



Mentor
Software for Children's Services

Supporting Young People in a Changing Digital World



Helping Young People Build Healthy Digital Habits for Life

For today's young people, the digital world is simply part of growing up.

It's where friendships are formed, interests are discovered, communities are built and identities begin to take shape. For many, it's also where they learn, express themselves creatively and stay connected with the people who matter most.

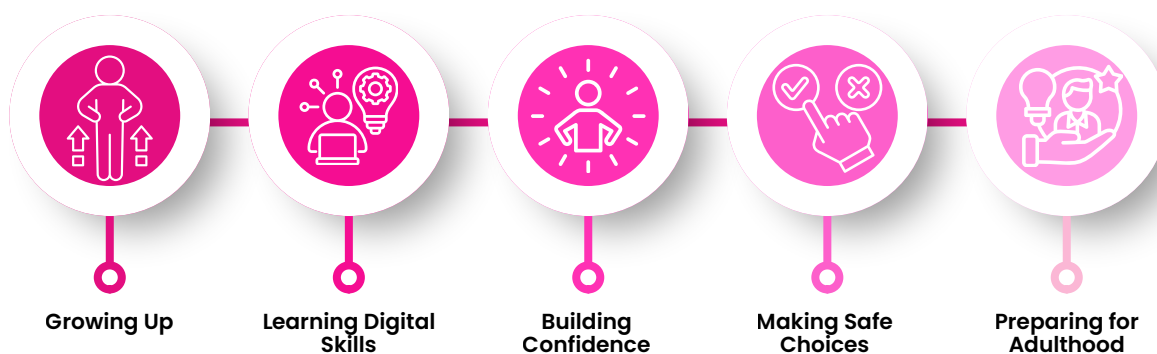
But alongside these opportunities come real challenges.

Over recent years, concerns have grown around children's exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, unrealistic expectations, online exploitation and the impact excessive screen time can have on wellbeing. In response, the UK Government has introduced stronger online safety measures designed to give children greater protection while encouraging technology companies to take more responsibility for the content they host.

For children's homes and Supported Accommodation providers, the focus should remain on helping young people develop the healthy digital habits, judgement and resilience they'll need long after they leave care.

Learning how to question what they see online, recognise unhealthy influences, manage screen time, protect their privacy and build positive online relationships are all skills that will support young people throughout their lives.

Throughout this guide, we've brought together practical ideas to help Responsible Individuals, Registered Managers and support teams encourage healthy digital habits while helping young people thrive.



More Than Just Social Media

The UK's new online safety measures are part of a much wider conversation about childhood, wellbeing and the role technology plays in young people's lives.

Today's teenagers have grown up in a world where smartphones, social media and instant communication have always existed. Technology offers enormous opportunities, from learning new skills and expressing creativity to staying connected with family and friends.

At the same time, evidence has increasingly highlighted the risks of unrestricted access to online platforms.

The UK Government's latest measures are intended to strengthen protections for children online by reducing exposure to harmful content and encouraging technology companies to create safer digital environments. Alongside this, the Online Safety Act places greater responsibility on platforms to assess and reduce risks to children, supported by oversight from Ofcom.



For children's homes and Supported Accommodation providers, these are a reminder that digital wellbeing deserves the same attention as emotional wellbeing, physical health and independence.

Young people leaving care will continue to use technology throughout adulthood. They will navigate social media, online banking, job applications, education, housing services, healthcare and relationships through digital platforms.

The goal is to help young people develop the skills to use technology thoughtfully and safely, to make positive decisions for themselves.

Research consistently shows that young people are far more likely to seek help when they have trusted adults they can talk to openly, without fear of judgement.



The Five Cs

A Practical Framework for Supporting Healthy Digital Habits

Mentor encourages providers to think about five simple principles that place young people's development at the centre.



