



Safeguarding Newsletter

ADVICE FOR PARENTS & CARERS

Welcome to the latest edition of our Parent Safeguarding Newsletter from the William Edwards Safeguarding Team, where we aim to bring you all the latest, relevant help and advice on issues we feel may be of importance to you and your child. Recently we hosted an information evening held by WizeUp, a drug and alcohol service for young people and their families in Thurrock. If you would like to know more, you can visit <https://www.changegrowlive.org/wize-up-thurrock/info> or contact a member of our safeguarding team.

Mental health & Wellbeing

As parents and carers, it can be hard to know whether your child's feelings and behaviours are a normal part of adolescence or if there is an underlying problem.

We all know that sometimes a rollercoaster of changing emotions can be perfectly normal in teens. However feelings or moods that last for long periods of time, that become the norm or overwhelming and inhibit your child from going about their daily lives, become problematic.

At the heart of positive mental health, lies strong relationships with those around us, and thus it is no secret that talking is a helpful way for young people manage and make sense of their feelings.

Below you will find a directory for advice and guidance, as well as tips for talking to your child if you have concerns around their mental wellbeing. As well as how to ensure social media is not having a negative impact.

Advice & guidance

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families—

www.annafreud.org

YoungMinds Parent Helpline—08088025544

NSPCC—08088005000

MindEd for Families—www.minded.org.uk/families

Young Minds Parent Support— www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/

Place2Be— <https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/parents-and-carers/supporting-your-child-s-mental-health/>

NHS Mental Health Services—<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/mental-health-services/>



School Safeguarding Team

Ms Wood—Designated Safeguarding Lead

Miss Pooley—Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

Mrs Heighway—Pastoral Manager

Mrs Taylor—Pastoral Manager

Mrs Cormack, Mr O'Kill, Mr Greenwood, Mr Pavitt—House Leaders



Top tips for talking

★ **Give your full attention, be curious and take it seriously.** We all know it's not nice to be half listened to. Being actively interested in your child can be a powerful way to help them feel listened to and understood. Try to resist the urge to downplay or dismiss what your child is telling you.

★ **Emphasise that you are always available to talk.** It may be that your child doesn't want to talk, can't find the words at the moment or is trying to assert their independence. But don't be misled by your teenager's need for separation. They need you just as much as ever.



★ **Take time to reflect.** Research shows that thinking about what is going on in your child's mind and being aware of your own thoughts and feelings promotes secure attachment, good social skills and the ability to 'read' others.

★ **Provide empathy.** When children feel truly understood they start to be able to manage their emotions and this has a big impact on their wellbeing. Using empathy is also a great way to defuse tension.

★ **Be aware of your own stress and negative feelings.** They can really get in the way of feeling close to your child. Reflecting on the causes of stress can prevent it from spilling into your relationships at home.

★ **Think about timing.** Ask yourself 'Is this the right time to talk?' Choose a time when you can focus on your child and ignore distractions.

★ **What should I do if I am worried?** You can find some advice and guidance listed on the back of this leaflet. In particular, MindEd for Families provides comprehensive information on a range of mental health problems. If problems persist, become overwhelming or you feel your child is displaying particular symptoms, we strongly recommend that you visit your GP.



What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

An estimated one-third of children have a social media account, so it's important that trusted adults know what content young people are consuming, what they're posting and the interactions they're having. On social media, it can be easy to go down 'rabbit holes' that aren't beneficial to our wellbeing. As platforms grapple with managing such 'legal but harmful' content, lives are being impacted – sometimes to tragic effect. We might be daunted by the scale of the tech giants and their content which so enthral young people, but we can still help children to be aware of their mental wellness: recognising when something isn't OK... and knowing what to do about content that upsets them.

1. UNDERSTAND THE ALGORITHM

Algorithms rank content by user interest: someone who regularly interacts with sports news, say, will see the latest results at the top of their feed. Likewise, if a user browses content that can cause harm, that's what will be recommended to them in future. Someone who's had a bad day and looks for posts which reflect their mood will find similar content being suggested to them more and more.

2. AVOID THE MAIN FEEDS

Avoiding the default feeds on social media platforms limits the amount of recommended content that's shown. Users can opt to only scroll through the accounts they follow, use restricted modes, or highlight posts that they don't want to see more of. Explore the platform safety settings to see how you can take control of what your child's phone shows them when they open the app.

3. DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE SEEN

Chatting about what your child's seen online keeps you aware of the content they're interacting with. Don't assume that platforms are screening out inappropriate material, or even that your child would recognise content as being harmful. Discuss who they follow, what posts they like and what comes up in their feeds: if alarm bells ring, it could be time for a more in-depth talk or to seek support.

4. LEARN HOW TO HIDE CONTENT

If your child stumbles across unsuitable content on social media, there's the option to hide that post as well as indicating you'd prefer any similar material not to be suggested in future. On some platforms, you might also be able to block posts that contain specific words, which is an excellent way to start taking control of what your child sees online.

5. SET DAILY LIMITS

Phones and most apps can tell you how much they're being used. Spending too long online can mean a child misses out on other activities that are important to all-round wellbeing. You could set some family rules – for everyone to follow – around device use, such as screen time limits and tech-free spaces: involving your child in creating this agreement makes them more likely to stick to it.

6. MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITY

Keeping a discreet eye on how your child is using social media can help ensure they're not entering potentially dangerous situations. As they grow up, of course, children need space to exercise their independence – but you can still occasionally ask to see what they're looking at. Be transparent about your own social media use and try not to sound judgemental about your child's.

7. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Even for adults, it's tempting to check an email or message as soon as the alert sound pings. Push notifications encourage people to open their apps and spend time on their device, so turning them off will help your child to practise mindful use of tech. Most of us have other things that we need to focus on as a priority – and those notifications will still be there later, when we have more time.

8. USE DEVICES TOGETHER

Giving children internet-enabled devices and complete freedom to explore platforms on their own can result in exposure to hugely damaging content. You could consider making a particular area at home a designated space to use phones, tablets and so on – making it much easier to monitor what content your child is viewing and (if necessary) steer them away from any potentially harmful paths.

9. ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mental health professionals often highlight the importance of exercise, quality time with loved ones, a balanced diet and restful sleep for our mental wellbeing. Spending hours on social media can cause us to sacrifice other activities that our brains need to feel well – so encouraging your child to put down their phone and enjoy something that doesn't involve a screen can be immensely beneficial.

10. TALK ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Most platforms default children's accounts to private, so only people they've accepted as friends can see their posts. This reduces the risk of bullying or unkind comments, but – just like offline life – the digital world can still make children feel as if they need to act or look a certain way to fit in. Talk to your child about peer pressure, and listen to any concerns so you can provide the support they need.

Meet Our Expert

Shazia Sarwar-Azmi is executive headteacher at a specialist primary school and, as an emotional therapy coach, works with school leaders to focus on the SEND, mental health and wellbeing agenda. A passionate advocate for vulnerable learners, Shazia is a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching and the author of *The Rainbow Within*, a book which supports children with SEMH needs.



Sources: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-52034825>
<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-algorithms/>



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