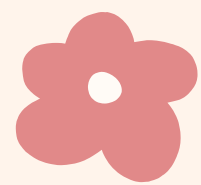# Mind Over Media
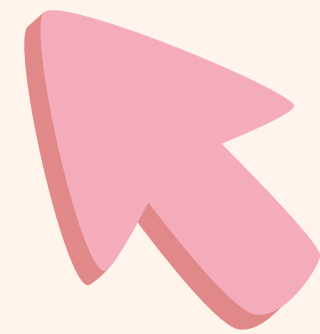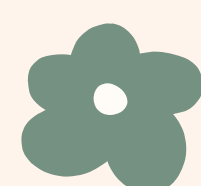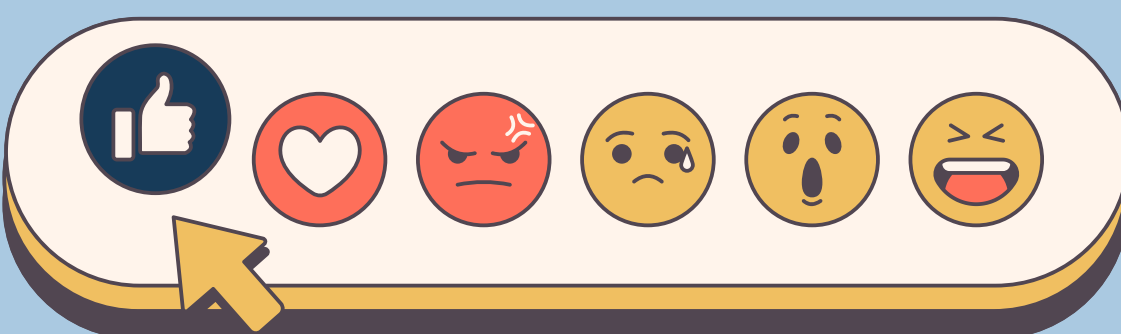
Navigating social media with your child

By Abbi Hall, Ben Ellison, Farida Thomson, Lauren Dias, Sam Sharp

CONTENTS

OUR AIM

Our aim is to provide parents with information regarding social media and the potential impacts it may have on the mental health of children. We want to encourage and advise parents to have open and level discussions on their children's usage and how to stay safe in content viewing. Social media can be a positive and useful learning tool for all kinds of learning.

Currently, in the UK, 84.4% of the population actively uses social media (Dixon, 2023). Social media statistics reported from Ofcom (2022), show that 21% of children aged 3 to 4 years old interacted with social media. This increases with age with 97% of 16 to 17 years old engaging with social media.

Percent of age population

Use social media | Have a social media account
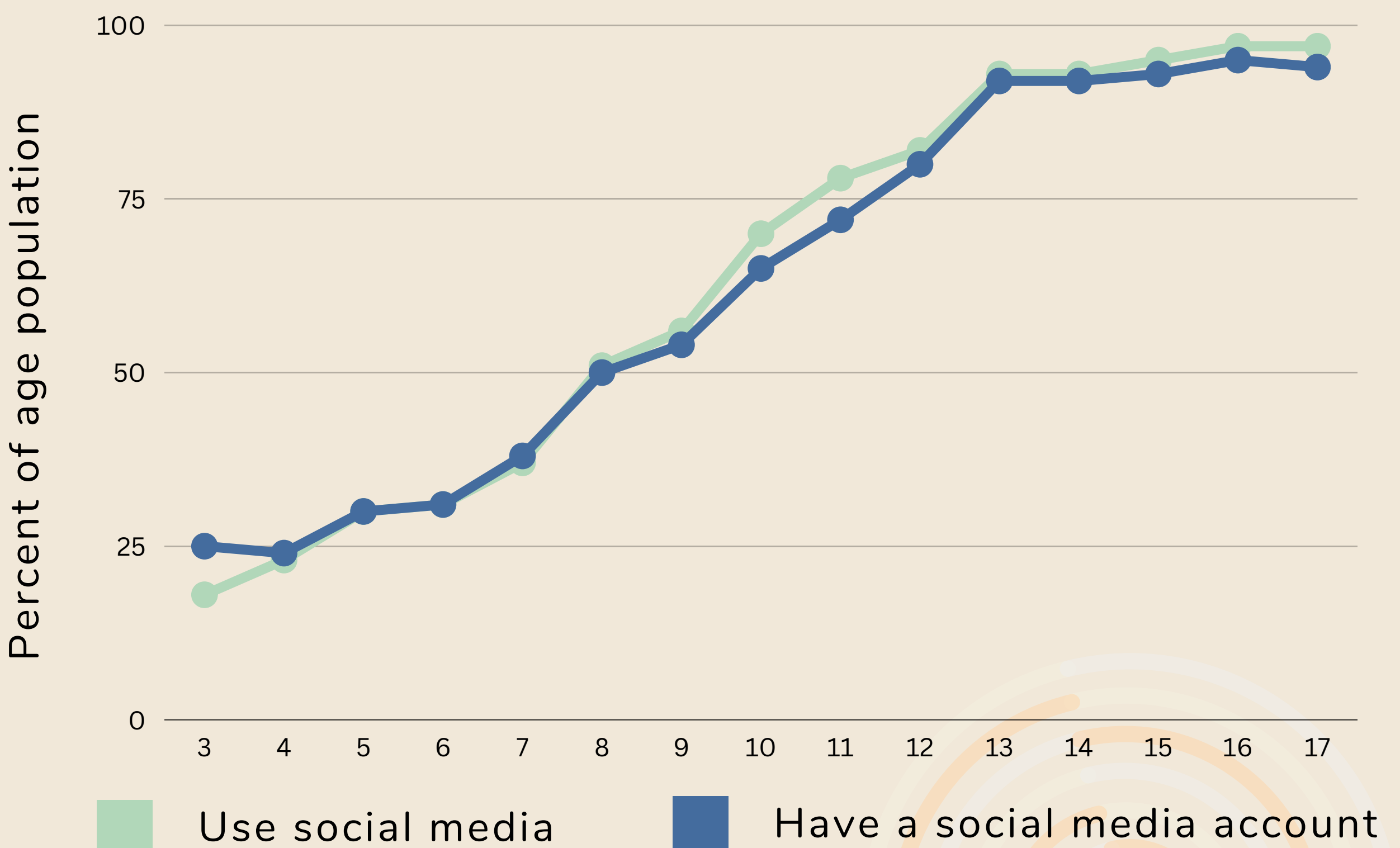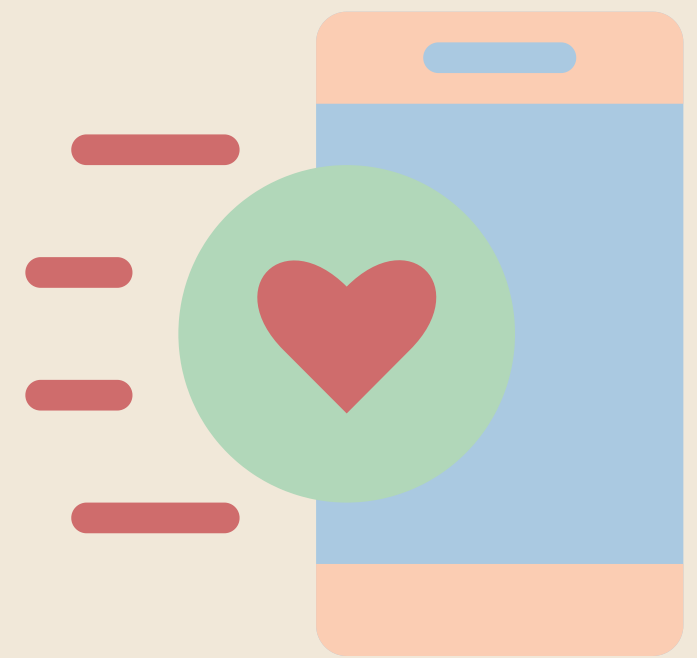
OUR AIM

THIS EBOOK IS FOR . . .

