

# Keeping yourself safe online

# Thrive

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# Get the lowdown...

## WHAT'S UP?

Or more appropriately for this issue, WhatsApp?

Hello and welcome to the latest issue of Thrive, dedicated entirely to keeping you happy and safe in your busy online lives.

We know that the internet is an amazing feature of everyday life - keeping you close to friends and family, bringing you the magic of music and films and hilarious YouTube clips, letting you shop and play games, share photos and videos, and so much more.

But, sadly, you can't trust everyone you meet online and sometimes the internet is where you could be threatened, teased, upset or humiliated. We're talking sexting, live streaming and cyberbullying.

In this issue, we chat to the experts and answer your problems, bringing you the very best advice to ensure you're free to enjoy your life online, hassle-free.

Thanks for reading - until next time!

*Thrive xxx*

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## A big up to...

NYAS Caerphilly Shout Out; Fairwater Bright Sparks; Whitchurch High School, Cardiff and Voices from Care Cymru. You all live with the reality of fostering day in, day out. Without your contributions, we just couldn't create this mag. Thank you!

The Fostering Network



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'It's a real pain when you go to live in someone else's home and they treat you like you're the same age as their kids. Not being trusted bugs me the most - it means I can't keep in touch online with my mates and mum.' Simon, 15



'It's a good way for family and friends to see what you're up to and know that you're ok and safe. They can see what's going on in my daily life, like when I go bowling or to the beach.' Matty, 14

# Have your say

### What does being online mean to you? Fostered young people tell us about the highs and lows of their digital lives



'When I FaceTime my family, I feel better afterwards. If you're in care, it's an easy way to get in touch with friends and family - I like seeing their faces and how they're doing. Sometimes it's easier to talk from behind a screen than in real life.' Anya, 13

'Lots of my friends share photos of their happy, smiling families and amazing lives, and I can't help but feel really jealous sometimes.' Sofia, 12



'I don't get to see my mum, but with my video cam I can see my mum, brothers and sisters up in the north of England. It makes it feel like there's no distance between us when I see them all on video.' Freddie, 14

'I wanted to chat to my older brother but my foster mum took my phone away, it was a bit harsh. My social worker had a chat with her and we made a few ground rules, like leaving my phone downstairs at night and only talking to my brother at an arranged time.' Tom, 15



How can you stay safe online?

# Getting lost on the internet

The internet is great for many things – those YouTube clips of people playing funny pranks, streaming your favourite bands, keeping in touch and much more. But, sadly, it's not all fun and games. It's important to be clued up on how to stay in control online and keep yourself safe

## Stranger danger: new friends

### Don't give too much away

The internet gives people the chance to hide their true identity, so stranger danger is as real online as it is offline. Always be careful of sharing too many details with someone you don't really know.

### How can I protect myself?

If you're talking to a 'friend' online, whether it's on social media or gaming, if they ask you to do *anything* that makes you feel uncomfortable, pressurised or anxious, tell your foster carer and ask their advice. If it doesn't feel right, ask for help. NEVER meet up with anyone you've befriended online IRL (aka in real life) without telling your foster carer first and checking they say it's OK. If you do meet up with someone, bring a friend and make sure you've shared the person's name and phone number with someone you trust.



## Keeping it private: Sexting

### Think twice!

Sexting is when you share a nude or semi-nude image of yourself, usually on your mobile. You may also be sent nude photos that you're pressurised into saving or sharing.

It might seem like fun or a harmless thing to do, especially if it's for someone you like, and you want them to like you. But think it through! If they really like – and respect – you, they won't want you to take risks with a private image of yourself.

### Why can it be harmful?

Firstly, because it's illegal for under-18's to take part in sexting. You can even get into trouble if you threaten to share an image like this.

And secondly, once you've hit 'Send', you can't get it back – it's out there for anyone to see. What should be private could easily (and embarrassingly) become public and permanent. Even if you've sent something on Snapchat, it can still be screengrabbed and saved.

When it comes to sexting, always remember – it's just not worth the risk.

## Lights, camera, action! Live streaming

### What's live streaming?

Live streaming is when you broadcast live video to an audience over the internet through a smartphone, tablet or computer.

### What are the risks?

What might seem a harmless way to share a talent or express yourself could soon put you in danger. This is because you can't control who is watching and what they could try and force you to do. Once you've live streamed there's no going back and viewers can comment and talk directly to you – and you might not like what they have to say.

### Think before you stream

The best way to stay safe online is not to live stream. But, if you do then make sure you only live stream from a place where you feel safe. Be careful of anyone who asks you to move to a private messaging space. If you receive any unwanted attention or demands, seek advice straight away from someone you trust.



