

# A parent's guide to: Navigating Secondary School

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*Online safety tips to support teens*

## What are kids doing?

According to Ofcom's Online Nation 2022 report, 15-17-year-olds spend an average of about 4 hours online every day. This time is spent chatting to friends, watching music or prank videos, playing multi-player games, creating their own content online and doing homework.

Beyond the schools gates there is added pressure to stay connected to continue conversations with friends and present the best version of themselves to fit in or gain popularity.

Although research shows that this is the age where parental guidance decreases, for teens it is the time when they most need it as research also shows that teens are much more likely to face risky situations online at 15 than they are at 14.\*

\*Suffolk Cybersurvey 2017



## Online activities

- **Checking-in with friends** and the world on a range of social apps - **Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram** being the most popular.
- Watching TV online through **YouTube** and other streaming services.
- Building their **digital footprint** by sharing details about their day to day life with friends and family or people they've met online
- **Gaming online** with friends regularly
- Engaging with **online learning opportunities** through school
- Doing homework through **video chats** with friends
- Taking part in **online challenges** with friends
- **Developing online relationships** some of which are purely digital
- **Raising awareness** of a cause they are passionate about to effect positive change
- **Joining online forums** to meet others with the same interests



## What risks do they face?

With an increase in interactions and time spent online research shows that there is a relationship between this and their emotional wellbeing. Heavy online users are more likely to feel depressed and can find it harder to concentrate than those who spend less time online.

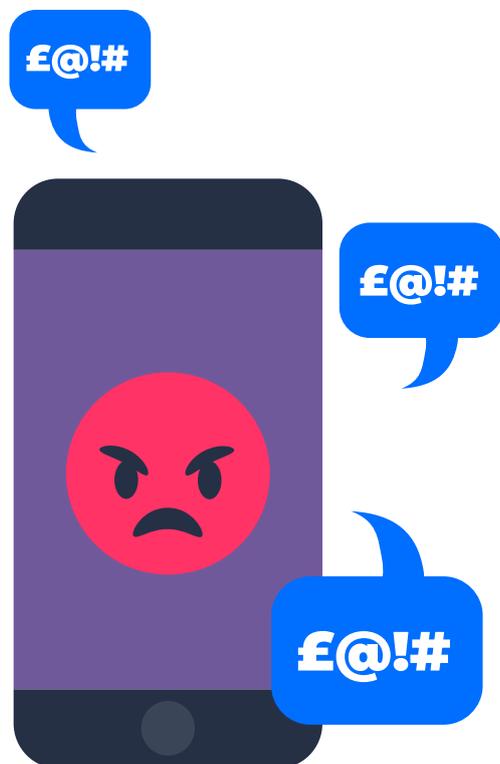
FOMO (Fear of missing out) and endless images of perfect selfies can also have a negative impact on young people's wellbeing and self-esteem. Peer pressure to maintain online relationships and stay connected can be difficult to juggle alongside school work and extra-curricular activities.



## Cyberbullying

As friendships break down on the playground, children may take to social media to express their frustration with each other. In some cases, misunderstandings on social media can also spark issues in real life.

Research shows that cyberbullying is most likely to peak at the age of 14 when children are trying to manage their friendships online and something goes wrong.



### What can you do to help?

- Discuss the **difference between banter and bullying** online so they can recognise when insults between friends can escalate
- If they are experiencing cyberbullying **stay calm and work together** with your child (and the school where appropriate) to find the best way to deal with it so they feel in control of the situation
- Be aware of what the **school policy** is just in case you need support
- Make sure they **know how to block or report people** on social media

### Support from schools

All schools should have a policy that guides their response to incidents. They may have mentors who can help or carry out 'Anti-bullying programmers' to raise awareness.

# Sexting

Although there is a lot of talk among teens of sending 'nudes' research shows that despite an increase in reporting, there's been little shift in the number of young people doing it. Research found that 7% of 14 year olds and 17% of 15+ have sent nudes.\*

With some teens that send nudes as a way to explore their sexuality in a relationship, there is a sense that 'it's worth the risk'.

When sexting goes wrong girls often experience victim-shaming as blame is put onto the person who took the image rather than those who spread it.

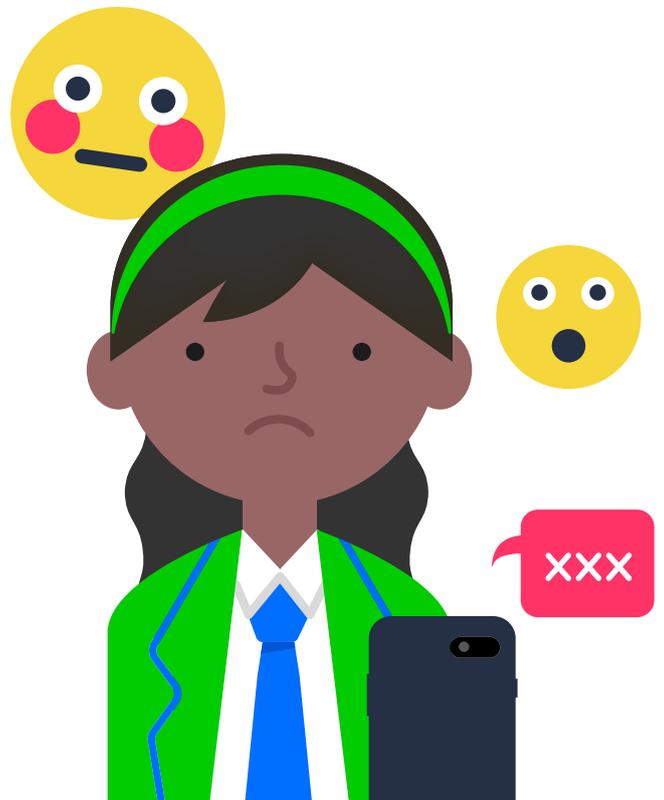
*\*Internet Matters and Youthworks 2020 Sexting report*



of teens said that **pressure was one of the reasons** why people sent nudes.

