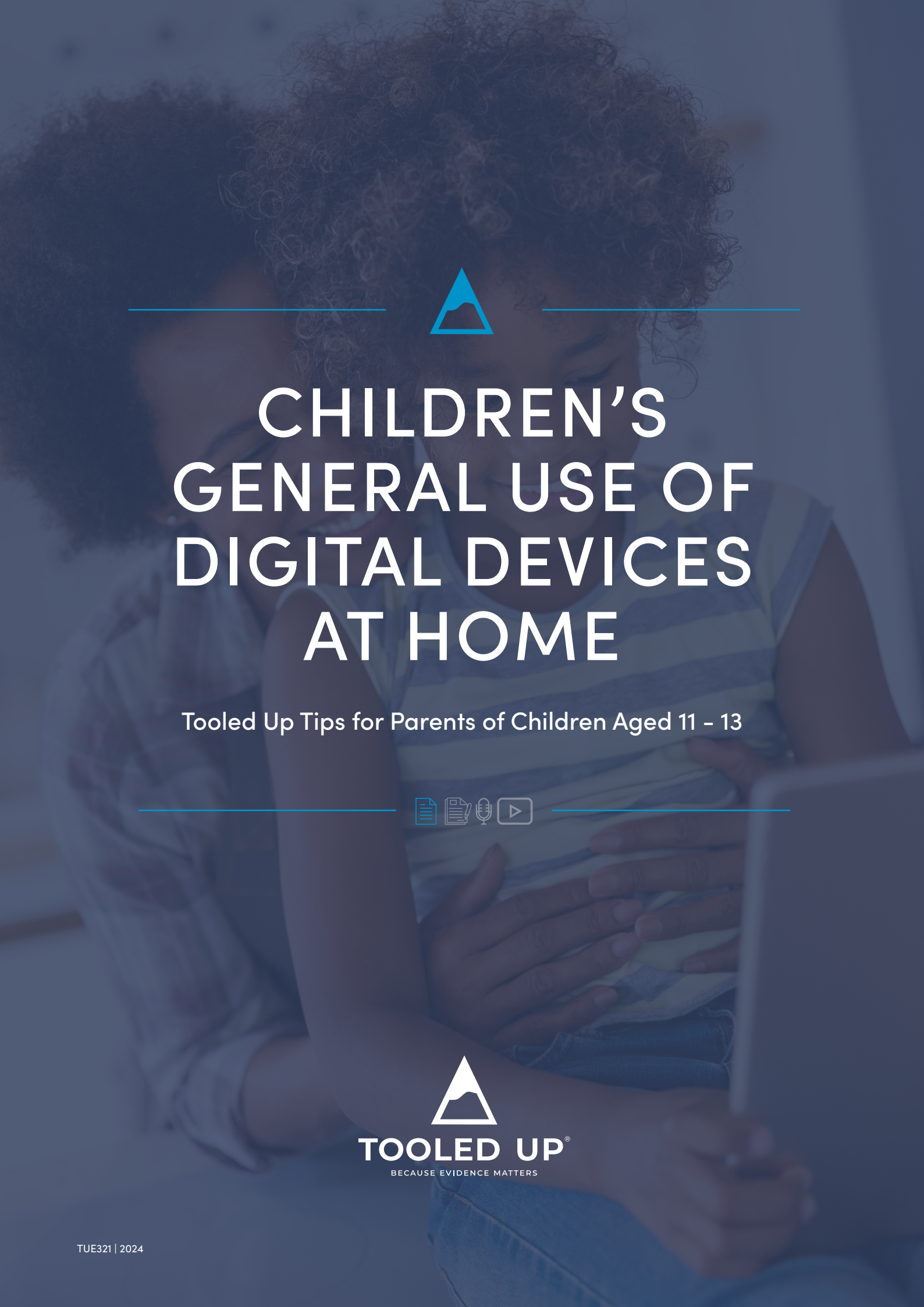


CHILDREN'S GENERAL USE OF DIGITAL DEVICES AT HOME

Tooled Up Tips for Parents of Children Aged 11 - 13

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CHILDREN'S GENERAL USE OF DIGITAL DEVICES AT HOME

This document has been produced by the research team at Tooled Up Education in partnership with our school. As you know, we are a 'Tooled Up' School and this means that as a community, we have full access to a digital platform of evidence-based resources relating to parenting and family life. This leaflet is designed to highlight the importance of partnership working when it comes to keeping children safe online and in cultivating their digital resilience.

Parent TIP:

You need to have registered your Tooled Up parent account to be able to click, download or use any of the resources mentioned in this document.

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Parent partnership is powerful

It takes a village to raise a child and when it comes to children's use of digital devices, it is essential that we work collaboratively, supporting one another in our collective mission to upskill children practically and emotionally, as they occupy and engage with digital spaces.

As a school, be reassured that we take our safeguarding responsibilities incredibly seriously, but parents play a significant role when it comes to empowering and protecting children in digital spaces.