## + Real life experience

'I love singing and performing for others, so when I live stream it means lots of people can enjoy my singing at the same time. This feels good – especially as my mum doesn't usually notice me. But sometimes they want to see more than my singing. Sometimes they ask me to take my clothes off.'  
Lucy, 13

## Oh no! It's messed up!

If you've done something that you regret online, don't panic – there are lots of things you can do:

- If it's a nude picture, ask for it to be deleted.
- Don't reply to threats.
- Talk to your foster carer or another adult you trust about how you are feeling. They can also help you decide what to do next.
- Talk to Childline anonymously on 0800 1111.

There's lots of advice on the Thinkuknow website [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)



# My life online: The good, the bad and the ugly

## THE GOOD

- ✓ Being able to play the latest games (if you have access to them) as soon as they're released.
- ✓ No matter what hobbies or interests you have, you can always find someone out there who loves the same things.
- ✓ Sometimes, you just need a break from schoolwork and spending a bit of time online can help you unwind.
- ✓ In need of a good laugh? YouTube is packed with hilarious home videos and pranks!
- ✓ It's never been so easy to keep in touch with friends from your last school or your family.

As we've been finding out, the internet can be brilliant in lots of ways and not so great in others!



## THE BAD

- Not everyone 'gets' social media or wants to be part of it, so it can be hard to settle in if your foster carer doesn't understand what it means to you.
- Everyone has different opinions on what's an acceptable time to be online each day - you might have to negotiate with your foster carer on this one.
- As you know, the internet can be pretty addictive! It's so easy to find yourself mindlessly scrolling and suddenly you've lost hours staring at your screen. That's why you should be sure to put that phone down regularly. Look up!

## THE UGLY

- + Hiding behind a screen, some people think it's okay to leave nasty comments, tweet something offensive and generally be unkind to others. But that can lead to cyberbullying, which is a criminal offence. If you ever suffer from online abuse, please report it.
- + Online bullying also comes in the form of being pressured to do things you're uncomfortable with. You should always ask for help in this situation.
- + There are many good, genuine people you can 'meet' online, but unfortunately there are others out there who aren't what they seem. Always be careful of what you share and who you talk to - and if something feels weird or wrong, seek advice straight away.

Here's a reminder of who you can turn to for help if you're struggling with any form of online harassment:

**Childline**  
**0800 1111**

**Thinkuknow**  
**www.thinkuknow.co.uk**

# Social media and me

Sam, 15, has been in care for three years and has lived with three different foster families. We chatted to him about what he loves and hates about social media.



If you've got a phone or tablet, you'll probably be on social media across a few apps, from Instagram to Snapchat, Tik Tok to WhatsApp and maybe more.

## Keeping in touch

'For those of us in care, it's a great way to chat to family and friends - I live with my foster mum, so it's not always easy to keep in touch with my own mum and my old foster family. It's also good for keeping up-to-date with what everyone's up to and making plans to meet up.'

## Finding your tribe

'We're all different and being online makes it easier to find people like you who have the same hobbies or interests and want to have access to like-minded people. Gaming is also good for making new friends and finding a shared hobby when you may not have much else in common.'

## Not everyone has loads of mates

'Some people have lots of friends and a really big friendship group, others are shy and keep themselves to themselves. When you go online, you can talk to people all over the world, so it helps you feel less lonely, a bit less on your own, especially if you've moved around a lot, like I have.'

## Trolls take their toll

'Sadly, it's easy for people to be nasty and bully others from behind their screens. It happened to my foster brother Eddie; cyberbullying is a real problem and it's important to always ask for help from a teacher, your foster carer or a friend if you are being bullied and need help.'

## Boredom buster

'It can be really fun and enjoyable, a way to relax in your downtime, see what's happening and generally switch off with a bit of scrolling. Having said that, it can be a total time-waster and it's really easy to suddenly lose two hours when you've got loads of other stuff to do!'

## You can always ask for help

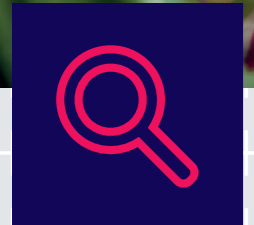
'Sometimes you need answers or advice but might not know who to ask, so it's good for finding answers or talking to people who understand or who are going through the same things. I've moved around a lot, so it hasn't always been easy to find someone to talk to. Now, my foster dad John encourages me to chat to him about everyday stuff and I know I can turn to him in trickier times, but being able to seek advice online is reassuring too.'



