



# A parent and carer's guide to the potential impact of the internet on their children's well-being

## How does the internet affect the well-being of our children?

The development of technology has transformed modern society and the effects can be widely seen from communication patterns and personal interactions, to educational and scientific achievements.

As people use the internet for communicating through mobile phones, social media, instant messaging and photo/video sharing, research evidence from the [Royal Society of Public Health](#) demonstrates the impact of this on our social lives and well-being.

## The positive effects of online interactions

Social media sites allow children and young people to meet and keep in touch with friends, and have easier access to information relevant to their social lives. Internet technologies allow immediate access to education, information and entertainment, and this can create positive effects such as:

- instant access to new types of entertainment
- increased education via research, online tutorials, videos and conversations
- exposure to new discoveries, including communities, cultures and languages
- reduced feelings of loneliness and increased social inclusion
- facilitating real-world social interactions
- expanded social circles and a sense of community
- creation of real relationships and feelings of self-worth
- increased skills in science, technology, engineering and maths
- increased skills in creativity, problem-solving and reasoning.



## **The negative effects of online interactions**

Unfortunately, the use of internet technologies is not always positive, so it's important to recognise the risks and negative effects in order to prevent them.

Some negative effects that internet technologies may have on children and young people include:

- increased feelings of loneliness and isolation
- increased self importance
- worries with self-image and self-identity
- increased stress
- creation of superficial relationships
- exposure to online bullying, pornography, racism, grooming and hate speech
- compulsive use of internet technologies and the inability to self-regulate
- fear of missing out (FOMO)
- exposure to online fraud and online illegal activity
- health problems associated with prolonged use of screens and devices (e.g. headaches, neck aches, obesity, eye strain).

## **What this means for your child's well-being**

The positive and negative effects of internet technologies seem to mirror each other and their impacts may vary, depending on the individual characteristics of the child or young person.

The combination of personal characteristics, age, resilience and maturity may explain why internet technologies can have stronger positive effects on some children and young people than others.

In order to reduce the negative effects of internet technologies, parents and carers can take steps to ensure that their child's well-being online is being enhanced.

## **Suggestions for parents/carers to manage their child's well-being online**

- Look at how your child interacts with their devices – are they sad, anxious, cheerful or happy after being online?
- Decide how to balance online activities with real-world activities.
- Understand that young people are able to manage social networks online, but offer them support with this.
- Ask your child what they like and don't like about being online.
- Maintain regular conversations with your child about how they are feeling, what they are doing and offer your support. For guidance on conversation starters, consult this [Childnet resource](#).



Parents and carers can find out more at Pew Internet Research who [provide up-to-date information on well-being in a tech-saturated world](#).

For further information on children and young people's well-being online, parents and carers can consult the [Online Safety Zone](#).

