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NHS
Greater Glasgow
and Clyde

Digital Wellbeing
Conversations Starters

Digital Wellbeing Conversations Starters

Talking to children and young people about their online lives isn't always easy.

But these conversations are a key part of keeping children safe online and ensuring they have positive mental health and wellbeing.

This toolkit has been created for anyone who works with a child or young person. It outlines eight key building blocks of digital wellbeing in a Digital Wellbeing Wheel and shares hints and tips for talking about children and young people's online lives.

It encourages staff to have regular, proactive conversations with children and young people about their online lives – the good, and the bad.

In doing so, staff can support them to develop the digital skills and resilience needed to cope with whatever challenges online life may throw at them. These regular conversations also help identify any issues a child or young person may be facing online early so they can get the right support at the right time.

By having these conversations regularly and often, collectively we can support children and young people to have healthier and happier online experiences.

Common questions and answers regarding the toolkit can be found in the Appendix at the end of the document.

Toolkit Contents
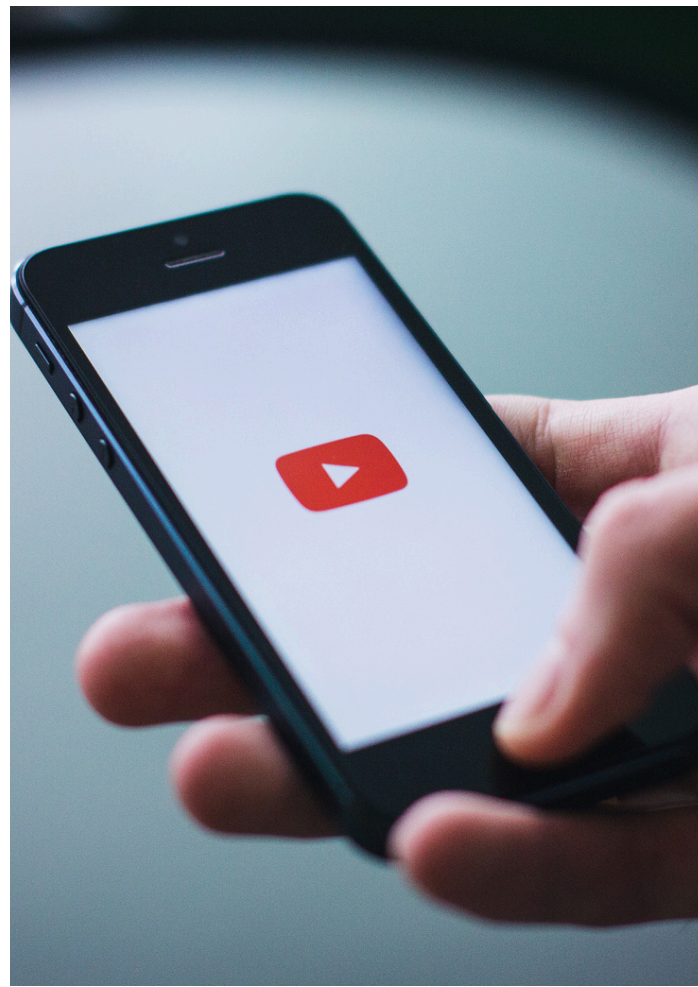
1. Before You Start

As you will be talking to a child or young person about their online lives and how it impacts their wellbeing, it's important to know what support is out there should they need it.
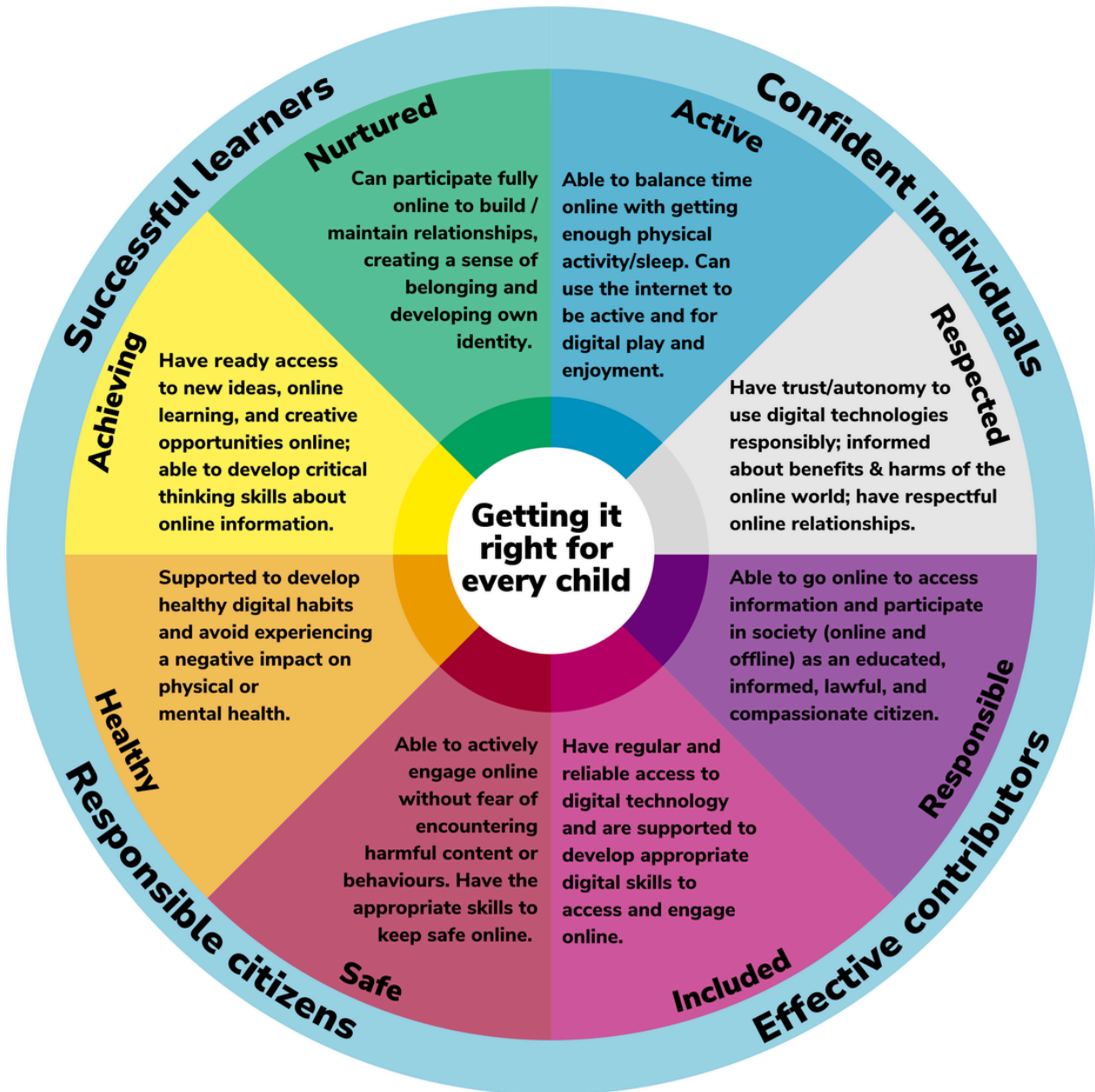
Helpful signposting can be found at the end of this document and we'd encourage you to familiarise yourself with available sources of support before starting any conversations.

You must also be aware of and follow your organisation's safeguarding policies and protocols should the child or young person become triggered or distressed by conversations or disclose information that suggests they might be at risk of harm.

If you are concerned about a child or young person and feel they may be in distress, encourage them to speak to their Doctor or trusted adult as appropriate. If you feel the child or young person's life is in immediate danger please call **999** immediately.