Mind Over Media is for parents, carers & guardians with pre-teens & adolescents who want to increase awareness of social media and its impacts upon the mental health of youths.

WHO WANT . . .

And are seeking guidance about online safety & the best way to approach this with their child.

MOM OFFERS . . .

A comprehensive eBook containing guidance across several topics aimed at equipping and preparing children for the online world, including information about privacy settings and setting up secure profiles.
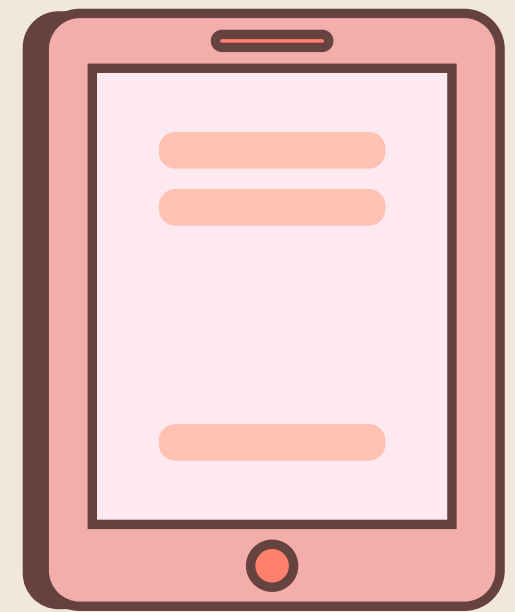
INSTEAD OF . . .

Searching through various, confusing sources of information or fully restricting and preventing adolescent access to social media.

WE DELIVER . . .

MOM delivers reassuring guidance to enable young people and guardians to navigate the online world together through open discussion, raising awareness of the implications of social media use whilst embracing the many positives of online platforms.

As social media becomes more integrated into everyday life, its impacts on mental health are called into question. While social media comes with age restrictions and safety features, surveys show they're not always followed.

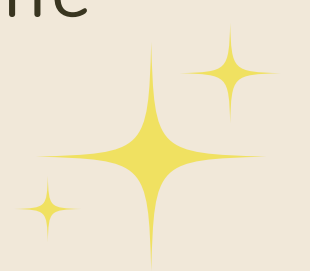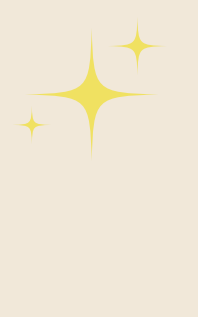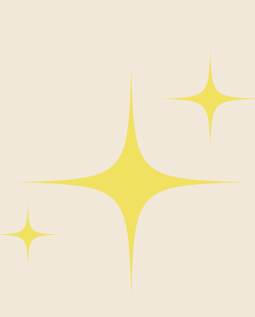Social media has its positives relating to mental health at the same time. Children aged 13 to 17 express a positive outlook about being online, with 53% saying social media was good for their mental health (Ofcom, 2022). Further positive influences are highlighted later in this book.

Furthermore, endless scrolling may lead to concerning topics being viewed, with 37% of children aged 8 to 17 saying they've seen "something worrying or nasty online". Adding on to this, 6 out of 10 of the children said they would tell someone about what they saw that was upsetting. Disturbing content coming up on social media can often be due to what the specific social media platform views as related content, which then recommends similar content. This has brought up worries about content that children end up viewing that may later contribute to mental health problems.

The eBook helps cover how to handle concerns regarding social media and how to navigate them. Social media can be a positive experience for learning and growing.
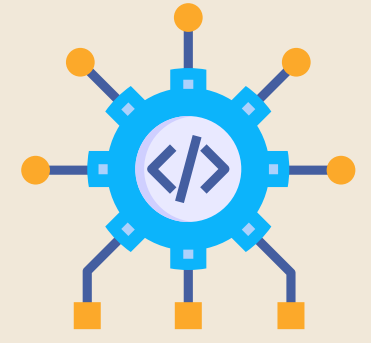
ALGORITHMS & ATTENTION ENGINEERING

One of the primary tools of the trade of running social media is what is menacingly referred to as "The Algorithm." What this refers to, broadly, is the mathematical processes that decide which posts are shown to you based on multiple factors that suggest what you may wish to see.
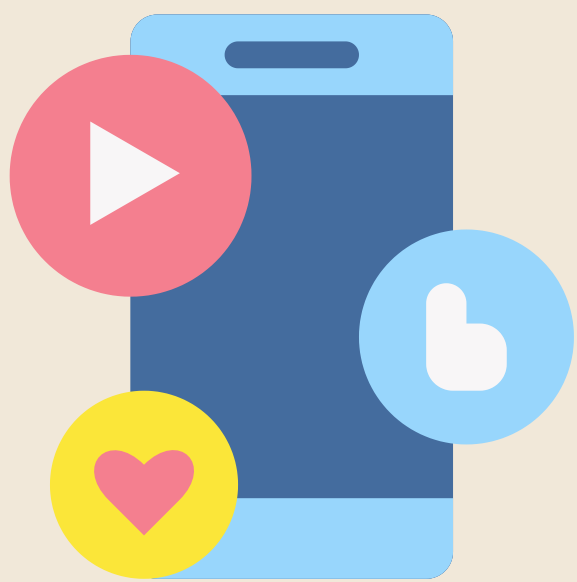
Posts are typically linked by theme based on keywords, either written or spoken, they use or the type of user that typically engages with them (people with shared interests or habits tend to enjoy similar posts). These factors vary from platform to platform but typically include data such as:

Demographics: Age
Gender
Location
Language

Posts: Previously liked and/or viewed related posts.

Amount of time spent looking at previous related posts.

The potential post's recency, virality and whether your friends enjoyed it.

Source: (O'Brien, 2023)
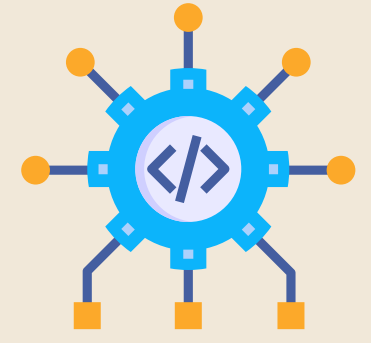
ALGORITHMS & ATTENTION ENGINEERING

These are all fairly innocuous things to know about a person, but what gets people so concerned is that they blend to make a fairly powerful concoction that always seems to know what it is that you want to see, or at the very least will keep you watching.

