



# Digital Parenting

## Friday 23rd January

Graham Starkey  
Assistant Head / Computing Subject Leader

# Digital Parenting - Session Agenda



- **Online Harms and the Online Safety Act:** How our UK legislation is beginning to safeguard your child's online safety.
- **The Question of Screen Time:** None or some, how much is too much?
- **Family Networking:** an opportunity to mix with other parents to share your experiences as a 'digital parent' and to identify what works and why.
- **Working Together:** A clear set of shared Feltonfleet Community recommendations to ensure a consistent approach designed to mitigate the growing complexities of digital parenting and promote a happy, wholesome childhood for your children.



“the safest place in the world to be  
online”

*the official mission statement of the UK government regarding its Internet  
regulation strategy*



"We are determined to ensure technology enriches children's lives, not harms them - and to give every child the childhood they deserve"

*Liz Kendall, Technology Secretary*



# Online Harms

*an online harm is any content or behaviour encountered online that causes significant physical or psychological distress to an individual*



**Brianna Ghey** (16) was murdered in 2023. Brianna had viewed harmful online content relating to eating disorders and self harm. Two teenagers with a 'fascination for violence' planned her killing using a messaging app. One had viewed violent content online.



**Molly Russell** (14) took her own life in 2017 after being exposed to suicide and self-harm content on social media. Her inquest highlighted images of self-harm and suicide viewed by Molly "shouldn't have been available for a child to see".



**Frankie Thomas** (15) died in 2018 having viewed explicit self harm material online for several months. An inquest heard that teachers at her school wrongly believed that filters were in place on her device though In fact, this was not the case.

# Online Harms - Children Under 9 years of age



- **Cases of harm:**
  - While most high profile cases in the UK have involved teenagers, there is significant evidence and recorded data that children under 9 years of age have also suffered direct harm.
- **Exposure to harmful content:**
  - Typically in younger ages (<9 years), children do not seek out specific content though it finds them through older siblings, algorithms or autoplay (automatic ads and follow-on content).

A 2024 report from the Children's Commissioner for England found that **10% of children have seen pornography by the age of 9**. For children this young, such exposure is often described by child psychologists as "developmentally traumatising," leading to confusion about bodies and boundaries.

**Graphic Violence:** Children under 9 frequently encounter "jump scare" videos or violent clips (often disguised as popular characters like Huggy Wuggy or Skibidi Toilet) on platforms like YouTube Kids or TikTok.

**Gaming Platforms:** Cases have been documented of online predators using the chat functions in **Roblox** or **Minecraft** to groom and build relationships with children as young as 6 or 7. These may then be coerced into self-generated indecent imagery.



## Online Harms - children 9 years and under

- **Identifying Risk:** Children under 9 who use online platforms are particularly at risk due to the developmental nature of their digital literacy, meaning they are less able to critically identify and assess risk. This is being exacerbated by AI.
- **Safeguarding:** Parental 'tech lag' can reduce safeguarding in the home, whereby their child appears to be playing a harmless game, unaware that the app also features open online chat facilities. Skilled online predators can use specific workarounds to gift in-game currency (i.e Robux in Roblox) or skins in MineCraft as part of their grooming strategies.



## Other Harms - children under 9 years of age

- **Immediate reward:** Game streaks rewarding more and continuous play and in-game currency acquisition encouraging purchases and bonus levels develop the addictive nature of games, offsetting their balance toward unhealthy usage patterns.
- **AutoPlay / Advertisements:** Autoplay and 'recommender' features in apps can quickly lead children from age appropriate content into inappropriate follow-on content, and advertisements can quickly attract curious minds.



# The Online Safety Act 2023

This law now regulates online harms into two distinct "tiers" through legal definitions:

1. Illegal Content (harms categorised as crimes)
2. Content Harmful to Children (harms that are *legal for adults* but dangerous for children).



# The Online Safety Act 2023

## 2017 (Planning Phase)

Originally called the Online Harms Act, started life in the Internet Safety Strategy green paper (2017) and the Online Harms white paper (2019).

## 2024

New criminal offences come into effect including cyberflashing, epilepsy trolling, and the offence of encouraging or assisting serious self-harm.

## 2021-2023 (Planning Phase)

Draft Bill introduced in May 2021,  
House of Lords: January 2023  
Royal Assent granted: 26 October 2023

## 2025 (Enforcement Phase)

Online providers have a legal duty to protect children including use of 'highly effective age assurance methods' from 25 July 2025



# The Online Safety Act 2023

The Online Safety Act 2023 is a landmark piece of legislation in the UK designed specifically to address illegal and harmful content on the Internet.

