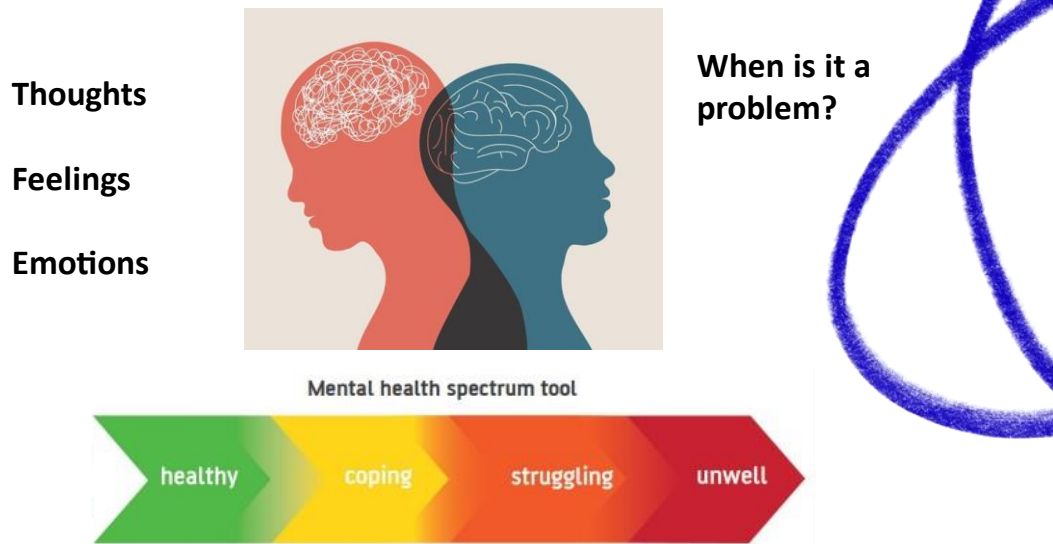


If you are concerned about the wellbeing of children and young people in your life you can talk to your GP.

## Everyone has Mental Health



- Everyone has mental health. Children and adults have mental health and can have problems with their mental health.
- It is made up of thoughts, feelings and emotions.
- Sometimes our mental health is okay and other times it is not.
- It becomes a problem when it gets in the way of living our life, going to work, taking care of ourselves, managing relationships and doing hobbies etc.
- We can talk to people, get help and do things to look after our mental health.

An **algorithm** is a set of steps and rules used to complete a task.

Retain an audience.

Every time we interact with something on a platform it collects a data point about us.

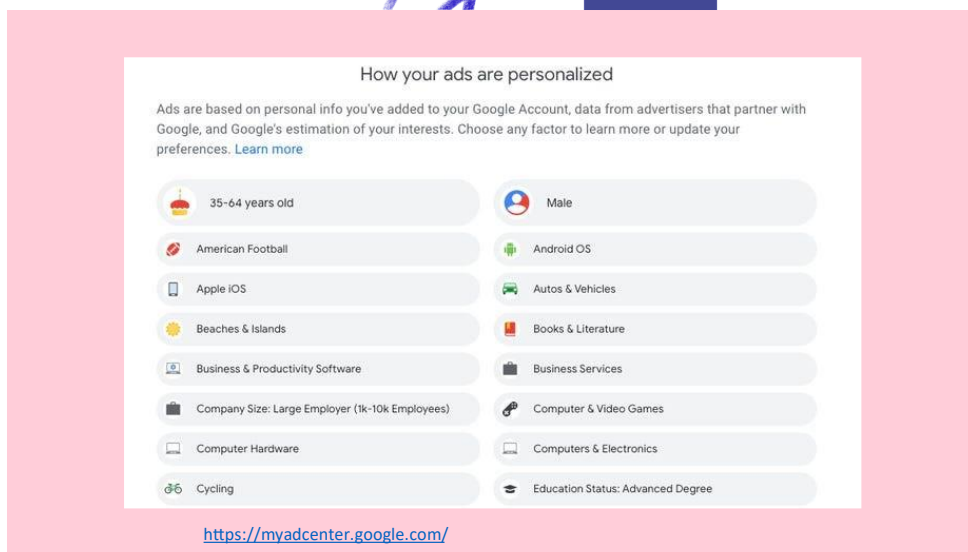
- Video clicks
- Friends, follows and network
- Time spent watching
- Comments, likes and other engagements
- Closing or clicking away

Increase watch time.

Increase audience.

Increase engagement.

Eyes on adverts.



Understanding how companies like Google, TikTok, Facebook and YouTube etc. use algorithms can help us to understand how what we do online affects us.