As well as this, the user interfaces of the platforms themselves have been said to have an "addictive design" (Cocchiarella et al., 2021), as they present choices in a way that encourages distraction and impulsiveness (Chaney et al. 2021).
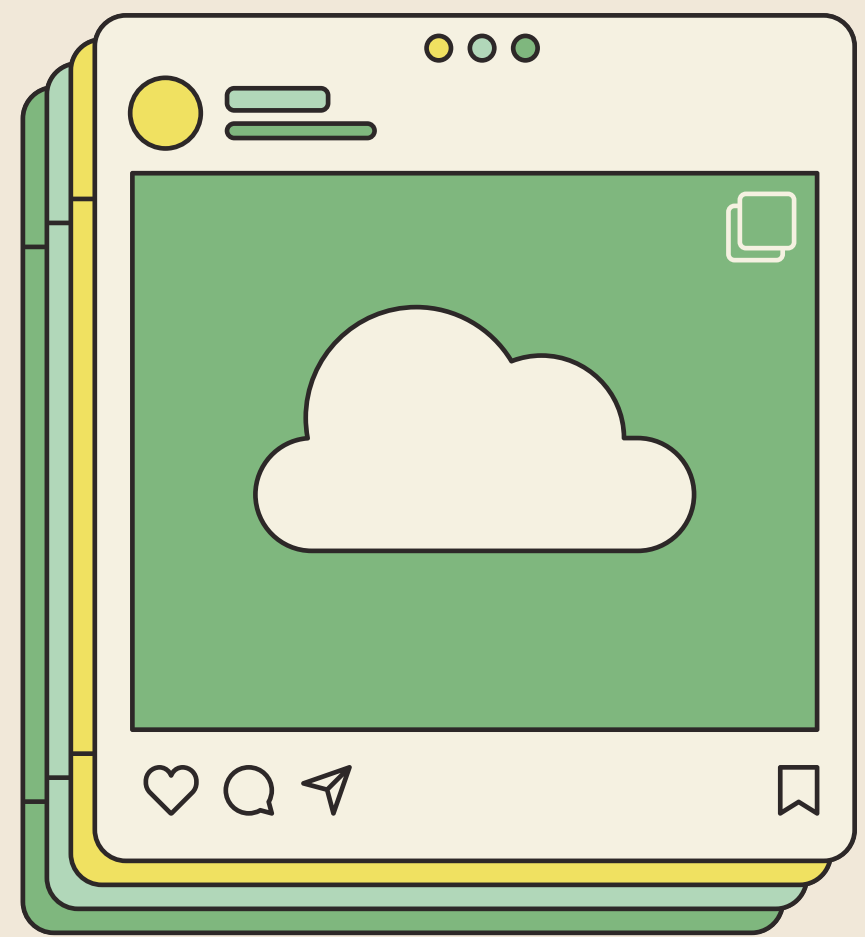
These aspects in combination can eat up your time rather voraciously, especially when your sense of time and how it's being spent is still developing and is linked strongly to emotion.(Qu et al., 2021) This is seen by some as preying on our brains' tendency towards flitting attention, and in repeated use, concerns have been raised about conditioning attention spans for shorter bursts of focus. (Frenette, 2021)
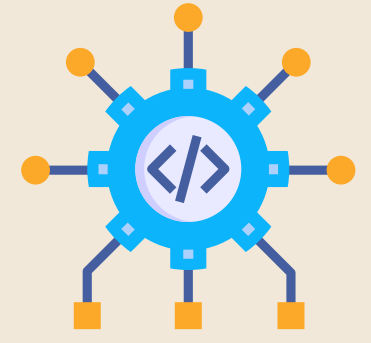
ALGORITHMS & ATTENTION ENGINEERING

Some social media platforms make their processes more clear than others, a good example of which is Twitter, which as of writing has recently made their recommendation algorithm completely open source, meaning anybody with the technical know-how can find out exactly how it works. (Twitter, 2023)
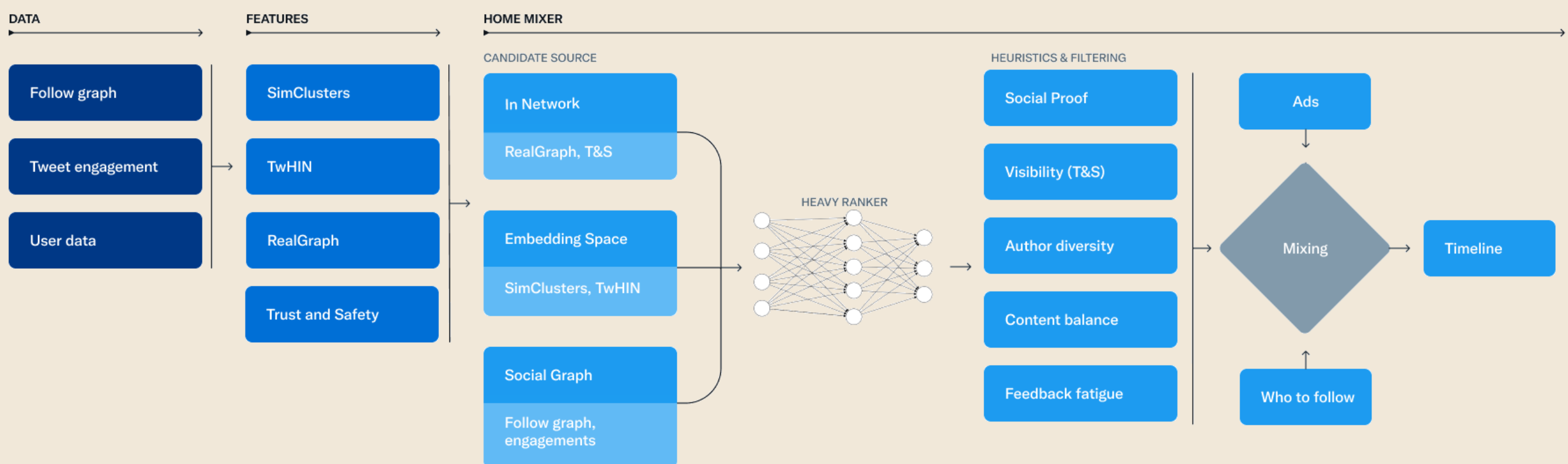
Some take a more "black box" approach, such as TikTok,(Smith, 2021) and some decide to land somewhere in between, telling what data they process, but not how, such as Instagram. (Moressi, 2021) Platforms do this primarily to avoid direct competition with one another, but this opacity has led to suspicion and discomfort surrounding the use of personal data. (Touma, 2022)
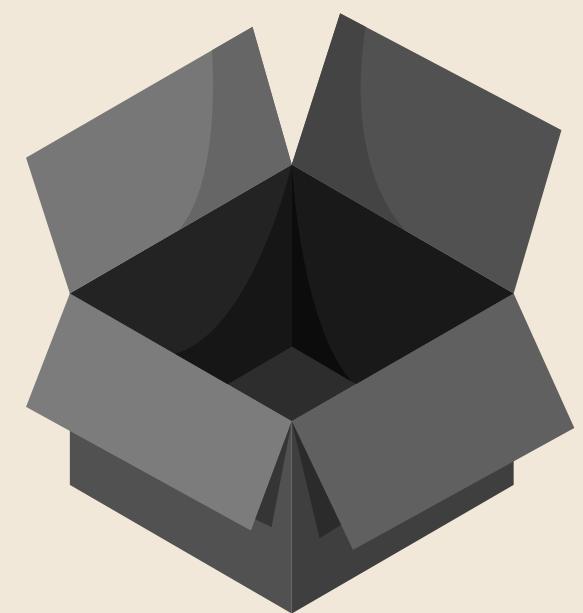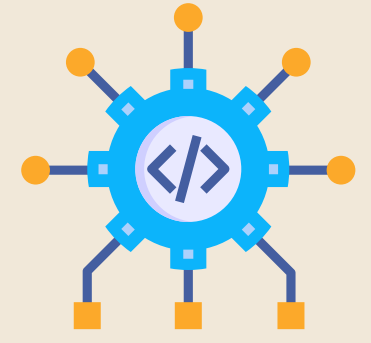
ALGORITHMS & ATTENTION ENGINEERING

