broaden your perspective, and boost future job prospects.



TRY THIS!

DON'T FORGET THE SMALL THINGS

A simple thank-you goes a long way. Supporting friends and family with small acts and positive feedback strengthens relationships and boosts everyone's mental wellbeing. Online, share positivity too – and report negative behaviour to help keep the internet a nicer place for everyone.

Ask yourself:

How can you get engaged in your local area and find volunteering roles? How can you support people you know?

5 BE

YOUR DIGITAL 5-A-DAY



MINDFUL



Whilst you may fear you are missing out on something if you do not go online, be mindful of the amount of time you are spending online.

TRY THIS!

LIMIT YOUR TIME ONLINE

Set daily limits for your online time and for specific activities like social media or videos. Keep a diary of what you do, what you see, and how it makes you feel. You can also use apps or [read our screen-time tips](#) from young people.

DO THIS ...

BE IN THE MOMENT OFFLINE

If you're always online, you may miss out on the offline world. Try to focus fully on what you are doing e.g. notice sights, sounds and smells on a walk. Explore [mindfulness on the NHS website](#), and try our [Note to My Younger Self](#) activity to support your mental wellbeing.

Ask yourself:

What are you spending your time doing, online and offline? How do the things you do make you feel?

YOUR DIGITAL 5-A-DAY

BONUS! STAY SAFE

To protect your digital diet and wellbeing, staying safe online is vital, as the internet can expose you to harmful content.



THINK ABOUT

YOUR PRIVACY

Talking to the right people and using the right sites is key when thinking about your activity online.

- What does oversharing actually look like? (e.g. sharing your location in real time, posting school uniforms)
- Have you checked your privacy settings?
- Do you know who can see what you post?

TRY THIS ...

BUILD YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

Try our [My Support Network](#) activity to build your own network of people and places for advice and support you can trust. You can also check our [Reach Out for Support list](#) for additional helpful options.

Ask yourself:

What can you do to keep safe online?

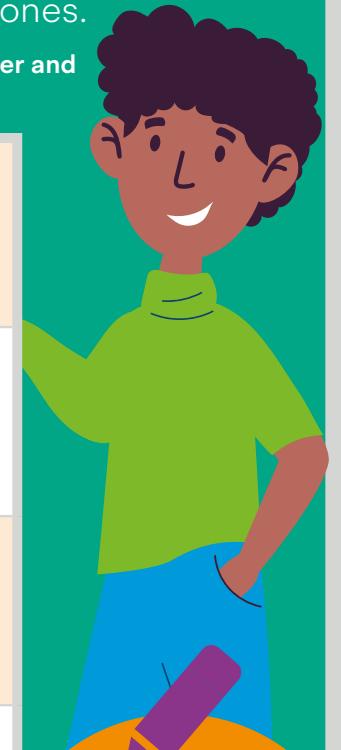
Who can you turn to if you encounter something negative?

GETTING OFF GRID

Here are some suggestions from my Youth Ambassadors and Youth SEND panel for things you can do away from your phones.

Try to do one of these per day and build in time to do some of these things together and with your family and friends.

Play a sport		Do a hobby		Dance
	Go for a walk		Listen to music	
Learn something new		Bake a cake		Play some music
	Play board games		Spend time with siblings	
Volunteer		Meet friends in person		Do something arty



Create your own grid, add your own ideas.



Conversation starter

Discuss what you enjoyed most, and how can you keep doing these regularly?

MY SUPPORT NETWORK

WHERE CAN YOU GET SUPPORT AND WHO CAN YOU ASK FOR HELP IF NEEDED?

Write or draw all the people / places you can go to get advice and support. Then write down the support they can offer you.



1

Support they offer:

2

Support they offer:

3

Support they offer:

4

Support they offer:

5

Support they offer:

6

Support they offer:



Conversation starter

Who could you talk to about your digital life?

REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

It is important that if something is distressing you, you reach out to someone you trust who can listen.

In the **My Support Network** activity, you'll have an idea of the people and places you can go to for support.