**Q** Since I moved areas to be with my new foster carer, I'm struggling to stay in touch with all my family and old school friends online. Between WhatsApp, Twitter and Snapchat, it feels like I'm constantly playing catch-up on everyone else's lives, instead of concentrating on my own. Help!

**Matt says:** This sounds really stressful, the problem with modern life is we expect everything to happen instantly and also feel guilty when we can't respond to things straight away. **It sounds like you could do with a digital detox:** let those closest to you know you'll be going offline for a while but you'll still keep in touch, just not constantly. They will understand and it should do you good to have some time away from your screens.

**Stressed out!**



# A PROBLEM SHARED

## Ask Matt...

## Bullying blues

**Q** I shared a post on Facebook about my lovely new foster family and a few of my so-called friends made nasty comments about the fact I'm being fostered. I'm so upset and don't know what to do.

**Matt says:** You are not alone. Being in care is a lot more common than people think. People make bad assumptions because they don't know what being in care is like. You might find that talking about it makes it less of an issue. But it's completely up to you who you tell and when. Everybody's different and you don't have to tell everyone your life story.

**Also, it might be a good idea to chat to your new foster carers** and tell them what has happened so they can help support you about what you can do next.



**Got a problem? Get an answer you can trust, right here**

**Q** I've moved in with a new foster family and they have a no screens rule after 8pm, I hate it! We've already had lots of arguments and I'm getting so frustrated - I wish they'd trust me.

**Matt says:** While it's difficult to settle in to a new home, you need to try and remember it's their house, their rules. Using screens late into the night is bad for your health and can stop you sleeping well and make you feel anxious. Your foster carers are just looking out for your wellbeing. And if there are other children in the house, the same rules have to apply to everyone.

You could try negotiating a little longer on your phone, but give them a chance and accept that, while you're there, you'll need to make the most of your screen time before 8pm. And remember there are lots of other things you can do in the evening, like listening to music, reading a book or relaxing with your family.

## My phone, my rights



**Q** In recent months, my foster sister has become really thin. She looks ill to me, but she keeps talking about how good she looks and how happy she is. She mentioned a Pro Ana site, but stopped talking when I got angry. Now she won't discuss it any more. What should I do?

**Matt says:** You're right to be worried - Pro Ana websites promote harmful behaviours that are linked with eating disorders. If your foster sister is being defensive about the sites she's using, she probably knows they're bad for her but doesn't know how to stop relying on them. **Your foster sister needs professional advice.** Even though you disagree with her about this, try to keep your friendship strong by chatting about other things. And perhaps you could encourage her to speak to an adult she trusts, like a favourite teacher, counsellor or your parents.

**A friend in need**



# And finally, finish strong

## Top 10 **must-read** internet safety tips

### 1. STRANGER DANGER

You wouldn't share photos or give out personal info to a stranger face to face. It's the same online. You never know who is really behind the screen. Always tell your foster carer straight away if something online make you feel uneasy.



### 2. PRIVACY SETTINGS

It's mega easy to get set up in social media, but make sure you choose the maximum privacy settings. If you haven't - go back and check! Google yourself and see what comes up in the results - aka your 'digital footprint'. Your info might not be as hidden as you thought.



### 3. POSTING IS PERMANENT

Deleting something online doesn't mean removing it from the internet forever. After posting something online, anyone can save, download and re-use it. Don't post anything you may regret later.

### 4. STRONG PASSWORDS

Choose secure passwords with a mix of symbols, numbers and capital letters. Never share your passwords with anyone - even friends.



### 5. PERSONAL INFORMATION

If somebody knows you well enough they will never need to ask for personal information like your address or school online. Don't share this info and be careful of who is asking for it.



### 6. FAKE NEWS

If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is! It's not just about social media. It's also spam emails. Never open links or attachments from an unknown sender, they could be a virus. And never pass on personal information in an email - trusted organisations will never ask for this in an email.



### 7. RESPECT

It's so easy to type something when you're hiding behind your screen. But remember, there's also a real person at the other side of the screen, so always be respectful and polite.



### 8. THE FULL STORY?

Remember that the lifestyles shown on social media are only part of the story. Despite how it looks from the outside, *nobody's* life is perfect.

### 9. BLOCK OR REPORT CONTENT

Take responsibility for making the internet a safer place to be.



### And one last thing...

### 10. KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO LOG OFF

Using the internet safely is not just about what you get up to online, it's about how much time you're spending doing it and making sure it isn't affecting school or sleep. Know when it's time to log off!