PERSONAL DATA AWARENESS

Putting all of this into perspective, it's important that children are equipped to handle their personal data in a responsible manner, and that it's made clear to them the price of admission they are paying for the positive sides of social media. An easy way to know what it is that you are giving each social media is to take the time to examine their respective privacy policies, and whether you are comfortable having this data processed.
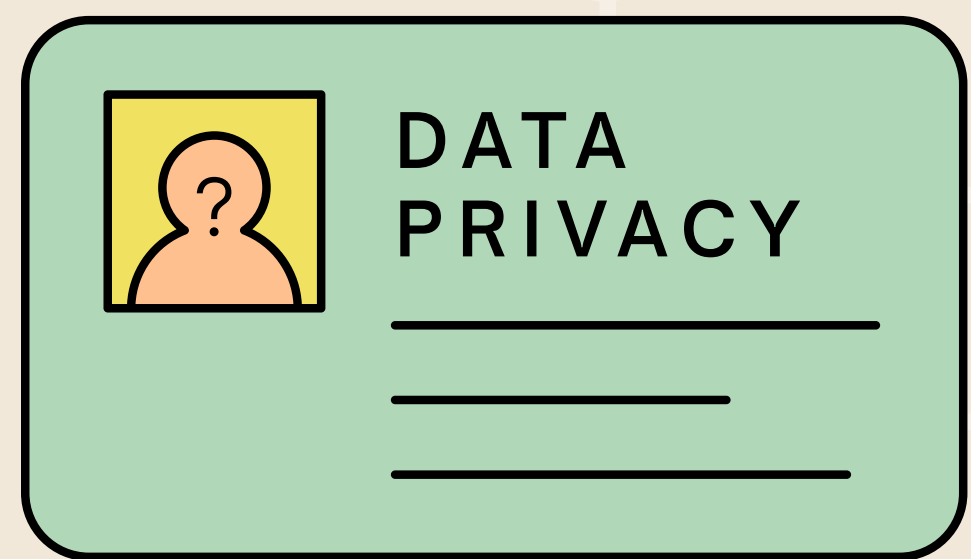
Posts that are recommended to you are not limited to user-made, either. Targeted advertisements are what turn social media from community platforms to business platforms and can be persuasive, though their results may be less than they're hyped up to be. (Farahat et al. 2012) Nevertheless, this is typically a feature that can be turned off in the settings of each app, in the interest of avoiding advertising to children, or to dodge the hard sell yourself.

POSITIVE INFLUENCE

Social media has a number of positive benefits for adolescents which can be propagated and strengthened. Ofcom (2023) highlights benefits such as assisting with school work, building and maintaining friendships and finding out about current events.

Friendship is central to adolescent life and social media can have positive impacts on psychological well-being through reduced isolation, improved social skills and communication with friends (O'Reilly, 2019).

5 POSITIVES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Online Social Support & Mental Health

Connection & Communication

Exposure to Positive Content

Positive Social Comparison

Resilence to Stress

(Keles et al., 2023)

1) Online Social Support & Mental Health

Social media has positive associations with mental health and can be supported by parents and teachers (O'Reilly, 2019). Mental health practitioners highlighted potential communication and connection benefits for those with mental health conditions who may be more prone to isolation. Social media can provide valuable information and self-support.

Moreover, young people with mental health conditions highlight a preference for digital communication as it causes less anxiety. However, this group can also be more vulnerable to the negative aspects of social media and so supervision may be required (O'Reilly, 2019).

2) Connection & Communication

Social media can facilitate connection and communication between adolescents through contact with friends, increasing happiness and reducing worry (Keles et al., 2023). Over half of teens aged 13 to 17 feel being online is beneficial for mental health as they can connect with their interests online (Ofcom, 2022).

Improved Well-Being for Marginalised Groups

Social media has benefits for marginalised groups such as LGBTQIA+ people which, for adolescents in particular, includes emotional support, enhanced well-being and feeling connected(Craig et al., 2021). Similarly, such networks provide an opportunity to connect with anti-racist and anti-sexist values which resonate with young people
(Harvard Business Review, 2020).

3) EXPOSURE TO POSITIVE CONTENT

Social media provides access to positive content that allows discovery, education, learning and awareness of events happening globally. This includes accessing entertaining content such as memes and finding new interests in areas of art, fashion and music (Keles et al., 2023). Positive content may also include posts from friends and family. Social media can provide exposure to positive political movements raising awareness and creating a sense of unity (Keles et al., 2023).
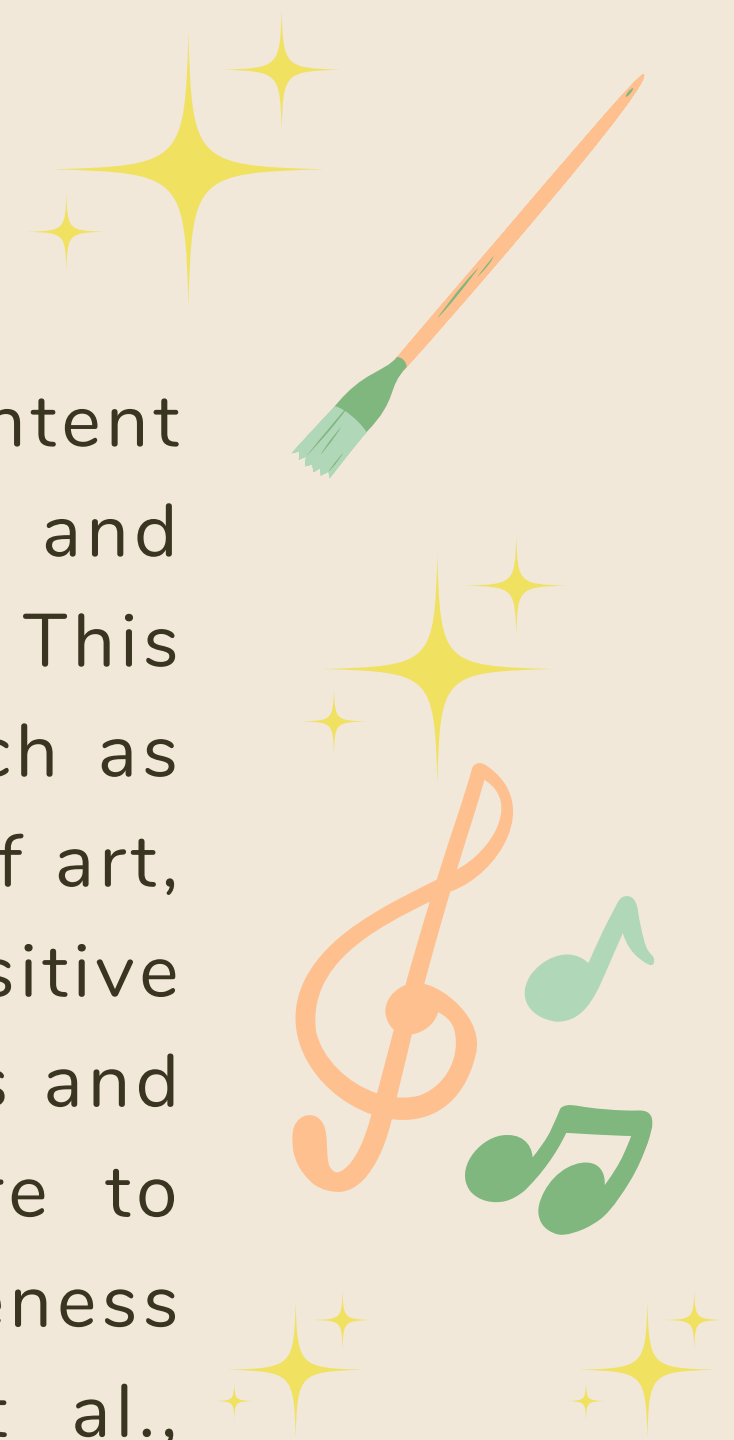
4) POSITIVE SOCIAL COMPARISON