2. The Digital Wellbeing Wheel

Confident individuals

Active: Able to balance time online with getting enough physical activity/sleep. Can use the internet to be active and for digital play and enjoyment.

Respected: Have trust/autonomy to use digital technologies responsibly; informed about benefits & harms of the online world; have respectful online relationships.

Responsible: Able to go online to access information and participate in society (online and offline) as an educated, informed, lawful, and compassionate citizen.

Effective contributors

Included: Have regular and reliable access to digital technology and are supported to develop appropriate digital skills to access and engage online.

Responsible citizens

Safe: Able to actively engage online without fear of encountering harmful content or behaviours. Have the appropriate skills to keep safe online.

Healthy: Supported to develop healthy digital habits and avoid experiencing a negative impact on physical or mental health.

Successful learners

Achieving: Have ready access to new ideas, online learning, and creative opportunities online; able to develop critical thinking skills about online information.

Nurtured: Can participate fully online to build / maintain relationships, creating a sense of belonging and developing own identity.

Getting it right for every child

Adapted from the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) wellbeing wheel.

The Wellbeing Wheel outlines eight areas that reflect the digital aspects of children and young people's wellbeing.

The areas have been mapped against and aligned with the eight Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) SHANARRI wellbeing indicators.

These eight areas make up the building blocks of a child or young person's digital wellbeing. When looked at together, they give a holistic view of a child or young person's digital wellbeing.

The eight areas help us to identify if a child or young person has the right building blocks in place, what blocks are particularly strong, or if any are missing/weak and need attention.

Those working with children and young people should consider each of the digital wellbeing areas alongside children, young people, and their families/carers. It's important to remember that they don't sit in isolation, all of the areas are interconnected and overlapping.

Tip: Work your way clockwise around the wheel, starting with "Achieving" to begin the conversation on a positive note.

3. Spot the Signs

There are a range of red flags to keep an eye out for which indicate that a conversation about online activities may be particularly helpful, e.g.:

- Changing patterns of device use
- Secrecy over device and online activities
- Negative self-image
- Signs of being isolated or withdrawn
- Self-harm behaviours or suicidal thoughts
- Experience of bullying

- Sleep problems
- Disordered eating
- Change in mood or behaviours (including drug/alcohol use) *(Biddle, 2022)*

There are also certain children and young people at greater risk of particular online harms.

These have been listed in the table below alongside some further reading to help you learn more about the risks and potential harms faced by these groups:

Care Experienced	• Research factsheet - Internet Matters • Advice for professionals working with care experienced young people
Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND)	• SEND - Social, Emotional Mental Health - Internet Matters & SWGfL • Working with children and young people with SEND - UKSIC • Cognition and Learning (C&L) - 11-14	Internet Matters & SWGfL
Ethnic minority communities	• Digital Youth Index - Risks and Online Supports
Gender	• Teen girls' experiences of harm online	Internet Matters. • Boys at greater risk of harms such as Sextortion - Sextortion - UK Safer Internet Centre
LGBTQ+	• LGBTQ+ young people (YP) aged 7-18 - Internet Matters • Risks and online support - Digital Youth Index

4. Questions to Ask

When thinking about the types of questions to ask children and young people about their online lives, keeping some categories of question types in mind can be helpful.

This will help you to mix and match different question styles against the eight digital wellbeing areas. Some will fit more naturally with a particular area than others.

Listed below are some suggestions for categories of question styles that you can use to help you have these conversations:

Icebreakers

Open and general questions about their online lives.

✔ Why it works: Intended to start the conversation and help you to get to know the child or young person.

E.g. What do you like to do online?

Scenarios and solutions

Imagine if you saw [XXX] online, what would you do?

✔ Why it works: Imagined scenarios can help children and young people think through situations they might find themselves in and what they could do to keep themselves safe.

E.g. Imagine you're watching a funny video and then the next video that plays is scary. What would you do?

