A guide for parents and carers on managing children's digital lives

Sacred Heart Catholic Primary school

Todays Presentation

Today's presentation is sourced from **'What I wish my parents or carers knew…': A guide for parents and carers on managing children's digital lives**

By the Children's Commissioner

A digital copy can be found here and a copy will be uploaded to our website along with this Power Point.

Introduction

Parenting today can feel overwhelming – especially when childhood looks so different from what we grew up with. There is no manual, and it can be hard to keep up with the fast-changing digital world your child moves through everyday. We aim to support those conversations and help you support your child with confidence.

Your Role as a Parent or Carer

Being a parent or carer is both a responsibility and a privilege. Children have been asked, and they have confirmed they want adults to set limits and make difficult decisions when things aren't clear-cut.

Dilemmas you may face;

- Allow your child online and risk exposure to harm

- Or hold them back from a space that is vital to how young people socialise, learn and play.

Parents worry about

- Endless scrolling
- Difficulty switching off
- Pressure from peers
- Changes in behaviour or mood
- Whether their child would tell them if something went wrong.

Why talking about digital life is hard for kids…and how to make it easier.

Parents and Carers don't know enough

1 Talk about both the good and the bad of life online

Young people say parents don't always understand the platforms they use or the online trends they enjoy. They also feel that adults focus mostly on what can go wrong, and rarely acknowledge the parts of being online that matter to them.

2 Be involved early and collaborate on key decisions

Young people say that when parents take an active interest from the start, they're better placed to help if something goes wrong. They also want to be consulted about decisions around their digital use, so they can understand the reasoning and feel the rules are fair.

3 When in doubt, ask your child

They know their online world best — and you're the person best placed to help them navigate it.

4 If you're still unsure, speak to a teacher or trusted professional

They can guide you towards the right advice and further support.

Why talking about digital life is hard for kids…and how to make it easier.

Fear of consequences

1 Create a safe space for talking about what they see online

Young people want to share their experiences but don't always feel they can. Help them feel comfortable talking about the apps they use and what they're seeing online.

2 Set ground rules together

Agree on rules with your child and be prepared for them to change over time. Reassure your child that you trust them, especially as they grow older. Involving them in these discussions helps them feel respected and empowered, as they can share their voice in the process.

3 Be honest and explain

If you limit social media access or end up taking their phone, give reasons. Young people understand that sometimes this is a reasonable response, but needs to be explained properly. If not, trust can be damaged and children might not open up a second time.

Why talking about digital life is hard for kids…and how to make it easier.

It's awkward or embarassing

1 Start conversations early and keep them going

Keep the conversation going, responding to your child's experiences. Don't let awkward or "taboo" topics stop you. **Conversation starters** are included later in this guide, and the **Thinkuknow website** has age-appropriate ideas.

2 Keep it casual

Use everyday moments to talk about their online experiences — for example, while walking or driving. Teens say they don't want "the big talk"!

3 Be a role model

Think about how your own habits set an example. Talk openly about them, use them to shape family rules, and share stories from your childhood or teenage years — reflecting on how things might be different in today's digital world.

4 Have a conversation and ask questions

If you're unsure how to start, try watching an **#AsktheAwkward video** together.

5 It's okay to laugh!

Sharing a laugh can ease tension and make conversations more comfortable. Teens say they don't want parents to be too serious or intimidating.

Managing Screen Time

This is the amount of time someone spends on a screen of any kind – this can include smartphones, tablets, consoles and laptops.

- 69% of children aged 8-15years old spend more than 2hrs a day on screen
- 23% spend more than 4hrs a day on a screen

Tips for setting screen time

Social media and devices are not designed with the best interests of children at heart. They are designed to keep people "on" them for as long as possible. Children are especially vulnerable to the features which are designed to keep people hooked online, which is why setting rules around device or phone use at home is important.

- Set rules and explain them.