Children are safest when we work together.

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What's the urgency?

The age range of 11-13 is a particularly sensitive developmental stage for many reasons. Puberty, hormonal challenges, rapid brain changes, accompanied by normal strides towards independence, mean we need to engage sensitively with our young tweens and teens. At this age, they can be acutely curious about the world around them and require us to both scaffold and support their learning as they find their feet. It can be a period characterised by sensitivity to peer opinions and increased risk-taking. It is an age where children may heavily nag parents for access to social media, games and apps.

In short, it is not a stage of their lives where we should just hand over a device and hope for the best. It is a critical stage for engaging in positive and consistent dialogue about a whole host of important topics. It is time to set the tone in terms of our expectations around digital device usage and a time to instil core values.

> *It can be a period characterised by sensitivity to peer opinions and increased risk-taking.*





Let's be clear: digital skills do matter

Raising children who are digitally skilled is incredibly important for learning, future employability and general life skills. We are all aiming to educate and raise good digital citizens with strong digital values and who can eventually navigate the digital world autonomously and with aplomb.

This is why *how* we talk about digital technology at school and at home matters. Ask your children about all the positives that digital technology brings to our lives.

What do you/ they enjoy about it?

How has it enhanced family connections, helped you with your professional life, or increased sources of family entertainment?

Don't be afraid to delve into these conversations. It is good to applaud advances in digital technology and to teach our children about the importance of it. Having these conversations sets the scene for richer conversations about the way we use digital technology more generally.

> *It is good to applaud advances in digital technology*

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No heads in sand (please)

Unfortunately, we are living in a time when we are seeing rapid rises in digital risks and harms; child exploitation online, sextortion, online gender-based violence, pornography consumption and cyberbullying. These risks are increasing at a time when we are concerned about children's mental health more generally. The *NSPCC* has referred to the World Wide Web as the 'World Wild West' for good reason (it is a magnificent space but equally a giant dustbin of content). Organisations like the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) have made it clear that sexual perpetrators have targeted the age range of children 11-13 more heavily in recent years and noted that 'self-generated' content has increased. This is where children are coerced, blackmailed, tricked or groomed into performing sexually via webcam.

The IWF have also made it clear that girls have been disproportionately targeted. The National Crime Agency (NCA) estimates that approximately 850,000 adult men have a sexual interest in children within the UK alone, the majority of whom are online. These are truly horrifying statistics, but we need to acknowledge them. This video by the IWF provides a stark reminder of how easy it is to forget that just because children are at home in their bedrooms or bathrooms, it doesn't mean they are safe from online harm.



> *The National Crime Agency (NCA) estimates that approximately 850,000 adult men have a sexual interest in children within the UK alone, the majority of whom are online.*

Social media: friend or foe?



It has become increasingly common to blame smartphones and/or social media for the global decline in children's mental health, increased levels of anxiety and addiction issues. This has particularly been the case since the publication of Johnathan Haidt's book: *The Anxious Generation* in 2024, which has gained huge traction across media networks. However, the situation is slightly more nuanced than presented in the media or even in that popular book.

The first thing to say is that social media is designed for children over the age of 13 for a reason. Secondly, there is evidence that social media can enhance teens' wellbeing in multiple ways; by providing community, identity-affirming content, entertainment, connective networks with friends and creative outlets. However, the flip side to that is that social media and the algorithms that live within them, can also open teens up to rabbit holes of problematic content. Children with low self-esteem and those who are psychologically vulnerable are at higher risk of being affected, targeted and falling prey to harmful content.



Another important thing to know is that within social media, one could argue that the real enemy (for the age range of 11-13) is **appearance-based social media**. Professor Tracy Wade's research has proven the link between appearance-focused content and poor body image, particularly in teens girls. Her work has also highlighted that peer commentary and teasing (particularly via Instagram) can even trigger a genetic risk for disordered eating thoughts and behaviours in adolescent girls.

Content that amplifies social comparison can be tricky for children of this age to process and can impact on how they feel about themselves.

As parents, we can model the importance of curating our feeds! Even if your child doesn't use social media yet, parents can lead the way curating their own social media feed now; removing or blocking anything from our social media feed that makes us feel bad about ourselves, our lives or our bodies. In this way, once your child starts using social media, they will have tools to navigate the torrent of content that may come their way.

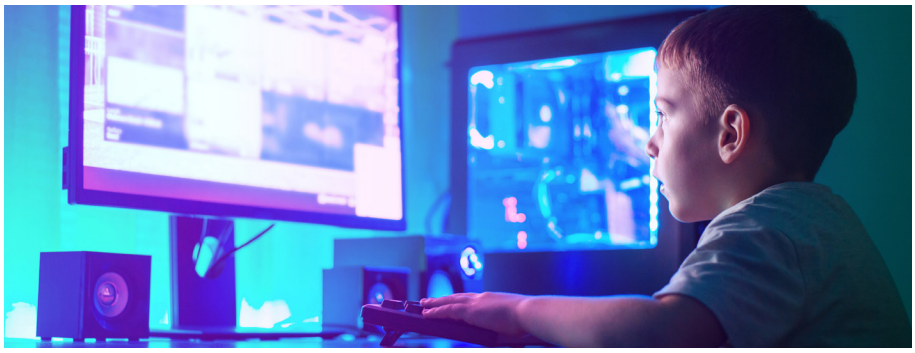
> *...one could argue that the real enemy (for the age range of 11-13) is appearance-based social media.*

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"But, we use parental controls!"