Skills and knowledge check

Check that the child or young person is aware of how to do [XXX]

✔ Why it works: An easy way to check if a child or young person is digitally literate. Rather than simply asking them if they know how to do something, you could ask them to show you how.

E.g. Could you show me how to report or block someone online?

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? Opinions-based

Getting their thoughts on a particular topic.

✓ Why it works: Encourages a child or young person to reflect critically on relevant issues.

✓ Asking them for the opinion of people their age can help depersonalise the question and is a good distancing technique.

E.g. What do young people your age think about influencers?

✓ Check-in

Check-in with them on how they are doing – this could be their physical or mental health.

✓ Why it works: Provides an opportunity to ask a direct question of a child or young person, especially if you have any concerns.

E.g. How is your time spent online making you feel lately?

On the following pages are some questions that could be asked against each of the eight digital wellbeing areas of the wheel to identify any areas of particular strength or weakness that need attention and support - icons have been listed against each question to indicate which of these categories it falls into.

All questions should be pitched at an age and developmentally-appropriate level. A question about sexting that is appropriate for a young person might not be appropriate for a young child, for example.

♥ Empathy

Ask a child or young person how they think someone would feel if [XXX] happened?

✓ Why it works: Appealing to a child or young person's empathy can help them think through the consequences of things that happen online.

✓ Why it works: Asking how a hypothetical person or someone that they respect might feel is a good distancing technique that can help a child or young person discuss the issue.

E.g. How do you think someone who was being bullied online would feel?

How do you think your mum/sister/important female would feel if they received sexist comments online, given those who identify as female are more likely to experience sexism online?

Achieving

- Which social media platforms are you using at the moment? What do you tend to do on them? (E.g. passively browse, actively post)
- How do you find videos, profiles, games you like online?
- Who are your favourite people to follow?
- How do you use the internet to learn new things?

- What have you learned to do online recently?
- How do you use the internet to help you with your homework?
- Imagine you come across a viral story that all of your friends are sharing online, but you have some doubts about whether it is true or not. How do you know what is fake news/misinformation, and what would you do in response to it?

Nurtured

- What makes you happy when you go online?
- What online communities or groups do you feel a part of / do you connect with online?
- How does going online help you with developing your identity?
- How would you describe who you are online?

Active

- What are your favourite ways to play and have fun online?
- How much time do you spend online/ on social media?
- What do people your age think about the time that we're all spending online?

- Imagine you had a friend who spent so much time online that they stopped doing other things they used to enjoy, like playing football. What would your advice to them be?
- Do you use the internet to help you keep active? Can you show me how to do this?

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Respected

- Are you trusted by your parent(s)/care giver to go online?

- What do you think the dangers are of being online?

- Imagine if you had a problem with another person online – what would you do? Who would you go to for help?

- Imagine you see a classmate being bullied online. How do you think they feel reading mean messages about themselves?

Responsible

- Can you find the information that you need when you go online?

- Can you tell me what you know about copyright issues online?

- What do you think being a good digital citizen means?

- What are your thoughts on the trail of information that we all leave about ourselves online (known as our digital footprint)?

- Do you think people treat others kindly on the internet?

- Has there ever been a time that you didn't think before you posted online? What would you do differently now?

Included

- Are you able to go online when you need to?

- Are you able to do things you want to do online? Is there anything you don't know how to do that you'd like to? (e.g. using online services / banking websites / apps)

Safe

- Are there any updates/new features on your favourite social media platforms/games? Can you show me how they work?

- Do you know how to use the internet safely? – E.g. keep yourself safe from being contacted by strangers / online bullying

- Do you know how to use privacy settings? How to block and report? Keep information safe? About VPNs? How to avoid scams?

- Imagine you had a friend who saw something that made them feel uncomfortable online – e.g. receiving unwanted messages, or seeing graphic violence. What advice would you give them/what do you think they should do?

- What would you do if a friend was being harassed online?

- Do you know how to get help or who to reach out to with any problems you might have online?

- If you were contacted by a stranger online, what steps would you take to keep yourself safe?