- Rules should address two things: 1) The amount of time your child spends on their devices; 2) What your child is doing on their devices

- Have a look at the Be Mindful section of the Digital 5 A Day

- Take a collaborative approach and ask your child what rules they think would be good.

Suggestions for you and your family.

- No phones at the dinner table.

- No phones when out walking.

- No devices in your child's bedroom.

- Have some phone-free time.

- Share why you're using your phone.
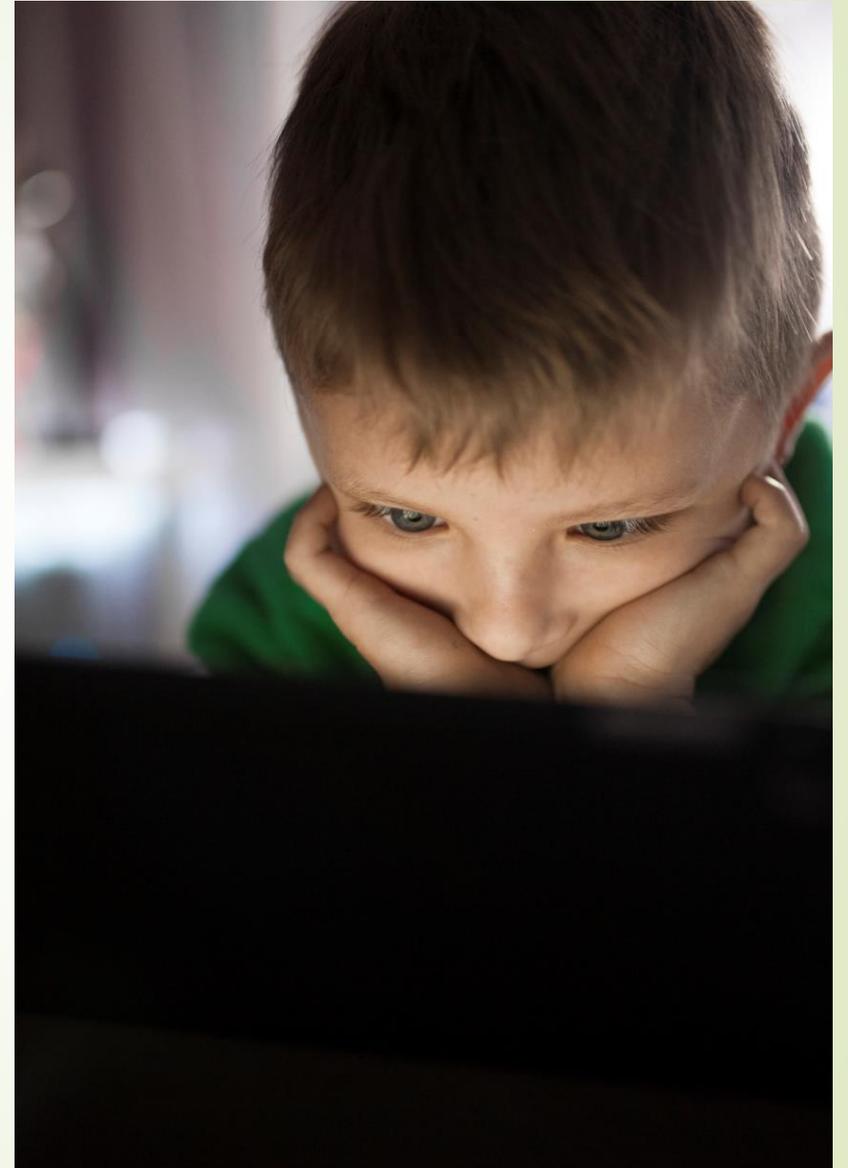
When bad things happen online

The Online Safety Act is now in place, but the online world is still far from safe for children. They are still having harmful experiences online and it is important that you understand how to talk to your children about their experiences and give them the help they need.

<u>What children think</u>

- They accept that bad things can happen and see it as an inevitable part of being online.

- Children feel they can handle these experiences but, in reality, may not be fully equipped to manage them alone.