This can boost self-esteem, self-image, well-being and motivation. Horizontal comparison helps positive self-image and confidence by identifying with those similar. The upward comparison may provide a source of motivation for goals (Keles et al., 2023).
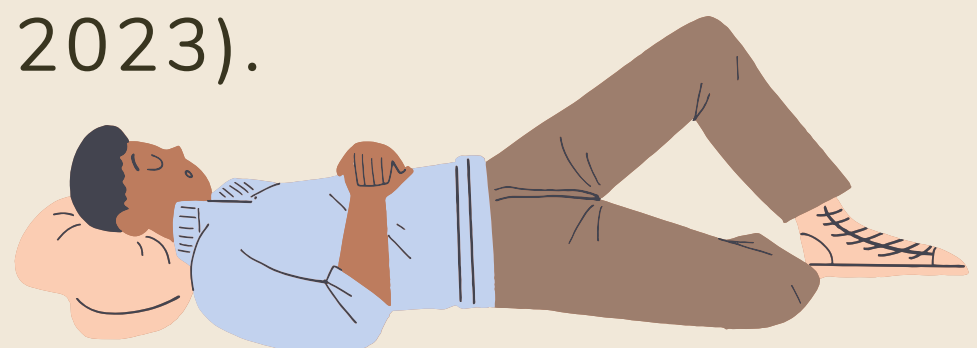
5) RESILIENCE TO STRESS

Social media helped adolescents cope with the negative implications of Covid-19 by enabling connection, entertainment and communication with others during periods of lockdown (Keles et al., 2023). Young people often use social media to relieve external pressures, which positively impacts their well-being (O'reilly, 2018). Focus groups have highlighted the importance of listening to adolescents and their social media use which has reinforced the notion of its value for relaxation purposes (O'Reily, 2019).

AGE GROUPS & ONLINE BEHAVIOURS

From Ofcom (2023)

8 – 11 YEARS OLD

Young people are developing new thoughts and feelings and are attaching emotional importance to friends. This may make them more susceptible to peer pressure & influence.
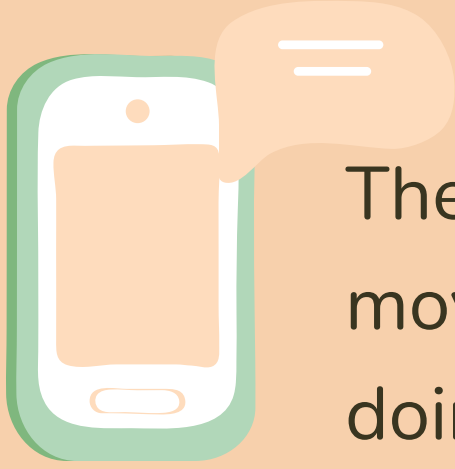
They develop media skills, with increased smartphone ownership & move to secondary. 22% of parents watch what their 8 to 11 old is doing.

63% may be using social media platforms & more likely to interact with others through messaging, calling & online games.

PLATFORM USAGE

TikTok
32%

WhatsApp
32%

YouTube
27%

Snapchat
24%
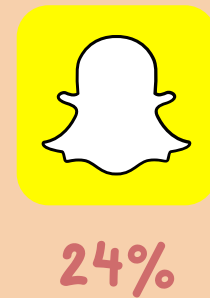
12 – 15 YEARS OLD

Teenagers have increasing concern over self-image whilst becoming more socially independent from parents with little direct supervision.

98% HAVE MOBILE PHONES

93% USE SOCIAL MEDIA

This age group connects online, creates media and communicates with others via video games, creating and sharing content online. 47% of this age group have uploaded and shared content.

POPULAR FOR MESSAGING

Snapchat · TikTok · Instagram

AGE GROUPS & ONLINE BEHAVIOURS

16 – 17 YEARS OLD

More time is spent with friends and teens develop a stronger sense of identity. There is likely to be increased concern over body image.

BRANCHING OUT & USING MORE APPS

TikTok
80%

80%

65%

AGE AND CONTENT

AGE RATINGS:

It's good to be aware of the age ratings for each app, so that you have a rough idea about what type of content would be displayed and shared on those sites.

16+	WHATSAPP	13+	FACEBOOK
13+	SNAPCHAT	13+	TWITTER
13+	INSTAGRAM	13+	YOUTUBE
13+	TIKTOK	13+	PINTEREST
12+	BEREAL	13+	TWITCH

Source: InternetMatters.org, NSPCC, Pinterest

Most platforms will have settings to manage privacy and safety, so it is a good idea to explore these with your child upon them creating an account. In general, the following is advised:

- With your child, explore the reporting and safety options within the platform. This could involve:
  - Learning how to report offensive comments
  - Learning how to flag inappropriate posts
  - Blocking users
  - Restricting interactions with other users
  - Listing keywords that relate to posts you wish to not be shown
  - Filtering/hiding comments
- With your child, explore the privacy features within the platform. This could include
  - Managing who can message your child (e.g, only their friends)
  - Who can see their posts/messages
  - Setting their account as private
  - Linking family accounts

INSTAGRAM

Instagram is an image-sharing platform, where users can follow and interact with each other and their posts. It includes an instant messaging feature as well as an explore page, where users are shown suggested content based on the accounts and posts they view, like and share.

23:26   .ıll 4G 13

< **Account privacy**

🔒 Private account

When your account is public, your profile and posts can be seen by anyone, on or off Instagram, even if they don't have an Instagram account.

When your account is private, only the followers that you approve can see what you share, including your photos or videos on hashtag and location Pages, and your followers and following lists.

Switch to private account?

▷ Only your followers will be able to see your photos and videos.

@ This won't change who can message, tag or @mention you, but you won't be able to tag people who don't follow you.

Switch to Private

Here are some specific examples of privacy and security settings within Instagram, but this list is not exhaustive.

All settings can be found under the menu icon (≡) on your child's profile page.

You can make the account private - Settings and privacy > Account privacy (Left, Source: Instagram).

A private account on most social media platforms will ensure that only the user's accepted followers/friends can see their posts and messages.
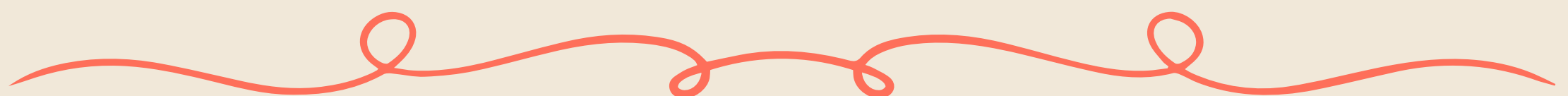
You can manage some of the content that will be shown - Settings and privacy > Sensitive content (Right, Source: Instagram)

Choose how much sensitive content to see:

More
You might see more sensitive content.

Standard
You might see some sensitive content.

Less
You might see less sensitive content.