- What do people your age think about...? (e.g. sharing photos)

- Are there any things you've been upset by when you've been online? (Any incidents, unwanted messaging, photos).

Healthy

- How do you balance your time online with other things?

- How is your sleep at the moment?

- What things are you doing to be active at the moment?

- Are you able to stop going online when you need to? How do your friends manage their time online?

- Where would you go to find information online that you can trust, like information about your health?

- What would you say to a friend who was feeling pressure to keep up with others and comparing themselves to others on social media?

- Do your eyes ever feel tired after using screens? Does your back ever hurt?

- How do you feel after spending time on social media?

There are some particular topics that we might want to ask children and young people, such as those with disordered eating, who self-harm, or have suicidal thoughts. This includes:
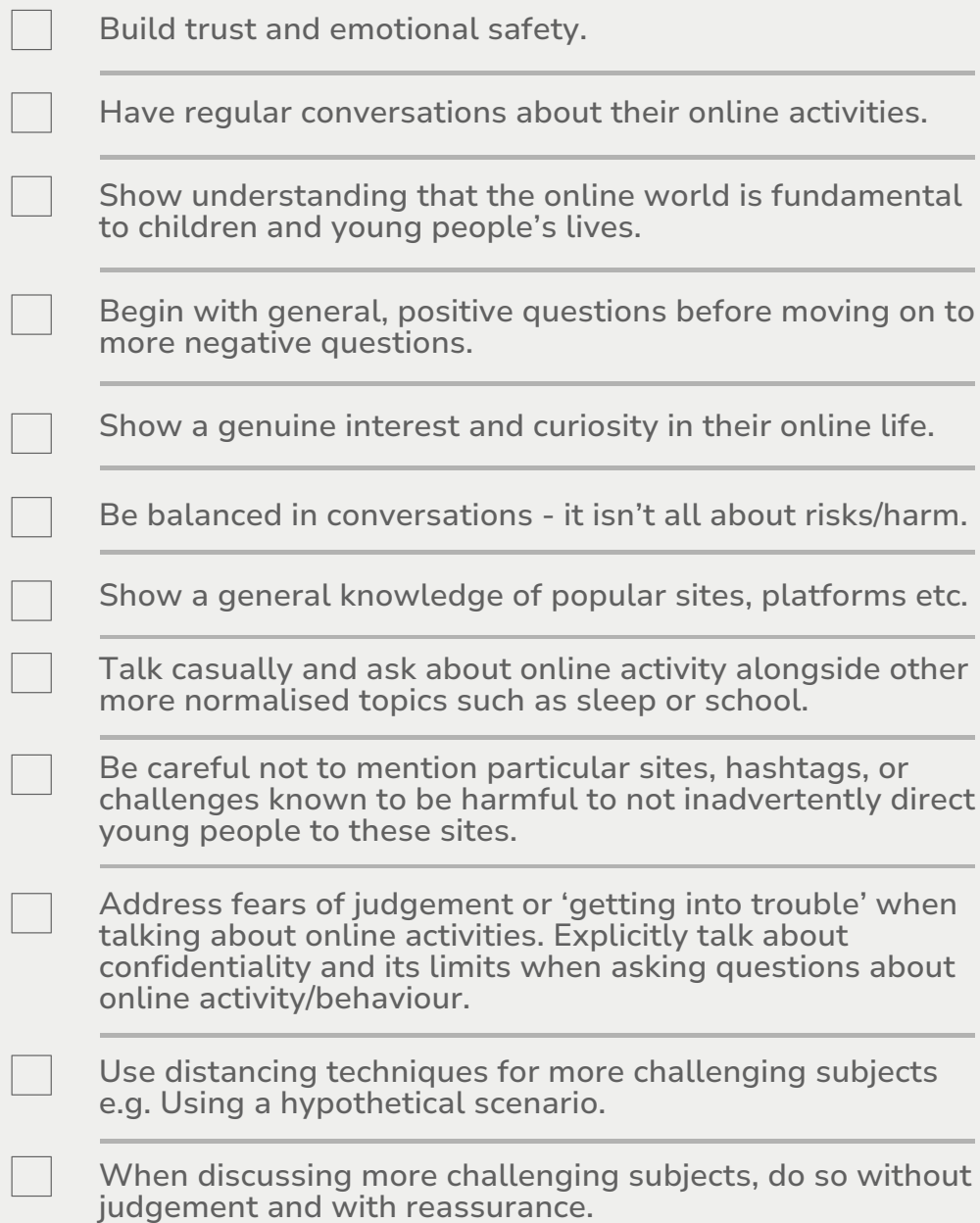
Disordered eating
- Visiting 'pro-ana' websites (websites that promote/encourage disordered eating)
- Use of apps; exercise apps, dieting apps, food tracking
- Buying weight loss medicine
- Viewing food-related sites
- Following individuals/influencers
- Engaging with weight loss-related content
- Use of physical activity / smart devices