- Children know that some harmful experiences they face would shock their parents. This includes being contacted by strangers online, often through escalating interactions.

- Children also report seeing pornography, being approached by people selling things, and having intimate images of peers shared.

A sharp increase in **mental illness** amongst teens and young adults since 2010
(The Anxious Generation)

16-17 years old are **less confident** in their ability to distinguish the real from the fake online than they were last year (75% vs 82%).
(Ofcom)

10-30% of children and young people used their smartphones in a **dysfunctional way**, an average of 23% show **problematic** smartphone use.
(Kings College London)

24% of 5-7 year olds own a **smartphone**, 76% use a **tablet**
(Ofcom)

90% of girls and 50% of boys have been sent **unwanted explicit content** *(Ofsted)*

41% of 5-7 year olds are **gaming online**, 15% are playing shooter games
(Ofcom)

Higher rates of anxiety and depression = time spent networking on **social media** sites
(John Gallacher)

Depression and **anxiety** affect 18-25 year olds more than any other age group.
(The Anxious Generation)

Tips for dealing with when bad things happen online

- Use parental controls but check in regularly with children about how they feel these are working.

- Set clearly thought out, specific boundaries on social media usage and consequences for inappropriate use - and explain them.

- Confiscating your child's phone doesn't always have to be the answer when something goes wrong.

- Know how and where to report things.

Signs to look out for

Children's behaviour can change for a number of reasons. If you notice any of these, consider whether online behaviour or experiences could explain the change.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)
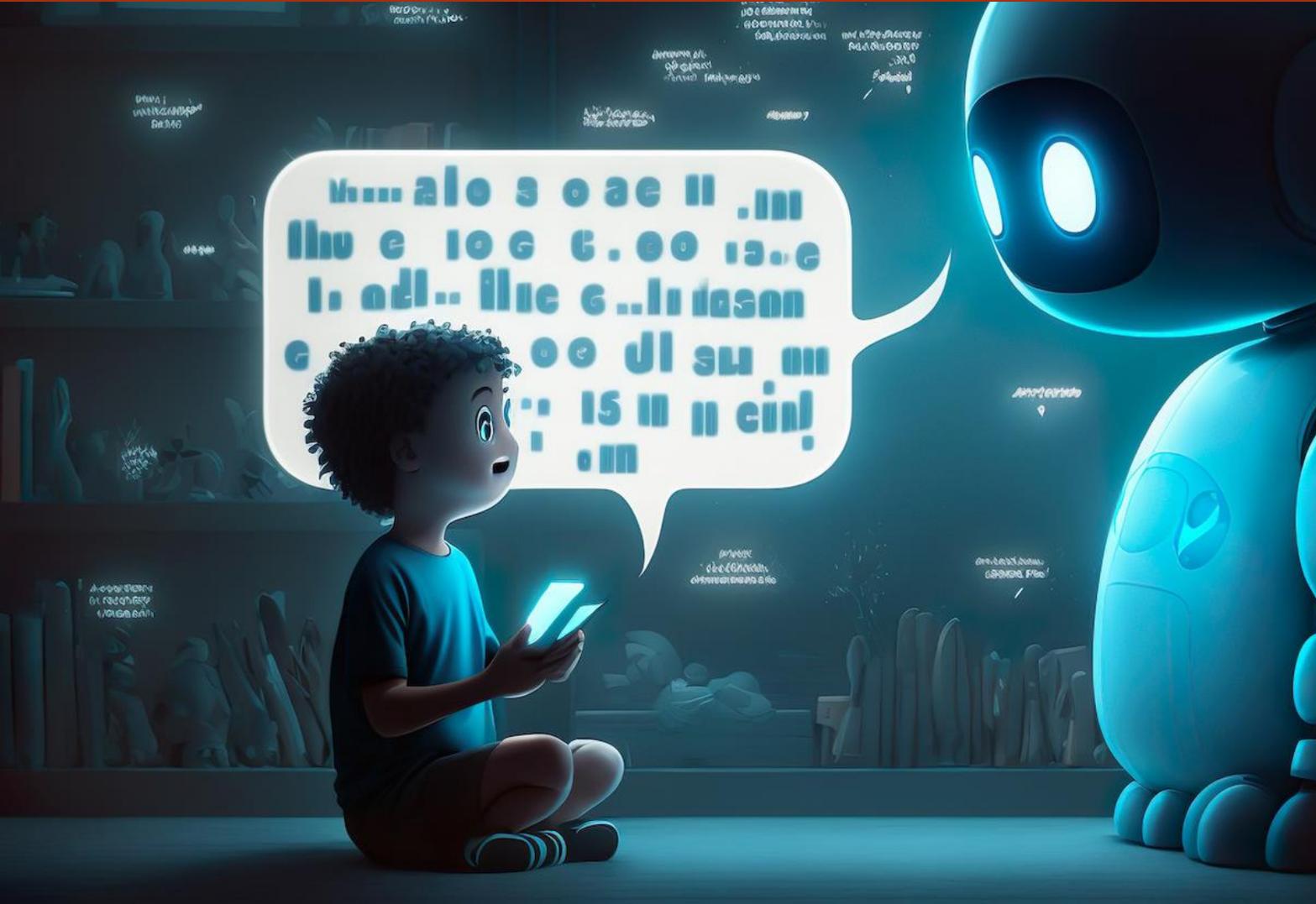
AI has been embedded into almost every online platform in recent years.

