SAFE and SMART

Keeping Children Safe Online

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What is
DIGITAL WELLBEING

Internet Matters have released their annual 'Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World' report. In it's fourth year it gives us a really good insight into the digital wellbeing of our children - what has changed, what are the positives and negatives?

You can find the full report HERE, but in this newsletter we're going to take a look at:

- What does 'digital wellbeing' mean?
- Why does digital wellbeing matter?
- What the Internet Matters report tells us.
- And more.

What does digital wellbeing mean?

Digital wellbeing simply means how children's use of technology affects their overall mental, emotional, and physical health. We want our children to have **positive, balanced, and safe** experiences while also helping them build resilience to deal with challenges. So within this we have:

- **Emotional and Mental Health**

  - Understanding how online interactions (such as social media use) affect self-esteem and body image.

  - Managing emotions related to online experiences.

  - Recognising when digital habits contribute to issues such as anxiety.

- **Healthy Digital Habits**

  - Setting balanced screen time to prevent excessive use that may interfere with sleep, physical activity, and real-world relationships.

  - Encouraging *quality* screen time—engaging in learning, creativity, or meaningful social interactions rather than passive scrolling.

- **Online Safety and Resilience**

  - Understanding online risks such as exposure to harmful content, misinformation, and online predators.

  - Learning how to handle negative experiences, including how to report and block harmful content or seek help when needed.

  - Encouraging critical thinking to distinguish between positive and harmful online influences.

- **Digital Citizenship and Ethical Online Behaviour**

  - Encouraging kindness and respect in online interactions.

  - Teaching children to think before they post and the long-term impact.

  - Understanding the importance of privacy and data protection.

Why does digital wellbeing matter?

As we can see, digital wellbeing can affect our children in many different ways, both positively and negatively.

Positive digital experiences can enhance learning, creativity, and social connections, negative digital experiences can contribute to stress, anxiety, and unhealthy behaviours.

By fostering digital wellbeing we can help children develop a **healthy relationship with technology** that supports their growth and development.

What the Internet Matters report tells us.

* **Vulnerable children** - the negatives for vulnerable children have increased to their highest level. Compared to the previous year of 10%, this year 24% of vulnerable children say they had an upsetting experience quite a lot. More vulnerable children are also saying they feel sad when they come across people who are not like them on social media, which indicates a struggle with comparison.

* **Feeling safe** - whilst a majority of children (77%) say they feel safe online, it's a drop from the previous year which was 81%. Again, it's vulnerable children that are more likely to say they don't feel safe.

* **Emotional resilience** - this is decreasing. Children report online harms are becoming more upsetting and more parents this year feel that graphic violent content and unhealthy body image content is more distressing to their children.

* **Children are more open** - this is good news, 93% of children are open with their parents about their online activities. Also, a greater number of parents are more strict with their child's technology use and their online time, with more parents using tools and controls to help with this.

The report (which you can find HERE) goes into a lot more detail and makes for a very interesting read.

Overall, as with previous reports, the positives outweigh the negatives, but as always it is vulnerable children who are most at risk from a variety of harms which can have a detrimental effect on their wellbeing.

Supporting Your Child

Tailoring your approach to their developmental stage ensures they receive appropriate guidance so here are some age-specific strategies to help your child navigate their online world:

🧩 Ages 3-5:

- **Establish Boundaries:** Introduce screen time limits to ensure a balanced routine that prioritises physical activity, sleep, and offline play.

- **Select Age-Appropriate Content:** Choose high-quality, educational programs and apps that promote learning and creativity.

- **Co-View and Engage:** Participate in screen activities with your child to help them understand and interpret content, fostering critical thinking from an early age.

🧩 Ages 6-9:

- **Discuss Online Safety:** Begin conversations about the basics of online safety, such as not sharing personal information and understanding that not everything online is true.

- **Encourage Critical Thinking:** Teach your child to question and evaluate the content they encounter, helping them distinguish between trustworthy and unreliable information.

- **Set Clear Rules:** Establish guidelines for device use, including time limits and approved websites or apps, and explain the reasons behind these rules.

🧩 Ages 10-12:

- **Promote Open Dialogue:** Encourage your child to share their online experiences, both positive and negative, without fear of judgment or punishment.

- **Foster Digital Literacy:** Educate your child on recognising misinformation, understanding advertising tactics, and the implications of their digital footprint.