- The Online Safety Act places a **legal "duty of care"** on tech companies.
- The onus now falls upon online content providers to actively:
  - **identify and assess risk**
  - **put systems in place to mitigate actual harm** and evidence their policy and procedures
- The Act gives Ofcom, our media regulator, powers of enforcement, including fines and criminal liability for senior managers, and content blocking powers.



# The Online Safety Act 2023

The Act has explicit and robust protections specifically for children.

It requires online services 'likely to be accessed by children' to:

- **Remove and prevent illegal content** - including child sexual abuse material, terrorism content, content promoting self harm.
- **Protect from legal but harmful content** - content that is legal for adults though damaging for young people, i.e. content promoting suicide, self harm, eating disorders. *Also extends to misogynistic content, depictions of serious violence, dangerous stunts / challenges, bullying, abusive or hateful content*
- **Implement age checks** - services must use 'highly effective age assurance methods' to prevent children from accessing age-inappropriate content, particularly social media and pornography.



## Online Safety Act - since July 2025

Platforms become legally liable for child safety:



- **Risk Assessments:** Every platform likely to be accessed by children (including most social media and gaming sites) had to complete a formal Children's Risk Assessment.
- **Mandatory Age Assurance:** Platforms hosting pornography or high-risk content became legally required to use "highly effective" age verification (like facial age estimation or ID checks).
- **Algorithm Shifts:** "Safe by Design" became the rule. Services with "recommender systems" (like TikTok or YouTube) must now prove they have configured their algorithms to actively filter out content promoting self-harm, eating disorders, or violence from children's feeds.



# Online Safety Act - since July 2025

Platforms become legally liable for child safety:



<p>November 2025</p>	<p>Ofcom pushes back the publication of the <b>Categorisation Register</b> to <b>July 2026</b> following a legal challenge by Wikipedia. This means that some platforms have a stay of execution to publish their transparency reports and to enact age verification checks.</p>
	<p>In late 2025, Ofcom issued its first significant fines (including £20,000 against a file-sharing service and £50,000 against a "nudification" site) for failing to provide data about their safety measures. <i>BBC News (13/01) noted that these have not yet been paid.</i></p>



# Online Safety Act - since July 2025

Platforms become legally liable for child safety:



January 2026	<p>Cyberflashing (sending nude images) becomes a priority offence. Tech companies must take active steps to prevent these images from appearing on their sites.</p>
	<p>Designated charities (NSPCC, Which) and consumer groups are able to lodge 'super complaints', speeding up the process of enforcement.</p>
	<p>High profile challenges of Grok, X's generative AI capability, leading to a probe by Ofcom over its proven use to create sexualised deepfake imagery. <i>Initially X responded by limiting the capability to subscribers.</i></p>
	<p>Under the Data (Use &amp; Access) Provisions, it is now an offence to request the creation of a non-consensual intimate AI (deepfake) image (in addition to simply sharing one).</p>

# Online Safety Act - since July 2025

Still to come ...



July 2026	Ofcom are due to publish the full Categorisation Register naming all of the big tech companies and their requirements under the Act.
October 2026	First statutory report on Content Harmful to Children under Section 163 of the Online Safety Act is due. This is the first check to see if the legislation is working. This will provide the first official data on how often children are encountering harm since the Act came into force.
January 2027	A decision around whether App Stores should be brought under the scope of the Online Safety Act.
?	<i>Will the United Kingdom follow the example of Australia and amend the age for use of social media to &lt;16 years? House of Lords voted this week to amend the Children's Wellbeing &amp; Schools Bill. The Conservatives have announced that they would block social media for &lt;16. Looking more likely.</i>

# Digital Parenting - Session Agenda



- **✓ Online Harms and the Online Safety Act:** How our UK legislation is beginning to safeguard your child's online safety.
- **The Question of Screen Time:** None or some, how much is too much?
- **Family Networking:** an opportunity to mix with other parents to share your experiences as a 'digital parent' and to identify what works and why.
- **Working Together:** A clear set of shared Feltonfleet Community recommendations to ensure a consistent approach designed to mitigate the growing complexities of digital parenting and promote a happy, wholesome childhood for your children.



## Screen Time

No longer defined simply as "time spent looking at a screen." health and education experts typically talk about a "Digital Diet," where the *quality* and *context* of the activity matter just as much as the number of minutes.