Simply searching for something online now brings up an AI explanation, and chatbots are now features of social media platforms. This means that interacting with AI is inevitable, and it is important that you understand what AI is, how it works and how to manage the risks around it.

Tips for managing children's AI usage

- **Be curious about what AI tools your child is using, and how.** Try and ask them to explain what the tool does and show you an example of it in use. You will learn more about the role AI has in your child's life if you let them lead the way.

- **Model being sceptical about AI generated content**. Ask your child if they think the information a chatbot gives them is real. You might want to ask ChatGPT or another AI tool a question, and show your child the answer and ask them what they think. Ask your child: "what does AI think, and what do you think?"

CHILDREN'S PREFERRED PLATFORMS & AI TOOLS

It's important to consider when you think your child is ready to use certain apps or social media platforms, regardless of the age those companies say their platforms are suitable for. You might decide to wait a few years beyond the stated age limit.

Tik Tok
13 years

Snapchat
13 years old
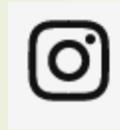
Instag
13 ye

(Twitter)
rs old

eddit
years old

Twi
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Quora

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nterest
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Sora
13 years old

Microsoft Copilot
13 years old
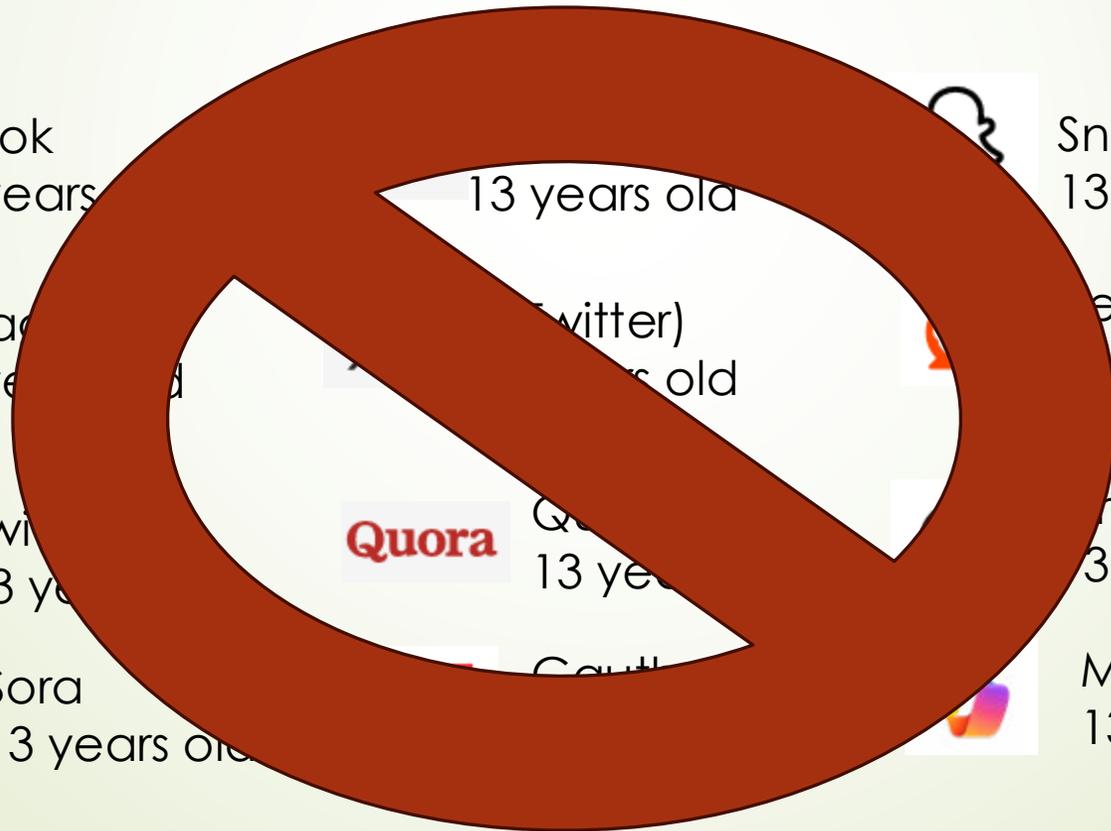
Take a moment to consider:

What Builds a Child's Brain -
Most

Reading
Serve-and-return
Independent play
Listening to music
Doing chores together
Listening to an audiobook
Solving puzzles and riddles
Building something together
Actively teaching a child life skills
Embracing boredom as time for creativity
Go on a listening walk to notice the world

Watching cartoons that are not age-appropriate
One-way instructions ("because I said so")
