

# QUESTION PROMPT BANK

How to talk to young people about their mental health and digital use.  
Recommendations from young people.

## How to introduce the topic

*Remind individuals the environment of the appointment is a safe and inclusive space.*

### Ask about online engagement

- What apps/platforms do you use?
- Where are your favourite spaces to engage on those apps/platforms? Why?
- What do you get (emotionally, socially, mentally) from using these apps/platforms?
- Who do you engage with online (influencers, friends, communities)? Why?

### Ask about online functioning

- How long do you spend online daily?
- When are you usually online (at night, during the day)? Why?

### Ask about online behaviours

- How do you think your online activities impact you?
- What effect does social media have on your daily activities (sleep, work, socialising)?
- Do you use apps to access advice? what kinds of advice?'

## Your Communication Skills

- Use a conversational manner when asking, like you're having a chat.
- Use relevant and friendly language that a young person will understand.
- Use open-ended questions to give young people the opportunity to reply with a short or elaborate answer, depending on their comfort levels.
- Nod, listen, and use understanding and positive body language.
- Provide warning if asking questions that are sensitive or potentially triggering in nature.
- Vary questions based on the age of the young person (i.e. a younger individual may require more prompts, whereas this may be less necessary for older individuals).
- Be reassuring and encouraging.
- **Do not** shrug off young people's responses or be dismissive about their feelings.
- **Do not** pressure the young person to answer questions.

## Your Attitude

- Try to establish a level of trust and rapport with the young person before asking more in-depth questions on the topic.
- Be non-judgmental of the young person and try not to stigmatise their online activities by giving negative or patronising reactions.
- Acknowledge the power imbalance and try to avoid being authoritarian.
- Respect the young person's privacy as much as possible (this includes creating a safe space and only telling parents about online use in necessary circumstances)
- **Do not** make assumptions about the young person's online use.
- **Do not** assume all of a young person's mental health problems are caused by social media.

Having some experience with the online world is valuable when discussing mental health and online usage with young people. It allows you to better support them and understand what they may encounter and engage with.

# REMINDERS TO ASK ABOUT

Start Here! 

## Positives of Online Use

### How does social media help you?

- This question encourages young people to reflect on and identify the general positive aspects of their online experiences.

### Can you give an example of a positive experience you've had online?

- This prompts young people to share specific instances of positive online interactions, allowing you to delve into concrete examples of beneficial online use.

### What is your opinion about having online friends?/who do you like to stay in touch with?

- These questions provide young people with the opportunity to talk about the support systems and relationships they have developed both online and offline.

### How do you find the online world gives you support?

- This question taps into how the online world may influence the young person's mental health and serve as a safety mechanism for them.

## Negatives of Online Use

### Can you give an example of a negative experience you've had online?

- Negatives may involve viewing harmful, dangerous, uncomfortable or distressing content. Asking this question will allow you to address challenging topics with young people.

### Do you feel pressured to post content online?

- This question helps identify any external or internal pressures that might influence the young person's online behaviours and well-being.

### Do you think social media is harmful to young people?

- This question opens a discussion on the potential risks and negative impacts of social media, providing insight into the young person's perspective.

### Does online activity negatively impact your mood or mental health?'

- This question can be used to explore how online activities might affect the young person's emotional state.

## Recommendations for young people

### Safety Mechanisms

- Focus on making small realistic changes to online use, to begin with.
- Use strategies (such as journaling) for the young person to reflect on and identify which online activities worsen or improve their mental health.
- Suggest how social media can be used productively (e.g. skill development, hobbies, education).
- Suggest strategies for reducing exposure to harmful content (e.g. blocking users, muting content). To help with this you can access the safety mechanism flash cards and roadmaps on [digitaldialogues.co.uk](https://digitaldialogues.co.uk)
- Signpost to useful sites or apps that are well-moderated (either for usage or support).

### Online and Offline Support

#### Ask the young person: Do you know where to access online support if you're struggling?

- Suggestions could include YoungMinds, Kooth, Childline, The Mix, Samaritans, Shout (as well as specific services to their county and/or topics discussed, i.e. if a young person mentions disordered eating being triggered during online use then services such as BEAT could be suggested).

#### Ask the young person: Do you know where to access offline support if you're struggling?

- Suggestions could include trusted caregivers, teachers, GPs, friends/peers, professionals (i.e. CAMHS), and offline organisations.

**DO NOT** recommend completely disengaging from online use

This can be detrimental and is unhelpful to suggest to young people, even if you believe it's good advice.