

Empowering young people to protect their mental health in the online world

*Guidance for parents, caregivers,
educators and advocates*

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Rapid physical changes combined with developing friendships, concerns about their appearance and more time spent in front of a screen can all affect a child's mental and emotional well-being. Being online can present significant opportunities to connect, learn and engage with others, but it also comes with challenges. This includes negative mental health outcomes, specifically depression and anxiety.

Digital natives need the right tools, skills and support to thrive in a digital environment

Protecting children and young people's mental health from excessive screentime, addictive algorithms, harmful content and behaviour is a shared responsibility. Governments and digital platforms are at the centre of keeping online spaces safe, while digital skills and critical thinking can empower young people to enjoy a healthier, more meaningful and mindful digital experience.

92% agree that schools should teach young people how to manage the impact of digital technologies on their mental and physical health

87% agree parents and families have a crucial role to play

December 2025 Eurobarometer on
future needs in digital education



- 1. Start a conversation** about informed decision-making and being intentional online, focussing on topics including the amount of time spent in front of a screen and their different uses, the differences between being active or passive use and how different approaches can make them feel.
- 2. Provide information** the relevance of technical features and algorithm design, including how these can influence behaviour as well as the limits of Artificial Intelligence.
- 3. Promote healthy digital habits** such as critical thinking, using social media mindfully to prioritise connections and engagements and taking regular screen breaks for physical activities and spending in-person time with friends and family.
- 4. Signpost resources** that can help young people navigate the digital landscape safely, including privacy settings and reporting and safety features as well as advice on where to turn if they need mental health support.
- 5. Raise awareness** of the importance of mental health for young people online and support campaigns that promote healthy, productive and mindful use of screens.

Remember: modelling healthy patterns is also a powerful and effective teaching tool.

EU action and support

In the European Union, minors are protected and empowered online by one of the world's most comprehensive toolbox for child safety, which includes:

- The [Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#) and its [guidelines on the protection of minors](#)
- [Safer Internet Centres](#) under the [Better Internet for Kids Strategy \(BIK+\)](#)
- A [Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health](#) including a “Healthy Screens, Healthy Youth” initiative
- The development of [rules to combat child sexual abuse online](#) and initiatives such as the [Cyberbullying Action Plan](#)

The Commission is launching an EU-wide inquiry on the broader impact of social media on mental health and wellbeing, especially for children and young people, to underpin an evidence-based debate on the matter.

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