A high sugar, highly processed diet
Repetitive tap-and-swipe games
Adult on phone during play
Interrupting your child
Loud and flashy toys
Endless screentime
Lack of attunement
Background TV
YouTube

and Least

Conversation Starters

It's important to regularly talk to your children about these topics, as they are part of their everyday lives.

Create a culture of openness, curiosity, and approachability so your child feels comfortable coming to you with problems.

What did you see on [insert platform e.g. Snapchat] today? Refer to **page 20** for a list of platforms

Can you show me to how to use (this platform)?

What do you think might worry me about you being online? What might worry you about me being online?

Do you think a family agreement for online use is a good idea? How might this look for us?

How much do you think I should know about what you do online?

Do people say things online they wouldn't say in person? Why?

I saw something strange online today and thought I would check in to see how you are feeling when online

Who do you feel comfortable talking to about things you see online? Do you know who you could turn to if you needed to? It doesn't have to be me — I just want to make sure you have someone you can rely on.

Why do you think managing your screen time is important? How might your sleep or social life be affected if you didn't?

CREATE THE CULTURE BEFORE THE CRISIS

The Children's Commissioner has designed and activity pack to support parents, copies are available, or you can download here

New Online Safety Bill- what are it's aims?

- Remove illegal content quickly or prevent it from appearing in the first place. This includes content promoting self-harm.

- Prevent children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content.

- Enforce age limits and checking measures

- Ensure the risks and dangers posed to children on the largest social media platforms are more transparent, including publishing risk assessments.

