Online Safety Newsletter → March 2026

The impact of smartphones

There is a growing concern on how excessive use of smartphones can affect our children.
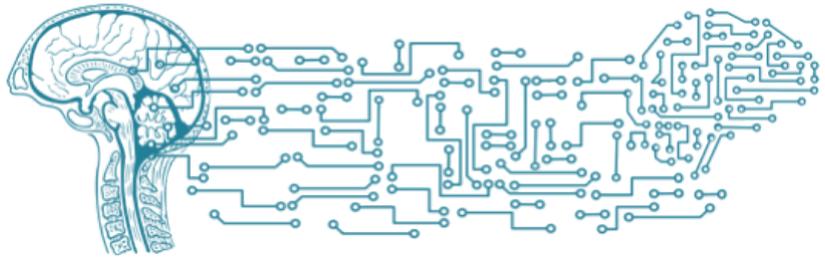
In addition to the effects of seeing inappropriate content online, the risk of cyberbullying and grooming, it is important that we also highlight the effects of smartphone use on our children's mental health.

If your child is using a smartphone then please try to ensure they maintain a healthy screentime limit.

According to King's College London, "two new studies of smartphone habits in teenagers have identified links between problematic smartphone use and depression, anxiety and insomnia." You can read more about these studies here: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/teens-with-problematic-smartphone-use-are-twice-as-likely-to-have-anxiety-and-many-are-eager-to-cut-down

Compass have published an article as well on what effects mobile phones have on children here: https://www.compass-uk.org/services/compass-changing-lives/what-effects-do-mobile-phones-have-on-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health/

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

What is AI?
AI is when a computer/machine can learn and perform tasks like a human. Its popularity continues to increase, and examples include:
- **Virtual assistants** like Alexa and Siri.
- **Chatbots** such as ChatGPT and My AI from Snapchat

Potential Risks of AI?
- **Chat apps -** A simple search of "AI Chat" within the App store highlights the number of apps already available and just scrolling through, you can see that they are not suitable for children with many rated as 17+.
- **Image manipulation –** there are AI tools that can be used to digitally remove clothes from photos, which clearly raises serious safeguarding and privacy concerns.
- **Deepfakes –** there are also AI tools that create realistic, fake videos which can be used to spread misinformation or cause harm.

Child Rescue Coalition discuss the dangers in more detail here: https://childrescuecoalition.org/educations/the-dark-side-of-ai-risks-to-children/

How can I protect my child?
As always, to keep your child safe online, it is important to:
- Develop your child's digital literacy by highlighting the risks of AI and showing them how important it is to verify what they see online.
- Set up appropriate parental controls on their devices/ broadband.
- Chat to your child regularly and ensure your child knows that they should talk to you or another trusted adult if anything concerns them.

Further information
For further information, the NSPCC and Internet Matters provide useful guides on their websites:
- https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2025/artificial-intelligence-safety-tips-for-parents
- https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/parent-guide-to-artificial-intelligence-ai-tools/