Empowering young people with additional learning needs to connect safely online.
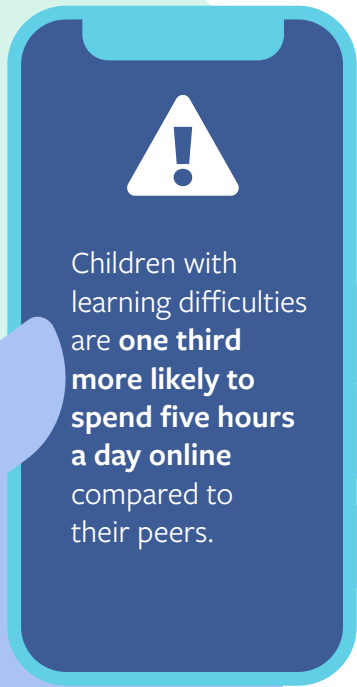
Screen time

For children with additional learning needs (ALN), screen time is harder to manage as they may find it hard to follow rules or may not want to stop doing a particular activity so, added support in this area is key.

Not all screen time is bad

- Time spent using technology often **improves friendships**
- It can be a **lifeline for someone with restricted mobility**
- It can help with learning
- Some young people use it as a **mood management tool**
- Some use it to **compensate for their offline life** or to 'escape issues'

A necessity for children with ALN

For some children with additional needs, screens might be a necessity for everyday life or a significant part of fulfilling an acute need, resulting in prolonged use.

This can make it harder to implement typical screen time guidance.

The most important thing is that you are engaged with their digital activity, are aware of the risks and managing them as and when they occur, and that your child is having a positive experience when using screens.

Children with learning difficulties are **one third more likely to spend five hours a day online** compared to their peers.
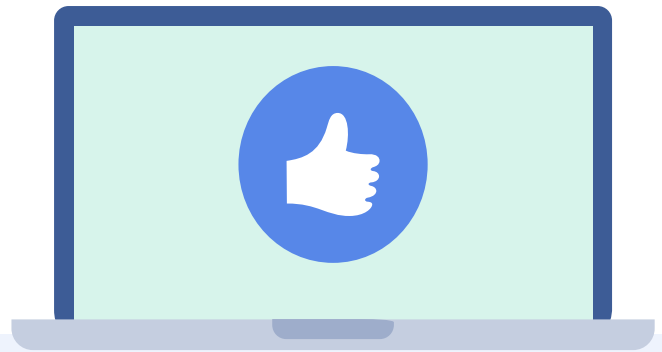
Reviewing your child's screen time

If technology use gets in the way of taking part in important activities, it can have a negative effect. This effect is rather small.

New official advice from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health says the evidence is weak for a guide on how long is harmful to spend on screens. They say families should negotiate screen time limits that are suited for each child and avoid screens at bedtime.

They recommend that we all ask these questions:

- Is screen time in your household controlled?
- Does screen use interfere with what your family wants to do?
- Does screen use interfere with sleep?
- Are you able to control snacking during screen time?
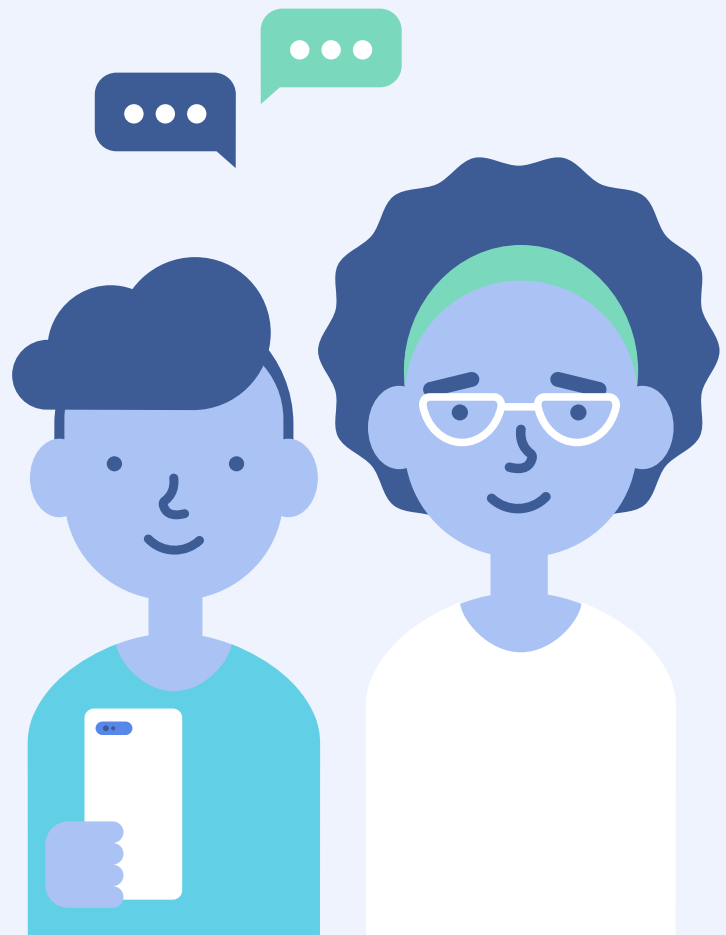
How to recognise when screen time is 'too much'

Often a sign that a child is spending too much time on screens is when they may feel anxiety or stress (or more than usual) if they are disconnected or separated from their phone.