Mentors Young Person Dashboard gives providers a complete picture of each young person's journey in one place. Record key work sessions, set and review personalised targets, track progress towards independence, log achievements and celebrate milestones over time. By bringing everything together in a single timeline, Mentor helps teams evidence positive outcomes, identify emerging needs and ensure every young person's development remains at the heart of their support.



Turning Change Into Opportunity

For many young people, social media is where they connect with friends, express themselves, discover new interests and feel part of a wider community.

As new online safety measures are introduced, some young people may experience frustration, boredom or a fear of missing out. Others may adapt quickly or welcome spending less time online.



There is no "normal" response, every young person will adjust at their own pace, and that's okay.

What matters most is creating an environment where young people feel comfortable talking about those feelings. It can become an opportunity to develop skills that will benefit young people long after they leave care.

Questions such as:

- *If you spent less time online, what else would you enjoy doing?*
- *What new skill would you love to learn this year?*
- *If you had an extra hour each day, how would you spend it?*
- *What are you really good at that you'd like to do more often?*

Try to help young people become more aware of how their digital habits affect their mood, relationships and wellbeing.

Supporting young people to reflect, rather than simply react, helps build emotional resilience and independent decision making.

Over time, these conversations encourage young people to develop healthier relationships with technology because they understand why balance matters.



From Digital Habits to Life Skills

Many of the skills that support healthy technology use are the very same skills that prepare young people for adulthood.

Digital Habit	Life Skill Being Developed
Managing screen time	Self-management
Questioning online information	Critical thinking
Protecting privacy	Personal responsibility
Respecting others online	Healthy relationships
Balancing online and offline activities	Emotional wellbeing
Asking for help when needed	Self-advocacy

Rather than creating strict rules around devices, consider how digital activities fit alongside everything else that contributes to a healthy lifestyle.

Encourage young people to think about balancing:

-  Screen time
-  Physical activity
-  Sleep
-  Time with friends and family
-  Creative hobbies
-  Time outdoors



Build Digital Confidence

Help young people develop the confidence to ask questions such as:

- ✓ Is this information trustworthy?
- ✓ Why has this content appeared on my feed?
- ✓ How does this make me feel?
- ✓ Would I share this in real life?
- ✓ Who could I talk to if something online worried me?

Developing curiosity is often more valuable than simply providing answers.

Celebrate Positive Choices

Notice the small wins. Perhaps a young person:

- ✓ Put their phone away during dinner.
- ✓ Went for a walk instead of scrolling.
- ✓ Spoke openly about something they saw online.
- ✓ Chose to spend time with friends offline.
- ✓ Asked for help when something didn't feel right.

These moments deserve recognition because they reinforce positive habits rather than focusing solely on mistakes.

Practical Checklist

Building Healthy Digital Habits

- ☐ Encourage device-free mealtimes.
- ☐ Support consistent sleep routines.
- ☐ Build outdoor activities into the week.
- ☐ Encourage hobbies beyond screens.
- ☐ Create opportunities for face-to-face conversations.
- ☐ Regularly check in on how young people feel about their online experiences.

Help Young People Reflect – Conversation Starters



About their online world



- ✓ What's your favourite thing to do online?
- ✓ Who inspires you?
- ✓ What makes you laugh?

About wellbeing



- ✓ How do you usually feel after spending time online?
- ✓ Have you ever seen something that upset you?
- ✓ What helps you switch off?

About independence



- ✓ How do you decide whether information online is trustworthy?
- ✓ What would you do if someone online made you uncomfortable?
- ✓ Who would you speak to if you needed help?



Preparing Young People for a Digital Future

Technology will continue to evolve, new platforms will emerge and trends will come and go.

But every young person deserves the confidence to navigate the world safely, make informed decisions and understand digital privacy,

For children's homes and Supported Accommodation providers, preparing young people for adulthood is helping them develop resilience, critical thinking, healthy relationships and independence. Digital wellbeing is now just as important as many of the other life skills young people develop before moving into adulthood.

The conversations we have today, the opportunities we create and the encouragement we give can all help shape the choices young people make long after they leave our services.



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