An algorithm is a set of instructions that can complete a task. When we use online platforms, like Google, they collect information about what we do, how long for, what we like, don't like, search for, watch etc.

Using this, Google creates an advertising profile about us. You can see yours online and make changes to it. Google uses this to decide the most effective adverts to show us.

The content shown to you is shown to achieve a desired outcome.

- Increase engagement.
- Retain an audience.
- Increase audience.
- Increase watch time.



Platforms like YouTube and TikTok use a similar process to decide which videos to suggest to us. They do this with the goal of keeping us using the platforms, watching and sharing videos and engaging with content by commenting or liking.

This doesn't always mean we will be shown content we like or enjoy. Content that is inflammatory, emotional or counter to personal views will also cause people to watch and engage.

- Social media platforms are designed to be addictive, taking advantage of the reward centres of the brain where feel - good chemicals are leased.



“When the outcome is unpredictable, the behaviour is more likely to repeat. Think of a slot machine: if game players knew they **never** were going to get money by playing the game, then they never would play. The idea of a potential future reward keeps the machines in use. The same goes for social media sites. One does not know how many likes a picture will get, who will ‘like’ the picture, and when the picture will receive likes. The unknown outcome and the possibility of a desired outcome can keep users engaged with the sites.”

[McLean Hospital | Mental Health Treatment, Research, and Education \(Belmont, MA\)](#)

We can also apply the above thinking to platforms like TikTok and YouTube shorts. Users do not know what video will come next as they swipe. The video may be okay, good, boring or amazing. Like a slot machine, finding a great video is the jackpot that rewards users with good feelings!

- It is not their fault.
- It is important to be aware that social media platforms are designed to create specific behaviours in their users.
- The impact and how we support them?



If young people come across videos that are inappropriate or upsetting, if they struggle to stay off their devices or get upset when they are taken away – this is not their fault. Many platforms are designed to keep us, young people and adults, using them as much as possible.

## OxWell student survey

40,000  
Students

When asked where they would most like support for their mental health and wellbeing, students answered:

1. Home
2. School
3. Online



Passive Scrolling =  
Lower Wellbeing

- Screens and social media are not innately bad.
- Our intention when we use them is more important.



Passive scrolling of websites like TikTok, Instagram etc. are linked with lower overall wellbeing. These apps and screens are not innately bad, but our intention should be set when we use them. How long will we use them? Are we doing something specific? Work? Socialising? Looking something up? If we don't set clear intentions we may just be letting algorithms decide our behaviour for us.

Millennials report  
higher negative  
impact

- Our perception of their relationship with technology may not match their experience.
- There are many benefits to using social media.



Talking to young people and children about how social media makes them feel is important. Our perception may not match with their experience and we shouldn't assume that they are experiencing negative feelings around social media.

## Impact on sleep

- Blue light can impact sleep too close to bedtime.
- Disrupts melatonin and circadian rhythms.
- Teens 8 – 10 hours children need 9 – 12 hours of sleep.
- Exacerbates other issues, hormones and emotional regulation.



- Blue light emitted from screens on laptops and phones disrupts the sleep hormone melatonin which affects how well we fall asleep and the quality of our sleep.
- Lack of sleep can make us more irritable and impact emotional regulation and increase the likelihood of anxiety, stress and depression.
- Lack of sleep also has an impact on memory and learning.
- Anxiety can lead to further disrupted sleep.

Belonging,  
identity and  
self-image.

- Sense of belonging for teens and children is crucial.
- They can achieve this in positive ways online and offline.
- Measuring personal worth using social media.
- Can lead to unhealthy online behaviours.



- Teenage years and childhood are important for developing a sense of belonging, identity and self-image. This starts with family and peers.
- A sense of belonging is important for overall wellbeing and better outcomes in many life areas.
- Belonging can be found in friendship groups and social groups, we naturally seek the validation of our peers.
- We can also get this validation online which can be helpful.
- Social media profiles are closely linked with personal identity and can have strong emotional impacts.
- If someone is lacking a sense of belonging and secure self-belief, becoming more concerned with their online presence may be a way they cope with this.
  - This can lead to a hypervigilance of their online presence, likes and followers etc.
  - Measuring their personal worth using online metrics, likes, views etc.

## The Fear of Missing Out

- Feels of rejection and loss.
- Before social media, we were not aware of the many goings on in our social groups.
- Drives comparison.



We see far more of our social groups activity than we did before social media. We may not have known what everyone was doing at the weekend, what they had for dinner and where they went at the weekend. Now we have access to our social group's goings on as well as constant access to millions of other peoples.