This affects search results as well as recommended content in Explore, Reels, feed and hashtag pages.
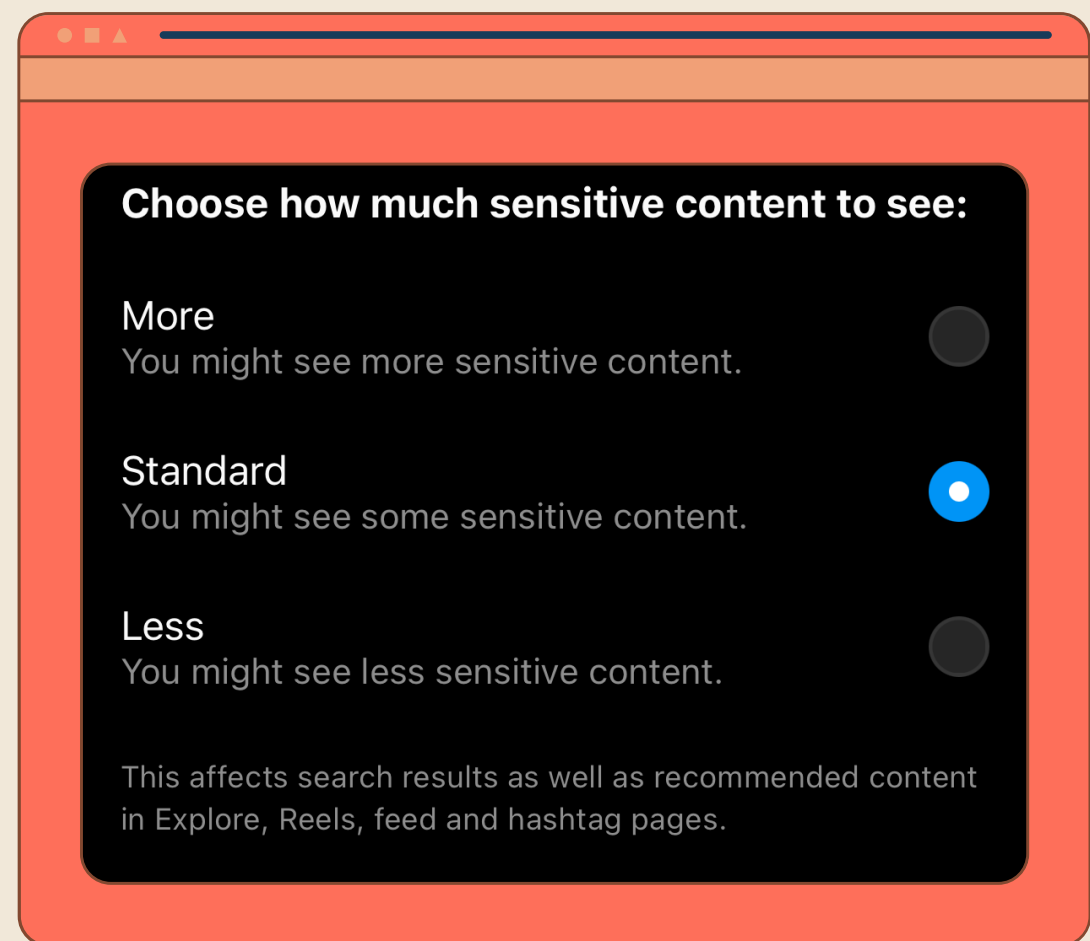
You can manage who can send messages to your child, add them to group chats and reply to their posts - Settings and privacy > Messages and story replies (Below, Source: Instagram. Left, Source Instagram).

7:28

Tweet

What's happening?

23:27   4G

← Message controls

Decide whether message requests go to your Chats list, your "Message requests" folder or whether to receive them at all.

Your followers on Instagram   Requests >

Others on Instagram   Requests >

Group chats

Who can add you to groups   >

Not all messages are requests: accounts you follow, for example, can send messages to your Chats list. Learn more about who can message you.

Who's in this photo?

Lafayatte, LA

X □ —

← **Messages and story replies**

How people can reach you

Message controls   >

Story replies   >

Who can see that you're online

You can also filter and hide offensive comments, and prevent your child from receiving messages that may be harmful or spam - Settings and privacy > Hidden Words (Right, Source: Instagram).

Be sure to look through all settings and privacy options when setting up a new account, and review them regularly, as they vary between social media platforms, and these features are subject to change.

DIMSUM

10:10PM

Hide Comments

Comments that may be offensive will be hidden in a separate section of your posts, reels and videos.

Advanced comment filtering

Additional comments that may contain offensive words and phrases will be hidden. You can always review and unhide individual comments.

Hide Message Requests

Message requests that may be offensive, spam or scams will be moved to the Hidden requests folder. We'll also filter notifications for these messages.

Custom words for messages and comments

Hide other comments and messages that you don't want to see by creating a custom list of words, phrases and emojis.

Manage custom words and phrases >

Awsum, 23
2 miles away
Hide Comments

WHATSAPP

Last Seen & Online	Nobody, Everyone >
Profile Photo	My Contacts >
About	My Contacts >
Groups	My Contacts >
Status	My Contacts >
Live Location	None >

List of chats where you are sharing your live location.

Whatsapp is an instant messaging platform, where users can communicate via chats (including group chats), audio calls and video calls. You can find the privacy settings by going to Settings > Privacy, where you can manage who can see your child's profile picture, who can add them to groups, see their location, etc (Left, Source: Whatsapp).

SNAPCHAT

Snapchat is a multimedia instant messaging app, where, unless saved in the chat, messages disappear after being viewed. Users can create group chats and post 'stories' that other users can view an unlimited number of times for 24 hours.

The main privacy features to be aware of are the options to manage who can see your child in 'Quick Add' and who can see your child's location. If you leave 'Quick Add' switched on, friends of friends and anyone with your child saved as a contact could receive suggestions to add them as a friend. The location features allow users to see where their friends are on a map, but choosing to turn this off will ensure your child's location will not be displayed to others.

Here is their guide to the privacy settings:

https://help.snapchat.com/hc/en-gb/articles/7012343074580-How-do-I-change-my-privacy-settings-on-Snapchat-

TIKTOK

TikTok is a platform where users can share and view short videos and also includes an instant messaging feature. It is advisable to enter the correct age group when your child is setting up an account, as the site has some extra privacy settings for 13-to-15-year-olds.

Here is their guide on the privacy settings:

https://support.tiktok.com/en/account-and-privacy/account-privacy-settings
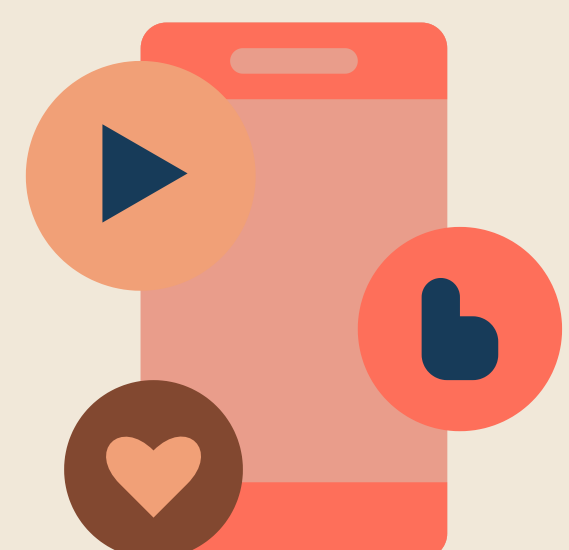
TIME SPENT ONLINE
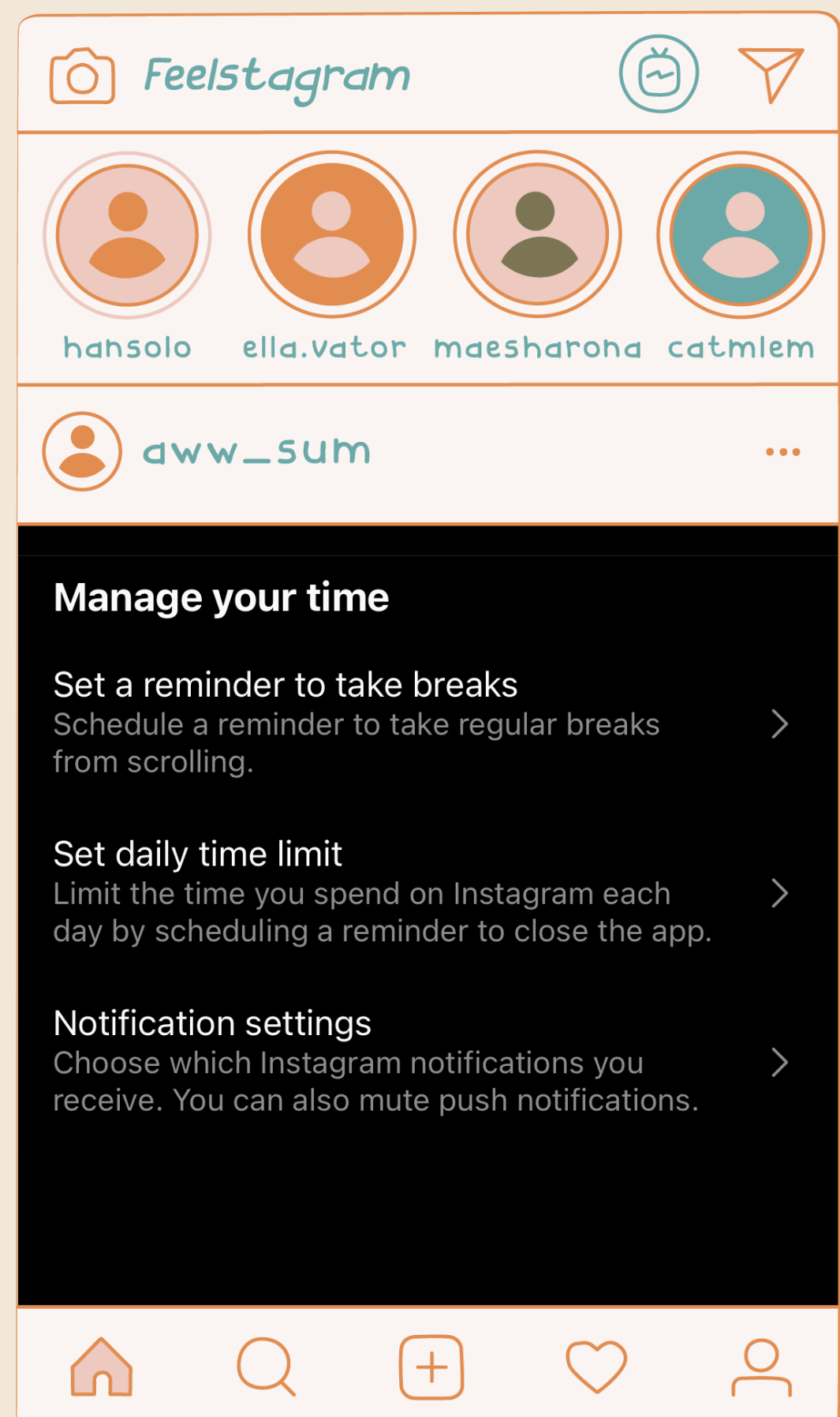
Children who use TikTok spend an average of 114 minutes per day on the platform (Source: Statista). Considering the negative effects that these sites can have on young people and how addictive they can be, like with many things, it is advisable to manage time spent on social media to allow for the positive effects of social media, without letting it impact them negatively.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Have open discussions about screen time and agree together on a rough usage time for weekdays and weekends.

Encourage your child's other interests, so that they spend time doing things that they enjoy away from social media. This will prevent them from becoming dependent on social media as a source of pleasure, increase individuality, and will help to minimise the effects of social media on their mental well-being.

Feelstagram

hansolo   ella.vator   maesharona   catmlem

aww_sum   ...

Manage your time

Set a reminder to take breaks
Schedule a reminder to take regular breaks from scrolling.   >

Set daily time limit
Limit the time you spend on Instagram each day by scheduling a reminder to close the app.   >

Notification settings
Choose which Instagram notifications you receive. You can also mute push notifications.   >

Consider encouraging your child to use the usage limits within some social media apps, such as Instagram, where they can find the following options, by going to their profile and selecting the (≡) menu > Your Activity > Time Spent (Above, Source: Instagram).

Consider encouraging your child to use inbuilt screen time limits,
for example, on Apple devices, in Settings > Screen Time, you can find these options (Right, Source: iOS. Below, Source: iOS)

Downtime
Schedule time away from the screen.

App Limits
Set time limits for apps.

Communication Limits
Set limits based on contacts.

Always Allowed
Choose apps to allow at all times.

Content & Privacy Restrictions
Block inappropriate content.

During downtime, only apps you choose to allow and phone calls will be available.

Turn On Downtime Until Tomorrow

Downtime will be turned on until midnight.

Scheduled

Security and privacy settings vary between devices and social media platforms, so be sure to explore these with your child when setting up new social media accounts, phones, laptops, tablets, and even game consoles - all electronic devices and accounts! And remember to review them regularly as they are often modified and updated.

USEFUL LINKS FOR PARENTS

General:
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/

Being safe on Instagram:
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/keeping-children-safe-on-instagram/

Being safe on Whatsapp:
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/2023-01-12-is-whatsapp-safe-for-my-child/

Being safe on Snapchat:
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/is-snapchat-safe-for-my-child/

Being safe on BeReal:
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/is-bereal-safe-for-my-child/

Being safe on TikTok:
https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-safety-blog/child-safe-settings-tiktok/

Being safe on YouTube:
https://support.google.com/youtubekids/answer/6172308?hl=en-GB

STAYING SAFE ONLINE

SELF DIAGNOSING AMONGST YOUTH

Young people are turning to social media to self-diagnose serious mental health conditions. This is an issue because

- diagnoses may be **inaccurate**
- self-diagnosis may lead to further **unnecessary worry**.

Self-diagnosis is identifying a medical condition in yourself, without guidance from a qualified practitioner. How did we get here? Based on what is searched, shared, and liked, platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, facilitate a cycle of potentially harmful content. Self-appointed influencers use social media platforms to create both a safe space and an outlet for their viewers.

However, despite what may be good intentions, there is a growing abundance of information circulating and the lack of intervention has resulted in youth internalizing mental health symptoms.

Dr Dodgen-Magee, of **Deviced! Balancing Life and Technology in a Digital Age** highlights that when users focus on a medical diagnosis, the platform algorithms serve them never-ending content which provides a "strong confirmation bias" - without any context.
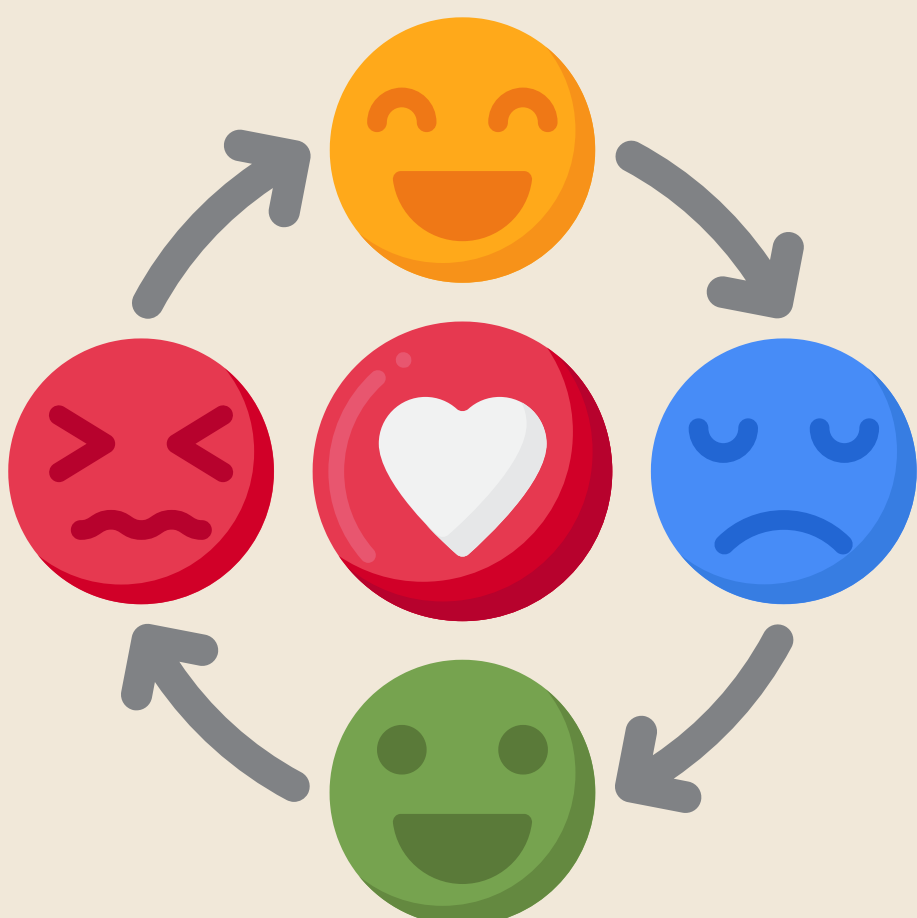
According to a published passage in the **British Medical Journal**, youth "report that they gain peer support, recognition and a sense of belonging from this exposure. This attention and support may be inadvertently reinforcing and maintaining symptoms". This has been labeled as the "horoscope effect" — a **self-fulfilling prophecy**.