It is good that you do, but parental controls operate like 'stair gates'; they work until they don't. At that point, some clever teens have worked out strategies for getting around them. The important message about parental controls is that they play a role (but just a small one) in keeping children of this age safe online. The evidence on their efficacy is mixed so **they cannot be relied upon as a silver bullet when it comes to online safety**.





Dr Mariya Stoilova of the London School of Economics, asks parents to exercise caution when relying on them too heavily, as: "There is little evidence that [they] consider children's developing capacities as they grow, and currently, they don't have the granularity required to support children's changing needs."



"What gives children a better chance of staying safe online then?"

Well, it's transparent dialogue about digital values and digital challenges wrapped in an authoritative parenting style. This broadly means that, as a family, you take time to articulate your family digital values, put boundaries in place that reiterate the importance of balance in children's lives, and that you have consequences for children breaching family digital rules.

By being clear, consistent and fair, children have a better chance of engaging with our family rules and of complying with them over time. They will make mistakes (because they are children), but by staying calm and constructive, we can work through those together and use them as teachable moments!

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Questions for Parents to Ponder:

Does my child *really* need a smartphone?

This is a big decision. Watch this webinar to help you make that decision.

Have we established our own set of family digital values?

We have a template, but feel free to come up with your own!

Are we modelling positive digital behaviours as adults?

What digital behaviours do we need to change?

Are we having regular conversations with our children to reassure them that whatever happens online, we are there for them?

Can our children articulate the rules at school around IT use?

Do I know where those rules are?

Have I researched apps and games sufficiently before allowing my child to use them?

How safe are particular apps popular with children?

Watch this webinar on TikTok to delve deeper.

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CHILDREN'S GENERAL USE OF DIGITAL DEVICES AT HOME

At this point, you are probably asking yourself, how can I start conversations about these topics without alarming or scaring my child? Here are a few sentence starters to try. Ask with care and curiosity. Respond calmly and constructively. If we get angry or seem upset, children will clam up and are very likely not to share things with us again.

Good things to **ASK** your children:

"I have been reading about online safety. What does that term mean?"

"Tell me a little bit about what you know already."

"What messages does school give you about online safety? Teach me some of the important dos and don'ts?"

"How can we as a family do more to stay safe online?" (This might include discussions about things like online fraud.)

"Have you ever seen anything online that upset you?"

"Have you ever come across content that was inappropriate for your age?"

"What would you do if someone wanted to show you something that wasn't for your age? What could you say?"

"Why do you think social media is designed for children over the age of 13?"

"Why do you think your school puts so much effort into keeping pupils safe online?"

"What are some of the things that you have learned in school about staying safe online?"

"How can I be sure you are using the school devices safely at home?"

"What rules do you think are important when it comes to children using digital devices?"

"What are your favourite sites for learning things?"

"Why is it important not to give away personal details online?"

"Why is it important to be kind online and to think before we text or type?"

"How do we know what is fake and what is real when it comes to the online world?"

Good things to **SAY** to children:

"It can be tricky to navigate the digital world, but we will learn together."

"Can you teach me how to use this digital device? Show me what you know."

"Whatever happens online, I am here for you. I don't want you worrying about things on your own."

"I can understand that you are curious about lots of things, but I am here to answer your questions, ok? Googling things isn't always a good idea."

"Everyone makes mistakes, even online, but we can learn from those."

"Tell me who you can turn to, if you need to talk about anything upsetting that happens online."

"Do you think I spend too much time on my phone?"

"What do you love about your game. Show me how it works."

"I love it when we chat and talk about this stuff."

"Thanks for sharing what you know."

"Thank you for confiding in me."

"I am proud of you and have confidence you will make good decisions online."

"Let's read through the school policy and your promise to use school devices safely."



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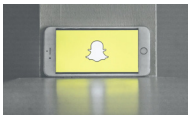
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If this document has captured your interest, there is plenty more information on the Tooled Up Education platform.

We recommend watching these WEBINARS:



Raising a Detective in the Digital World: A Talk for Parents



An In Depth Look at Snapchat



Raising a Girl in the Digital Age: A Parents' Guide



Raising Boys in the Digital Space and Keeping Them Safe



Please remember, as a Tooled Up registered parent, you can press the **support** *button within the Members' area of the site at any point and seek advice, information or request resources from the* **research team**, *who are always delighted to help! If you need to set up your Tooled Up account, please ask the school office for our unique school pin to 'get in'.*



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