With self-harm or suicidal thoughts
- Looking up methods of harm/suicide
- Viewing images of self-harm
- Joining online conversations about self-harm or suicide
- Posting images of own self-harm
- Following individuals/influencers who discuss self-harm or suicide
- Consuming media with themes around depression *(Biddle, 2022)*

5. Checklist: How to Talk about Digital Wellbeing

- [ ] Build trust and emotional safety.

- [ ] Have regular conversations about their online activities.

- [ ] Show understanding that the online world is fundamental to children and young people's lives.

- [ ] Begin with general, positive questions before moving on to more negative questions.

- [ ] Show a genuine interest and curiosity in their online life.

- [ ] Be balanced in conversations - it isn't all about risks/harm.

- [ ] Show a general knowledge of popular sites, platforms etc.

- [ ] Talk casually and ask about online activity alongside other more normalised topics such as sleep or school.

- [ ] Be careful not to mention particular sites, hashtags, or challenges known to be harmful to not inadvertently direct young people to these sites.

- [ ] Address fears of judgement or 'getting into trouble' when talking about online activities. Explicitly talk about confidentiality and its limits when asking questions about online activity/behaviour.

- [ ] Use distancing techniques for more challenging subjects e.g. Using a hypothetical scenario.

- [ ] When discussing more challenging subjects, do so without judgement and with reassurance.

6. How to Support

Encourage reflection and self-awareness

Have reflective discussions with young people, including:

✓ Explore how online activities impact their wellbeing to identify what is helpful/unhelpful and challenging/rewarding.

✓ Their thought processes, motivations, and behaviours underlying their online activity and reasons behind engaging with potentially harmful content.

✓ Potential triggers, including why some content is particularly upsetting for them.

✓ How their actions online might harm others, intentionally or unintentionally.

✓ Consider if education around particular topics would be helpful, e.g. the impact of the algorithm, online harms.

Coping strategies

Think together about what safety measures or tools they could put in place to keep themselves or others safe:

✓ Unfollowing harmful accounts (e.g. those that lead to self-comparison or harmful behaviours)

✓ Blocking / reporting people

✓ Using filters to 'reset' feed and hide triggering words

✓ Consider healthy digital habits; have screen breaks such as at night when might impact sleep

✓ Bookmark links to online supports, including websites, resources, services, and apps

Encourage positive online use

✓ Identify and focus on current benefits the child or young person is getting from being online; connection, developing skills, hobbies, and interests.

✓ Recommend 'positive' content; including positive influencers, helpful lived experience accounts, self-care.

Consider offline alternatives

✓ Engage with the child or young person around their offline supports networks.

✓ Consider offline alternative coping strategies (e.g. instead of scrolling when bored or upset, call a friend).

Help-seeking

✔ Encourage ongoing discussions with trusted adults about online behaviours and activities (parents/carers, teachers, youth workers).