Lack of sleep and exercise and no willingness to visit friends may be a sign they need to take a break from their device.

What experts recommend

The Chief Medical Officer for England has issued advice which recommends:

- **Sleep:** leave phones outside the bedroom and get enough good-quality sleep

- **Education:** make sure that children follow their school's policy on screen time

- **Safety:** advise children to put their phones away while crossing the road

- **Family time:** put screens away at mealtime

- **Sharing sensibly:** parents and carers should never assume that children are happy for their photos to be shared; when in doubt, don't upload

- **Keep moving:** get up and move every couple of hours after spending time sitting or lying down using a screen

- **Talk:** make sure children know they can always speak to you or a responsible adult if they feel uncomfortable with screens or social media use

- **Tracking:** make use of device or platform features that track how much time is spent using screens or social media.
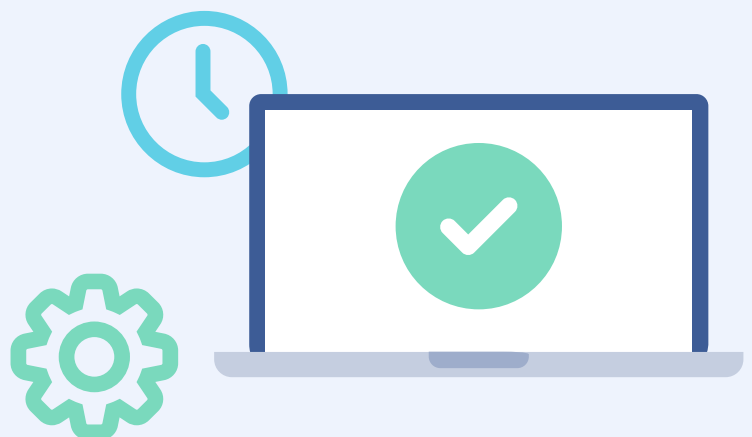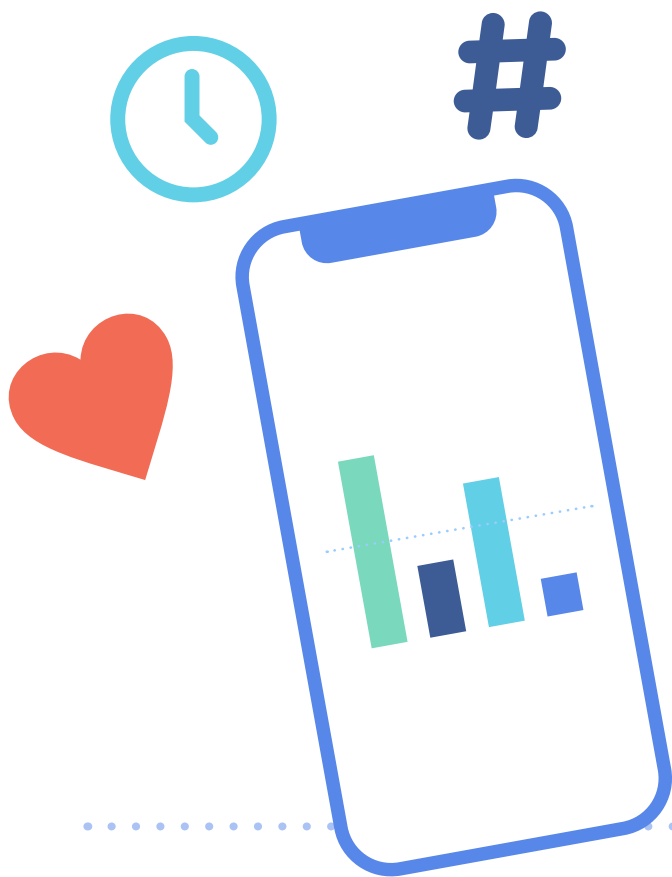
Tools available to manage screen time on social media

In addition to general tools like Google Digital Wellbeing and Apple Screen Time, a number of **platforms have designed tools on their platforms to help young people** stay aware and manage how much time they are spending on their platforms.

Here is a list of the most popular social networks and tools that you can point your child to, to help them manage their screen time

Facebook

Monitor your time on Facebook **with its dashboard.**

Instagram

Manage **'Your activity'** dashboard to monitor how you use the app.

TikTok

Enable the **Digital Wellbeing feature** which alerts users who have been on the app for more than 2 hours.

Screen time resources available

https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/screen-time/resources/

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