This can drive comparison and feelings of rejection if not included in things. This is linked to identity and belonging.

## Negative Bias

- Self-protection by paying attention to negative things.
- The media highlights negative stories and algorithms favour divisive and controversial videos or opinions.
- Doomscrolling and hypervigilance.
- Anxiety and low mood.



- Our brains tend to focus on negative things more as this keeps us safe.
- This is true of online content and things happening in our lives.
- The algorithms of social media sites can make this more prominent. If we engage with content that upsets us or make us fearful, the algorithm may then show more of this content to us as that is what we are engaging in.
- Doomscrolling – the acting of scrolling through a lot of content that tends to be negative.
- All of this can lead to anxiety and a hypervigilance of negative content and news stories online.

## Distorted perception

- Algorithms can create “bubbles”.
- Negative bias in the media creating negative bubbles.
- Comparison of self, how we look and how we act.



- Algorithms can create “bubbles” where the content shown to us is very similar, representing similar views and ideas.
- Reading lots of negative stories about violence, war etc. can distort the way we perceive the world and make everything seem more threatening.
- These bubbles can also create a distorted perception of self, how one should behave or dress etc.

## Supporting Young People

Social media and the internet is a huge part of life. It would be unreasonable to expect anyone to go through life not using with them.

For young people today social media becomes one of their primary modes of socialising and remaining connected to their social groups.

How do we balance the positive/negative impacts of social media with the positive/negative impacts of using or not using it?



## Knowledge and Awareness

- Are they informed about how social media and algorithms work?

- Are they aware of how social media affects them, their moods and behaviour?

Open discussions

Emotions and Feelings

Model Self-reflection

Knowledge = Power

Age Appropriate?

- Every child is different and has different needs. Discussions and information shared should be age appropriate.
- Open discussions give a level of informed decision making to teenagers and children and involving them in discussions early on can make it more likely that agreements and rules will be successful.
- Knowledge can make it easier to make difficult choices. If we know how social media is made to keep us using it, it can be easier to put it down.
- How does social media makes them feel? Be open about how it makes you feel. Are you aware of a tense feeling when you don't have access to your phone? Are you aware of a need to check social media?
- Modelling –monkey see monkey do. If they see us reflecting on how we use technology and social media, discussing how it makes us feel and what we do to have better control over it – this will help them reflect on their own experience.

## Behaviour

- Do adults at home model behaviour that promotes good social media boundaries?
- Are there agreements in place about how and when social media/the internet are used?

Prioritising conversation over phone use

No phones at certain times/places

Habit building behaviour

Deliberate time to check in each day

Making agreements together

- It can be easy to default into daily patterns. Be deliberate with changes to house rules and behaviours.
- If we always use our phones and prioritise devices over young people in our lives, this sends a message and they will learn to do the same. It might not always be clear when they need our attention.
- Setting intentions with technology use – how long will you use it?
- What is the purpose? To relax and unwind is a purpose but reflect on how they feel at the end of the session, are they relaxed or are they more tense/wound up/etc? Do the same for yourself.
- Create deliberate times to check in and have conversations.

## Environment

• Does the home environment promote less screen time?

• Are there plenty of offline opportunities and activities at home?

Mornings and Dinner Time

Easy access to other things

Planned activities that are people orientated

Where are phones and tablets etc?

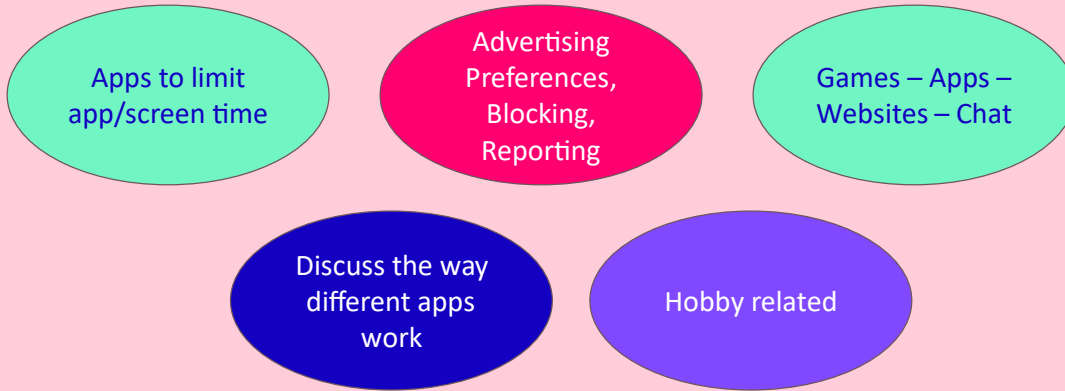
Outdoor spaces

- Where are phones kept during “no screen” times? Pocket? Tables? Drawers? If they are out of sight, they are less distracting.
- Is there easy access to a variety of different activities? Make it easy to do other things. Board games, books, music, instruments, arts and crafts, outside activities etc.
- Plan family and group activities away from screens.