## What can you do to help?

- Discuss what a **healthy sexual relationship looks** like to them
- **Focus on 'what if' situations** to explore how they would deal with such a situation and whether it would be something that they'd consider doing
- Use real life examples that they can relate to in order to **explain the risks so that they are able to make a more informed decision**
- If they can't talk to you, **direct them to trusted support** like Childline to talk to trained councillors
- **Review their privacy settings** on social media so they only share with people they know



## Support from schools

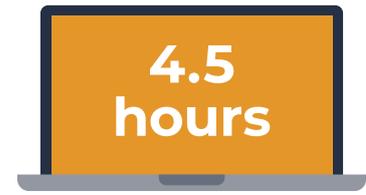
PHSE and Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) lessons help children explore and discuss subjects such as relationships, respect, consent, risk taking, exchange of sexual messages and images between peers and bullying. The government published statutory guidance for schools on [relationships, sex and health education](#) which is compulsory from September 2020.

Sexting guidance helps schools to determine how they should deal with incidents and when external agencies should be involved. In cases where the image was shared as a joke or without intended malice then the school may deal with it themselves however if there was intended malice and it was shared without consent then the police or social care may be involved.

## Screen time

Socialising, watching music videos or gaming make up the bulk of what they do. Mindless scrolling on social media, a decline in concentration, distraction from school work and a potential cause for conflict are some of the negative aspects of screen time that parents report.

On a positive note, spending time online can help teens develop skills for future jobs, take away physical barriers to connect with others and improve educational outcomes. When it comes to video games, 13-15-year-olds claimed to spend nearly 12 hours gaming in one week.



15-17s spend an average of about **4 hours a day** online

### What can you do to help?

- The challenge is to **help teens to focus on things that will minimise risk** and maximise the opportunities the online world can bring
- Discuss how screen-time is **affecting their overall wellbeing**
- **Help them to prioritise** how they use their screen time to make sure they are focusing on the right things
- **Make them aware** that most apps, games and devices are designed to keep them watching and playing for as long as possible
- Talk about the [research around screen time](#) and the concept of [persuasive design](#) making it hard for us to put devices down or spend less time on popular apps.
- Stay engaged in what your child is doing to **help them use a wide range of media** from safe sources
- **Encourage them to take part in outdoor activities** where tech can support rather than be the sole source of entertainment
- **Set a good example** with your own tech use

### Support from schools

To support children on this issue schools can follow a framework called [Education for a Connected World](#) which looks at eight different aspects of online safety, one of which is health, wellbeing and lifestyle. This addresses things like the importance of sleep and the pressure that social media can put onto its users.

# Peer pressure

Fitting in has always been a big part of what teenagers struggle with. The digital world has made this process much more complex as the rules are changing all the time.

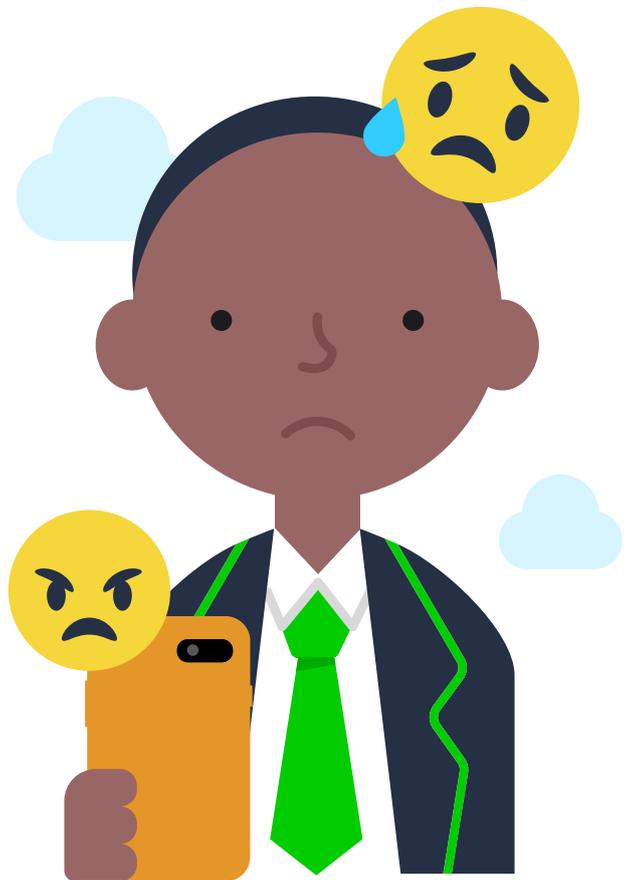
These days peer pressure online comes in various forms; taking part in a prank and posting it on social media for all to see; chasing likes and new followers to fit in to the status quo; sending a nude to prove commitment in a relationship. The added layer of the digital world has created 'virtual peer pressure' which children have to deal with.

## What can you do to help?

- **Stand your ground** & apply rules to counter any negative peer pressure
- Use a news story or something they can relate in order to **discuss potential risks of peer pressure**
- **Help them build the confidence** to say no if they are asked to do something that puts them or others at risk
- **Encourage them to choose their friends carefully** (on and offline) to ensure they are not led astray by friends who may be taking part in risky behaviour

## Support from schools

Many schools promote an inclusive school culture and take the time to celebrate diversity to help form positive social norms. Schools will also be keen to work in partnership with parents to resolve any online related issues.



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