You can speak to a trusted adult e.g. a trusted family member, staff at school, a youth worker or social worker. The following organisations can provide you with expert information, advice and support:

childline

Childline is a free and confidential service for under-19s living in the UK:
childline.org.uk | 0800 1111

shout 85258

Shout provides 24/7 urgent mental health support:
giveusashout.org | text SHOUT to 85258



The Survivors Trust for victims of sexual violence:
thesurvivortrust.org/our-helpline | 0808 801 0818

NAPAC

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood

NAPAC offers support to adult survivors of childhood abuse:
napac.org.uk | 0808 801 0331

NHS

You can also contact your local NHS urgent mental health helpline or call 111 for 24/7 advice nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-urgent-mental-health-helpline



If you are living in care, are living away from home, have a social worker or are a care leaver you can contact the Children's Commissioner's **Help at Hand team**.



REAL-LIFE SCENARIOS TO DISCUSS

Here are a few short, maybe relatable situations to help you discuss and practice what to do:



Someone pressures you to reply straight away



You see something upsetting but aren't sure who to tell



A friend screenshots your message and forwards it



You're tagged in a photo you don't like



5 TIPS FOR MANAGING SCREEN TIME

My Youth Ambassadors and Youth SEND panel share what they found helpful to manage their screen time:

1

Discuss screen time and think about creating a healthy balance

Understand how the screen time function works on phones and how to navigate it.

Have an honest conversation about why managing screen time matters.

2

Set boundaries such as not having your phone on you whilst you're sleeping

Stuff online tends to go wrong late at night... it's really easy to just sit up scrolling, watching things.

There's loads of stuff that shows that going on your phone before you sleep does not help you sleep. So I just think that's really important.

When I have my phone under my pillow, I don't sleep as well.

3

Take part in setting rules and come to an understanding about why these rules are in place

It needs to be a collaborative approach where the adult and child decide together

I think it's important to have a honest conversation and to set boundaries together

4

Set times where you spend time offline together

If adults can demonstrate using their phones less – my mum barely goes on her phone – and that made me use my phone less as well.

5

Think about how you can use your screen time for learning skills or creative activities.

If they have a limit – maybe an hour – doing something productive. Like a word game or something not just scrolling etc.

DIGITAL AGREEMENT

Here is some space for you to write some ground rules. Discuss ideas for rules together and come up with some agreements.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Things you can think about include:

Digital device use at home and in your bedroom

Managing screen time – balancing time on your phone with activities such as social media, gaming, and educational content

Which websites, apps and games are ok and which ones you should avoid

What checks to make before setting up an account, posting, or accessing certain content e.g. privacy settings, strong passwords, safety

What to do if you see something you don't like or don't feel is trustworthy

Who you can socialise with online

A NOTE TO MY YOUNGER SELF

You can try this together and chat about what you would share with your younger selves.

My Youth Ambassadors and Youth SEND panel have filled out notes to their younger selves. These are the thoughts and advice they had to offer.

write
your
own



- ① Don't allow people to change your view of yourself. You don't have to follow everything you see on social media just because it's popular or you're afraid of missing out.
- ② Even if you feel like your parents or carers are the 'bad guys', understand that what they're doing and the rules they're making are in your best interests.
- ③ Don't be so afraid of what others think because they will **ALWAYS** have an opinion, good or bad.
- ④ Don't let anyone pressurize you into thinking you should be online more- for example them pushing you to respond quickly and constantly be online.
- ⑤ You're not as behind as you think.

Dear younger me,



Conversation starter

Did anything surprise you?

YES



Take part in the
Big Conversation
Survey

“SHARE YOUR VOICE”



Join the Youth
Voices Forum

Here are some opportunities to have your say on important issues. You can tell the Children's Commissioner what you think needs to change to make children's lives better, find opportunities to get involved in and make a difference on issues that matter to you.



Visit the Youth Voices
Hub to see what
children think about
key topics.



Listen to the Big
Conversation
Podcast

Write to
your MP or look
into joining your
local council's
Youth Council if
it has one.

Get involved
with your school
council if it has
one.



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childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/youth-voices/