# UK Screen Time Recommendations



- No direct legislation for screen time in the UK.
- The NHS and Public Health England currently align with the World Health Organisation (WHO) standards for younger children:

Age Range	Recommendation
Under 2 years	Ideally no screen time.
2-5 years	< 1 hour per day
5-10 years	< 2 hours recreational screen time per day

- The National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) recommends a 2 hour limit for all children (includes television).

# UK Screen Time Recommendations



- The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) published the first official guidance in 2019 which highlighted quality of interaction, balance and the importance of physical activity, family connection and sleep:
  - **Quality of interaction** (Active educational use vs. Passive)
  - **Balance**: appropriate balance to ensure a child's overall health and development.
  - **Physical and social interaction** in place of passive screen time.
  - **Sleep**: No screen use less than one hour before bedtime.

# The current picture



January 2026	<p>A major study led by <a href="#">University College London (UCL)</a> finds the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>Average Use:</b> 98% of two-year-olds in England are now spending an average of 129 minutes (over 2 hours) on screens daily - double the WHO recommendation.</li><li>● <b>Language Delay:</b> The research found that toddlers with high screen use (around 5 hours a day) scored significantly lower in vocabulary tests than those with low screen use (55% compared with 65%).</li><li>● <b>Social Divide:</b> Children from lower-income families were found to have nearly double the screen time of those from higher-income families, often due to the pressures of juggling work and childcare with fewer resources. Higher users were twice as likely to display mental health issues.</li></ul>
April 2026	Government to publish first official guidance on screen time for parents of children under 5 years.

# Feltonfleet School Screen Time Audit



October 2025	<p>Our 5 day audit of screen time by 20 Middle and Upper School pupils found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Active, balanced educational use: Teaching Staff completed a 'task tracker' for these pupils. This displayed a balanced spread of digital and non-digital tasks. Devices were used for research, reviewing Google Classroom tasks and feedback, filming (Science, Music, MFL), collaborative presentations, uploading completed work.</li><li>● Appropriate levels of use: levels of pupil use ranged from 30 to 140 minutes across a school day inclusive of Prep time.</li></ul>
February 2026	<p><i>Second audit planned.</i></p>

# Digital Parenting - Session Agenda



- **✓ Online Harms and the Online Safety Act:** How our UK legislation is beginning to safeguard your child's online safety.
- **✓ The Question of Screen Time:** None or some, how much is too much?
- **Family Networking:** an opportunity to mix with other parents to share your experiences as a 'digital parent' and to identify what works and why.
- **Working Together:** A clear set of shared Feltonfleet Community recommendations to ensure a consistent approach designed to mitigate the growing complexities of digital parenting and promote a happy, wholesome childhood for your children.

# Family Networking - 15 minutes



- What devices are currently in your home?
- What is your child's relationship with digital devices like?
- What are your views on 'Screen Time'?
- What successful digital parenting measures are you currently using?
- Are there any existing points of tension ('digital flashpoints') between you and your children relating to their device use?



# Digital Parenting - Session Agenda



- **✓ Online Harms and the Online Safety Act:** How our UK legislation is beginning to safeguard your child's online safety.
- **✓ The Question of Screen Time:** None or some, how much is too much?
- **✓ Family Networking:** an opportunity to mix with other parents from your child's year group to share your experiences as a digital parent and to identify what works and why.
- **Working Together:** A clear set of shared Feltonfleet Community recommendations to ensure a consistent approach designed to mitigate the growing complexities of digital parenting and promote a happy, wholesome childhood for your children.



# Establishing a Digital Culture at home

Consider your child's early interactions with digital devices as setting the foundation for later use

Shaping their direct and indirect use of digital technology

## Prioritise the following:



- In line with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) guidance, prioritise:
  - **Physical and social interaction** in place of passive screen time. These correlate with more developed spoken vocabulary and school readiness.
  - **Reading** and **traditional play** (construction toys, board games, making and crafting).
  - **Balance**: limit recreational use of digital devices; when used choose active digital creation tools and problem-solving app options.
  - **Sleep**: No screen use less than one hour before bedtime.

# Working Together



- Successful digital parenting generally comes from:
  - Having a **solid knowledge base** (to mitigate parental 'tech lag').
  - A **clear plan** for the role of digital devices at home.
  - Applying **consistent age-appropriate boundaries**.
  - **Direct supervision** of device use.
  - **Open ongoing communication** between you and your children.
  - **Mindful role-modelling** of healthy digital use.