## Digital Environment

- Are you aware of the sites and apps that they are using?

- Are they aware of how they can curate the things that they see or don't want to see?



- Encourage active and intentional hobby and interest based technology use – music, art, sport etc. instead of passive scrolling of Instagram, TikTok etc.
- Show positive interest in what they do online, fostering trust.
- Discuss rules and agreements about apps used to limit time.
- Be aware of what apps, games and websites they are using.
- Share and discuss how they can block or report, people, adverts, videos, and other content that they don't like or that makes them feel bad.
- Parents have different approaches for monitoring devices. Promoting trust and responsibility, sharing knowledge and information is good.
- Young children will require more monitoring.
- While teenagers and children have a right to privacy, their safety is more important.
- Build trust, knowledge and responsibility at a younger age and transition to less monitoring as they get older.

## Signs of Anxiety

When young children feel anxious, they cannot always understand or express what they are feeling. You may notice that they:

- become irritable, tearful or clingy
- find it hard to concentrate
- have difficulty sleeping
- wake in the night
- have angry outbursts
- start avoiding everyday activities
- have bad dreams

## Signs of Low Mood

Low mood that does not go away or lasts longer than two weeks could be a sign of depression. Other signs could include:

- being irritable or grumpy all the time
- not being interested in things they used to enjoy
- feeling tired and exhausted a lot of the time
- not having much confidence
- eating less than usual or overeating
- Seeming unable to relax or being more lethargic than usual

## The 5 Ways to Wellbeing



Find more about The 5 Ways to Wellbeing Here - [5 steps to mental wellbeing - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/5-steps-to-mental-wellbeing)

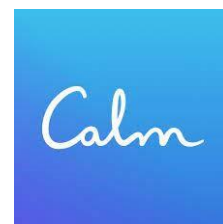
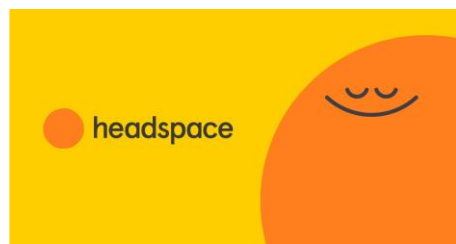
**You don't need to have all  
the answers**

**Just by being there, you are  
supporting them**

**Create space and listen**

## **Apps**

- Headspace
- Calm
- Finch
- Balance
- Kooth



### **CAMHS**

NHS mental health services that focus on the needs of children and young people.

### **Young Carers Bucks**

Young Carers Bucks is part of Carers Bucks and supports children and young people in Buckinghamshire aged 6-18 years old who have a caring role.

### **Barnardo's; R-U-Safe?**

Direct, one-to-one support to young people at risk of Sexual or Criminal Exploitation (CSE/CE).

### **Kooth**

Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people.

### **Switch**

Switch Bucks is an alcohol and drug service for young people in Buckinghamshire.

### **Young Minds**

### **Youth Enquiry Service**

Free and confidential support, information and counselling to young people (13-25) in the High Wycombe area.

### **Child Bereavement UK**

Child Bereavement UK supports families when a child is facing bereavement.

### **Youth Concern**

They offer a drop-in centre, counselling, music studio, IT studio and general guidance and support.

### **Wycombe Youth Action**

Reducing social exclusion by supporting youth volunteering and educational, social, employment and personal development.

### **Bucks Family Network**

Our counselling and therapy service is for individual clients, schools and professionals.



## **Support for Adults**

### **GP**

Good first point of contact for advice and support.

### **Healthy Minds (IAPT)**

NHS service offering talking therapies for common mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and stress.

### **Relate**

Provides counselling services for issues surrounding family, marriage, LGBT+, and children and young people.

### **Switchboard**

An LGBT+ helpline for support with sexuality, gender identity, sexual health, and emotional wellbeing.

### **Cruse Bereavement Support**

Offers face-to-face, telephone, email, and online support for anyone who has experienced a loss.

### **The Samaritans**

Free and confidential listening support. 24/7, 365 days a year.

### **Age UK**

Information, advice, and support for older people living in Buckinghamshire.

### **Bucks Mind**

We offer counselling services, community-based support groups, and peer-to-peer support. We also have a Safe Haven for anyone experiencing a mental health crisis.