✔ Review <u>Online Harms: Helplines, Websites and Reporting Mechanisms</u> document which includes helplines, websites, and information on reporting mechanisms for a range of online harms. Discuss and explore options for support together – offering to demonstrate apps or websites of interest.

✔ Follow up on whether support was helpful or not.

Reporting

✔ Where there is worrying activity or behaviours identified, ask for names of sites, the type of content created, or details of online groups.

✔ Review <u>Online Harms: Helplines, Websites and Reporting Mechanisms</u> document which includes details about whether a range of online harms are legal/illegal, and reporting mechanisms.

✔ Support the child or young person to report illegal or legal but harmful content or behaviours as appropriate.

7. Further Resources and Supports

Aye Mind: A website for those working with children and young people who want to learn more about how the online environment impacts their mental health and wellbeing. Includes a directory of digital tools that can be used to support mental health.

Be Suicide ALERT prompt sheet: For staff working in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde area who are/may be talking with someone who is at risk of suicide, including support services and suicide prevention resources.

Child and Youth Apps, Helplines, and Websites: A document that maps out the range of available mental health supports for children and young people to access, including websites and helplines.

Get Safe Online: The UK's leading online safety advice resource.

Online Harms: Useful Helplines, Websites, and Reporting Mechanisms: A document outlining the range of helplines, websites, and reporting mechanisms to support those who have experienced a variety of online harms.

Self-Harm resources and supports: A comprehensive resource for staff providing support and advice to people who may be self-harming.

UK Safer Internet Centre: Helping children and young people stay safe online, including guides and resources for a range of audiences from parents, to education, social work, healthcare, and more.

References

- *Biddle L, Rifkin-Zybutz R, Derges J, Turner N, Bould H, Sedgewick F, et al (2022). Developing good practice indicators to assist mental health practitioners to converse with young people about their online activities and impact on mental health: a two-panel mixed-methods Delphi study. BMC Psychiatry Jul 19;22(1):485*

- *Bora Kim & Kate White (2018) How can health professionals enhance interpersonal communication with adolescents and young adults to improve health care outcomes?: systematic literature review, International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 23:2, 198-218*

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Get in Touch

This toolkit has been created by the Mental Health Improvement Team at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Social Work Services, Glasgow City HSCP.

If you have any questions about this toolkit, get in touch at:

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8. Appendix - Common Questions and Answers

Q1

What is the Digital Wellbeing Toolkit?

A resource to support regular conversations with children and young people about their online lives. It is available in printed or digital format.

It is centered around eight key building blocks of digital wellbeing, mapped against the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators, and shares hints and tips and sources of support.

Q2

Who can use the toolkit?

Anyone who supports a child or young person. The main target audience is staff groups, but it is also suitable for parents/carers.

You do not need to be an 'expert' in digital or the online world to use the toolkit. It provides the foundations for building your knowledge and confidence around digital youth mental health themes and how to talk about them.

Those using the toolkit are strongly encouraged to review the signposting information before starting any conversations to familiarise themselves with available sources of support should an issue arise.

Organisational policies and protocols must be followed during any conversation with a child or young person.

Q3

How can the toolkit be used?

The toolkit is a flexible resource - how it is used depends on the staff member's role, experience, and relationship with the child or young person. Some examples:

- **Before conversations** - As a preparatory tool to reflect on the various dimensions of a child or young person's overall wellbeing, how to talk about them, and sources of support for potential issues.

- **During conversations -** Use the wheel as a visual prompt during one-on-one conversations, group work, or workshops to explore children and young people's online lives across all the indicators.

- **Proactive and ongoing conversations -** To support ongoing, proactive discussions with children and young people about their online lives. Using the wheel regularly, staff can help children and young people develop digital skills and resilience across all digital wellbeing areas.

- **Identifying and addressing issues early -** By regularly discussing children and young people's online lives, staff can identify a concern or issue in a young person's online life earlier. This allows for early intervention and ensures they get the support they need quickly.