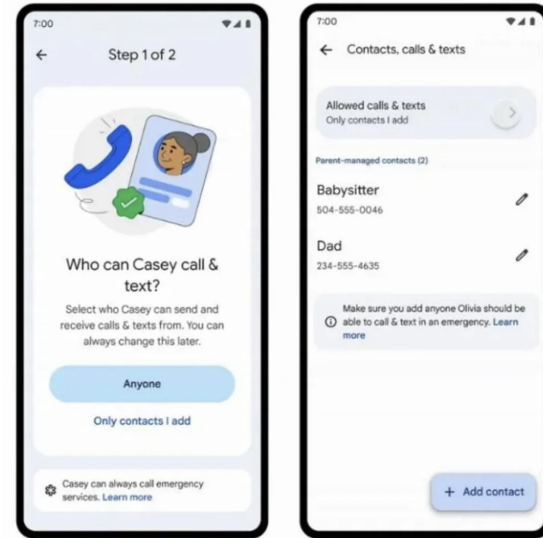


Knowledge - Boundaries - Communication - Education

# A solid knowledge base

Know how to:

- Enable and manage your Internet filtering settings to block harmful content.
- Create child accounts for your children requiring permission to download and install apps.
  - All social media (including YouTube) and 1:1 messaging apps are not designed for <13 years of age.
  - Review apps prior to downloading.
- Manage screen time and other access permissions using device settings or tools like Google Family Link and Microsoft Family Safety.



## Filtering Inappropriate Content

# Apply age-appropriate consistent boundaries.

Set clear non-negotiable boundaries:

- No devices used in bedrooms and bathrooms.
- No recreational screen-time on school nights.
- Use app store, Pan European Game Information (PEGI) ratings and British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) ratings to manage access to content.
- Use parent review and ratings sites like Common Sense Media to help steer your decisions. Prioritise offline use.
- Set age appropriate recreational screen-time limits for weekends in line with guidelines.
- 'The Sunset Rule': No screen time within 60 minutes of bedtime.



## Boundaries

## Direct supervision.

- Devices in family areas only.
- Sit alongside and 'co-pilot' their experience (as opposed to individual solitary use)
- Monitor online search history if Internet enabled.
- Check and update your parental control settings regularly.
- If any messaging apps, who is in your child's contacts?
- Check the privacy, security and location settings for any apps or accounts used. Ensure all chat facilities are disabled.

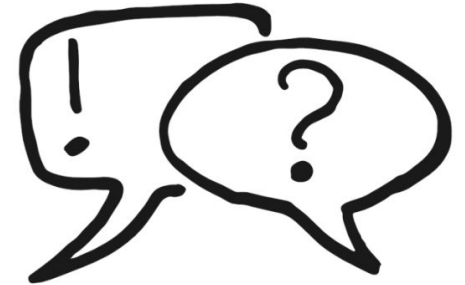


Active Monitoring

# Open ongoing communication between you and your children.



- What digital issues have you discussed with your children recently?
  - How do you use this app? What do you have to do? Have you ever felt unsafe playing it? What features would you like it to have?
  - What devices do you wish you had access to? Why?
  - How helpful was your Internet search? Do you agree with the information? How do you know that it is reliable?



## Communication and Critical Thinking

# Mindful role-modelling of healthy digital use.

- How might your own digital habits model healthy use? Are there any habits that you might need to tweak?
- What does your own use of Social Media look like to your child: liking, posting, consent, sharing, blocking, privacy
- What are your own levels of screen time like?
- How regularly do you ring-fence mealtimes, family movies and other shared times as 'technology free' times?
- Model devices as a tool to add value and achieve an output, for example, using a tablet to identify bugs in the garden.



Education and Role-Modelling

WHERE INDIVIDUALS REALLY MATTER

# Digital Parenting Summary



- Be an active and present digital parent at home.
- Keep talking with each other about digital parenting issues.
- Prioritise opportunities for physical play, social interaction and non screen based activities.
- Resist pressure to download specific apps or to provide greater access - stick to your plan.
- Emphasise active educational learning over passive screen time, with clarity over the value-added rationale for use of a digital device.
- Use the tools at your disposal to stay informed, open-minded and discerning in steering your child's digital progression.
- Role model mindfully.



# Being a 'Digital Parent'

The goal isn't to be a perfect digital parent; it's to be a present one.

[graham.starkey@feltonfleet.co.uk](mailto:graham.starkey@feltonfleet.co.uk)

*Enriching and extending learning outcomes through emerging digital technologies*