🧩 Ages 13-15:

- **Introduce Social Media Wisely:** If allowing social media use, ensure your child understands privacy settings, the permanence of online posts, and the importance of respectful communication.

- **Support Autonomy with Guidance:** Acknowledge your teen's growing independence while maintaining open lines of communication about their online activities and potential risks.

- **Discuss Online Relationships:** Talk about the differences between online and offline friendships, emphasising the importance of caution when interacting with strangers.

- **Encourage Balance:** Help your teen develop time-management skills to balance screen time with academics, physical activities, and face-to-face social interactions.

🧩 Ages 16-18:

- **Prepare for Adult Responsibilities:** Discuss the long-term consequences of their online behaviour, especially as they approach adulthood and potential employment.

- **Promote Self-Regulation:** Encourage your teen to set their own boundaries for device use, fostering self-discipline and awareness of their digital habits.

- **Stay Informed Together:** Engage in discussions about new technologies, apps, and online trends, learning together to keep the conversation relevant and respectful.

Supporting Children with SEND

🧠 Why it matters

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may spend more time online — for learning, play, or socialising — but they may also be more vulnerable to online risks as we saw from the Internet Matters report. But with the right support, they can build strong **digital resilience** and enjoy the many benefits of being online.

🧩 Key Support Tips

Know your child's needs

- Tailor support to your child's individual strengths and challenges. What works for one child might not work for another.

Use structure and repetition

- Clear rules, regular routines, and repeated guidance help your child feel safe and confident online.

Create a trusted space

Keep an open-door policy so your child can talk to you about anything that happens online — without fear of being told off or judgment.

Talk about feelings

Use visuals or simple language to help your child explain how something online made them feel — excited, confused, anxious, happy.

Support friendships

Online spaces can help children with SEND connect with others — help them understand how to spot kind, safe friends.

🕹️ Age-Specific Support

Ages 3–7

- Stick to high-quality, sensory-friendly apps.

- Co-watch and co-play; talk about what's happening.

- Use stories or images to explain basic safety.

Ages 8–11

- Create visual safety rules (e.g., "Don't share your name").

- Use safe search engines or child-friendly platforms.

- Talk about online kindness and what to do if they're upset.

Ages 12–15

- Role-play situations: "What would you do if…?"

- Explain privacy settings and the importance of respectful posts.

- Support them in managing group chats or social media drama.

Ages 16–18

- Help them understand scams, misinformation, and privacy.

- Discuss how online behaviour might affect jobs or education.

- Let them lead discussions on new tech — build mutual trust.

🔐 Extra Tools

- Use **parental controls** and safety settings — but involve your child so they understand the "why"

- Try **apps that support communication, calming, or scheduling**

- Work with your child's school to **reinforce messages consistently**

💬 Remember…

Your support makes a difference.
Staying curious, calm and connected helps your child feel confident and cared for — online and off.

My Family's Digital Toolkit

All this advice about digital wellbeing, resilience, different ages, online spaces, devices and much more can quickly become overwhelming. To help us out Internet Matters also have a brilliant, easy-to-use resource called My Family's Digital Toolkit

It takes about 8-10 minutes to complete with 7 questions and within the toolkit you get:

- Age-specific advice.

- Learn about popular apps and platforms that your children use.

- Advice on how to deal with online safety concerns.

- Recommendations for digital tools to support your child's interests and their wellbeing.

The toolkit is free and you can access it **HERE**.

TikTok
New Features

Following on from the digital wellbeing report from Internet Matters, it's good to see that TikTok have introduced new features which can help children and their parents. Announced in the second week of March 2025:

- **Time Away** - a new family pairing feature which gives parents more tools to set boundaries and customisable limits.
- **Wind Down** - a new in-app meditation feature, which is designed to help children wind down if they use the app after 10PM.
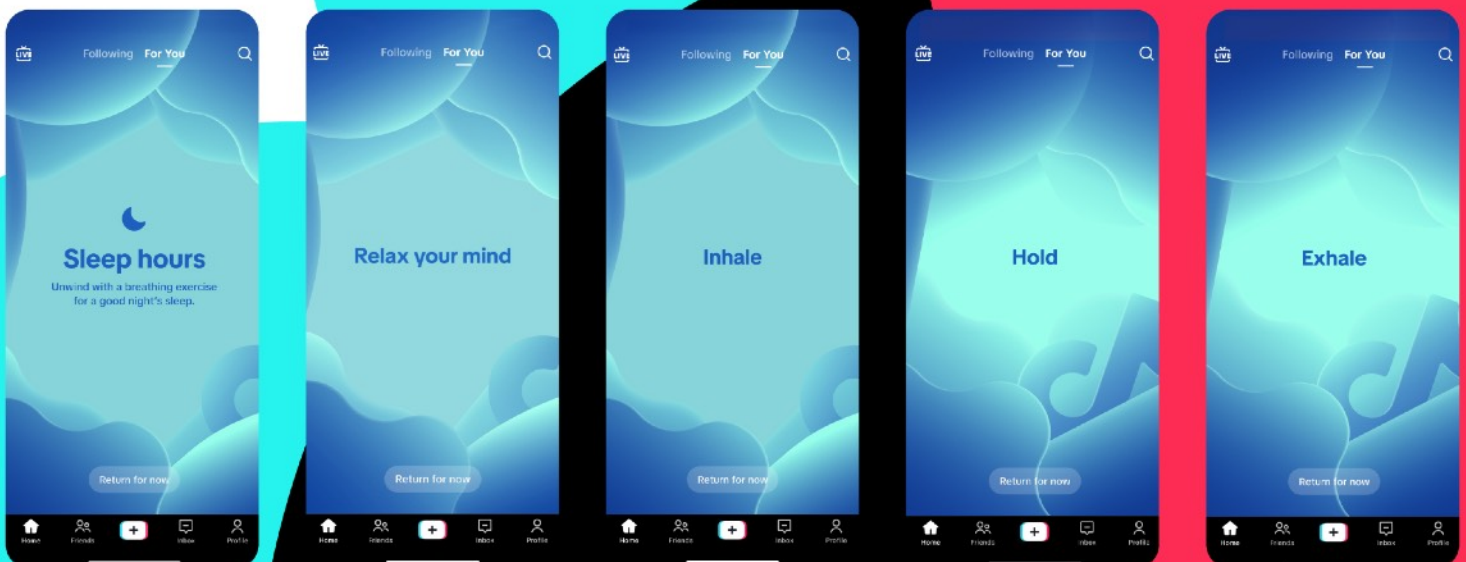
Time Away

Time Away is now a part of the Family Pairing suite of tools which allows parents to decide when it's best for their children to take a break. There is already a feature which allows parents to set a schedule, this feature expands on this and also allows children to ask for extra time but the final decision lies with their parents.

Wind Down

If a child who has indicated their age as under 16 is on TikTok after 10PM, their ForYou feed will be interrupted with the new wind-down feature. This is more of an incentive which show meditative prompts such as "relax your mind, inhale" etc. If the child ignores the first reminder a second, harder-to-dismiss full screen prompt appears.

This is also known as a 'nudge' technique. Instead of being overly-restrictive, instead it tries to nudge children into making good decisions.

Coming Soon

TikTok have also announced some new features coming soon which will be a welcome addition for parents, these are:

- **Following Transparency** - this will allow parents to see who their child is following, who is following them, and account their child has blocked.

- **Reporting** - if a child reports a video they can choose to alert a parent or other trusted adult, even if they aren't using Family Pairing.

More information is available on the TikTok Newsroom page **HERE** and you can find the full range of TikTok Family Pairing features **HERE**.

Common Apps

This is not an exhaustive list, but tends to be the more popular apps used by children and young people.

Age requirements are set within the terms and conditions of the app provider, don't be confused by ratings in the app stores which can be different.

App	Age	Comments
	13	**Discord** - is a voice, video and text chat app that's used by tens of millions of people aged 13+ to tap and hang out with communities or their friends. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**Instagram** - is a photo and video sharing app where people can upload photos, videos and messages to share with others. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**Snapchat** - is a very popular app that lets users swop pictures and videos (Snaps) with others which are meant to disappear after they are viewed. There is also a messaging feature. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**TikTok** - is a social media app that allows users to create, watch and share short videos shot on mobile devices or webcams. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**Twitch -** is where people come together to chat and interact live. Think YouTube, but it is live rather then pre-recorded. Parental settings can be found **HERE**.
	13	**WhatsApp -** is a messaging app which uses text, images, video and voice record features to connect with others. Parental settings can be found **HERE**
	18	**Reddit** - is a network of communities (called subreddits) where people can share information, their interests and hobbies. Reddit is an 18+ app, there are no parental controls.