- Provide parents and children with clear and accessible ways to report problems online when they do arise
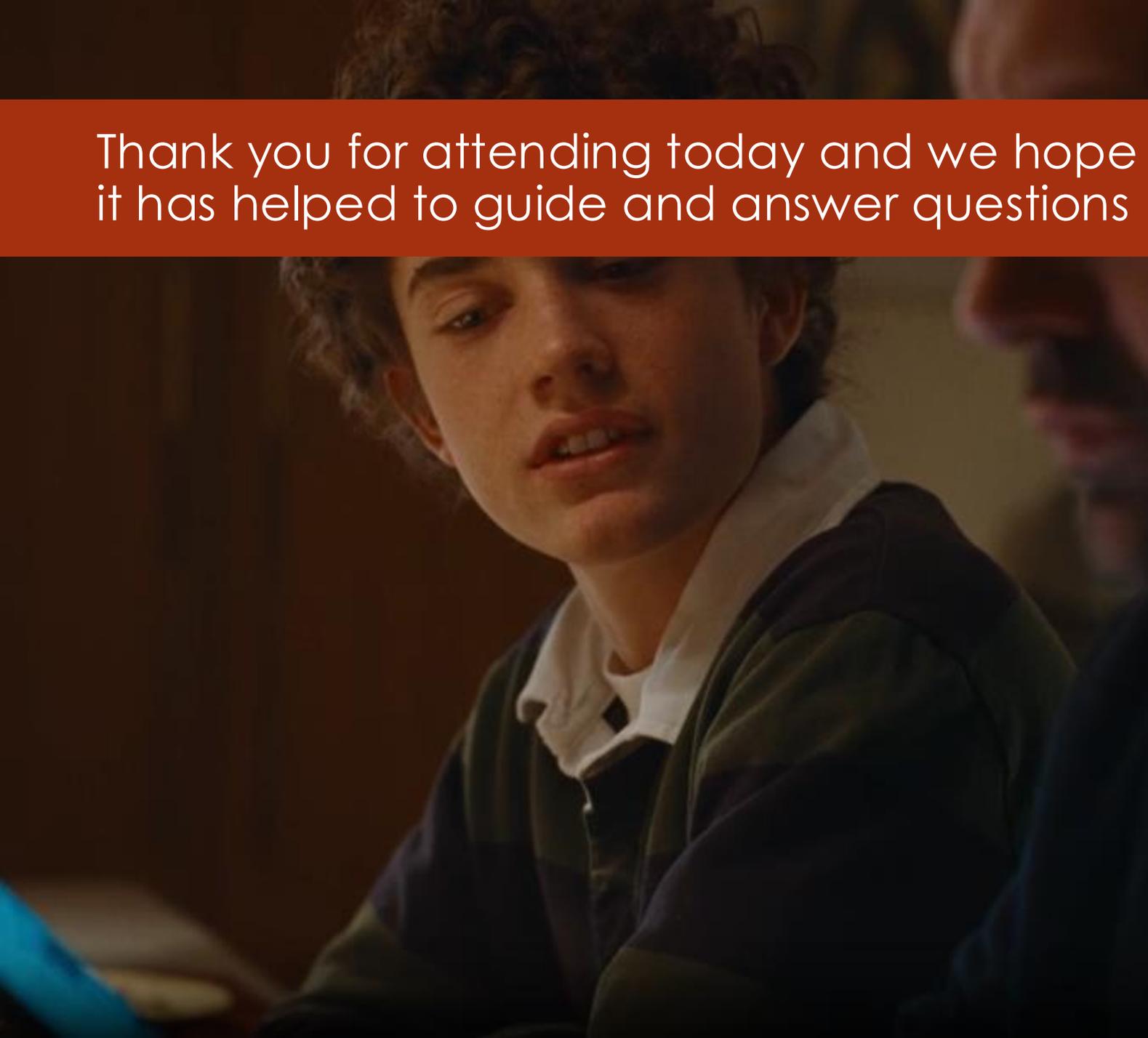
Thank you for attending today and we hope it has helped to guide and answer questions

- As a school we are always here to support you and your child

- It is an everchanging landscape and we are all learning day by day as digital technology evolve so quickly.

- A short video to end on and reflect on our digital use