SELF DIAGNOSING AMONGST YOUTH

A self fulfilling prophecy is an expectation or belief that influences a person's behaviour, in turn causing it to become true.

Understandably, it is instinctual to gravitate towards a like-minded community; trending theme tags are quick to remove the distance between viewers. For example, '#DID' (Dissociative Identity Disorder), '#Borderlinepersonalitydisorder' and '#bipolar' receive millions of views. It only takes one individual's content to make a profound impact on viewers globally. It is vital that individuals are encouraged to seek professional medical advice if they require support. It is incredibly easy to **misdiagnose**.

Nonetheless, Professor Pat McGorry, of youth mental health at the University of Melbourne, reminds us that self-diagnosing is **not** an 'epidemic of attention-seeking or mass hysteria'. Young people are genuinely experiencing difficulties with their mental health.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

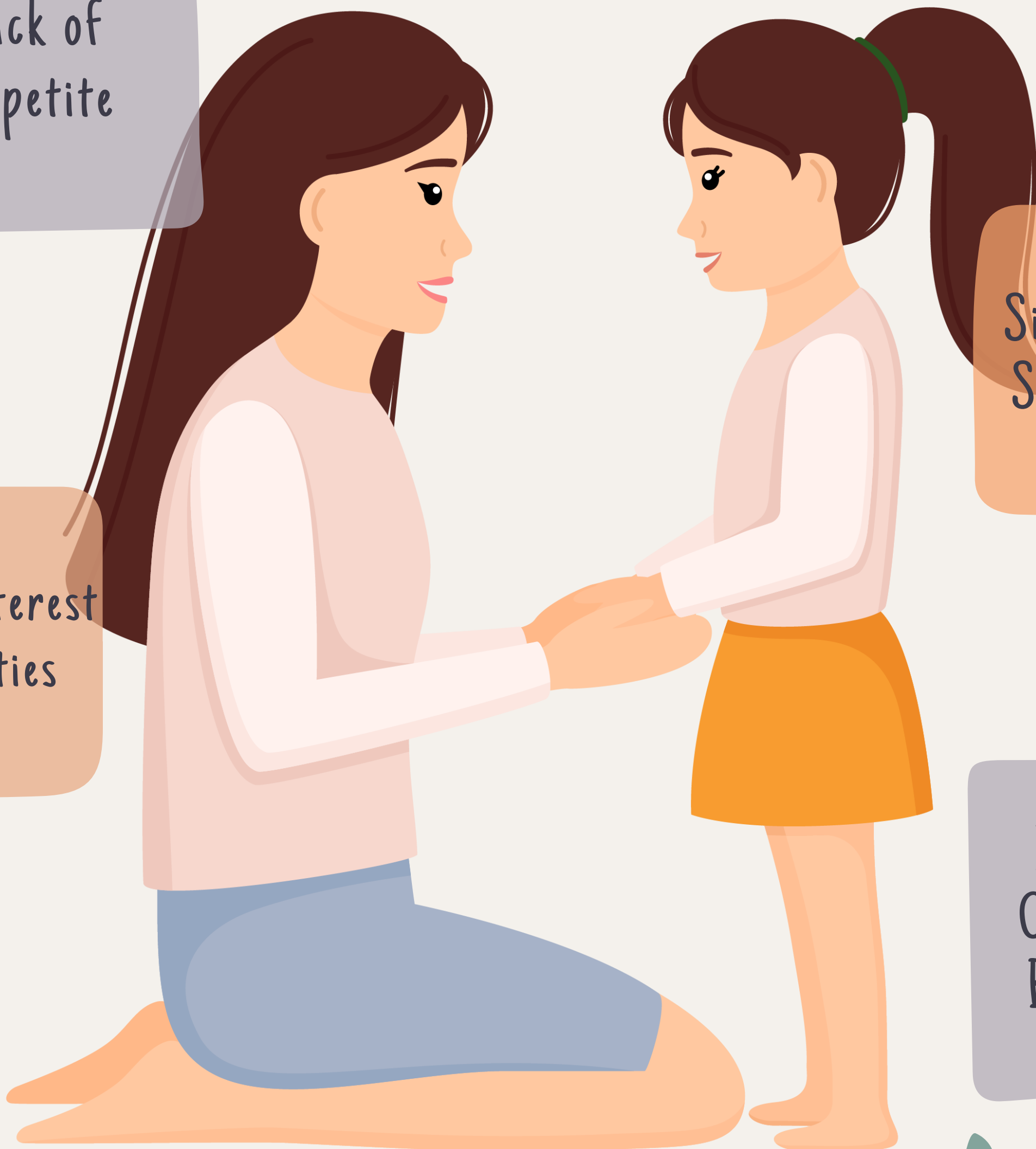# Important Signs
WHEN TO INTERVENE

Continous Low Moods

Increasing Social Isolation

Lack of Appetite

Signs of Low Self Esteem

Losing Interest in Activities

Dramatic Changes in Behaviour

EQUIPPING THE YOUTH

Below are tools parents can equip children with to manage any negative experiences with social media.

Gratitude Journalling

A research review in 2018 found journalling about traumatic or emotional experiences was associated with the improvement of physical and psychological health.

Mindful Breathing

Breathing excercises for kids are excellent tools for reducing stress.

Encourage Interests

Ensure more time is spent away from social media! Find communal areas. Contact local schools that offer free extra-curricular activities. Inspire youngsters to declutter and make extra money via vinted or depop.

Youth Clubs

The UK Youth Fund in partnership with Pears Foundation aims to ensure that as many vital youth services as possible are able to support young people in their local community.

MOST IMPORTANTLY...

Parents and carers should encourage non-threatening, open conversations that create an open dialogue with children.

IN SUMMARY

- Despite the risks inherent to social media, with the right measures in place, its benefits can make it absolutely worthwhile.

- Social media has a number of positive impacts including online support, connection and communication which leads to enhanced wellbeing. This is very important for marginalised groups that can connect online and develop communities. Social media provides escapism and can reduce stress due to entertaining content. When used effectively, these platforms can create a positive and enjoyable experience.

- Remember to check all security and privacy settings with your child on their devices and accounts, to help them to use them as safely as possible

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