Supporting the online experiences of looked after children

Simone Vibert, Head of Policy, Internet Matters

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About Internet Matters

www.internetmatters.org

Our Vision:

We inspire leading organisations to create together a future where all children and young people are prepared to benefit safely from the impact of connected technology

We exist to:

Give parents, carers and professionals the evidence-based guidance they need to help all children embrace the internet with confidence and to protect them from online harms

Raise awareness through campaigns and industry partnerships so that children and young people can be happy and healthy online

Ensure the views of parents and children are consistently and systematically heard by industry, policymakers and government

What I'll cover today

- What the research shows
- Resources, advice and guidance available
- Policy response
- How to get involved

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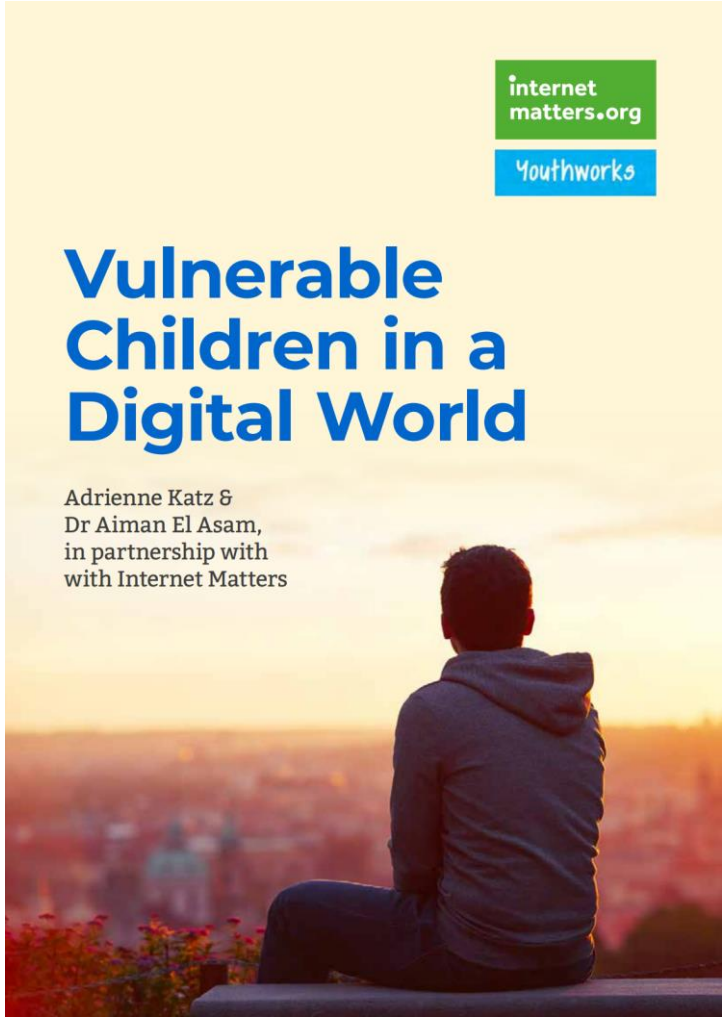
The research: online experiences



Vulnerable Children in a Digital World (2019)

- Online harms are not distributed evenly across the population.
- Young people who are vulnerable offline are more likely to be vulnerable online too and are at increased risk of experiencing harm online.
- There needs to be specific consideration of the needs of vulnerable people in relation to their online safety and wellbeing.

Vulnerable groups studied

Family Vulnerability	Communication Difficulties	Physical Disabilities	Special Educational Needs	Mental Health Difficulties
'I am a young carer' 'I live in care'	'I need help with English' 'I have speech and language difficulties' 'I have hearing difficulties'	'I have a physical disability' 'I have vision difficulties' 'I have a long-standing illness'	'I have learning difficulties' 'I have other forms of Special Educational Needs'	'I have a mental health difficulty'

The research: online experiences

Contact	Content	Conduct	Cyberscams
High risk online relationships involving sexting and reasons for doing so: Pressured to do so, blackmail, I was tricked into it, I was in a relationship and I wanted to share the picture, I was in a relationship and pressured to share a picture, due to threats I shared it. I just tried it for fun.	**Visiting or being exposed to websites:** that urge me to be very thin, that talk about self-harming or trying to kill themselves, promoting hatred or racist views, giving dangerous advice, selling illegal goods that show nude pictures or videos I did not search for, with very violent pictures or videos I did not want to see, items from an open question.	**High risk conduct** Use of chat rooms, I look at pages meant for adults, visiting online gambling sites, downloading movies or music without paying.	**Abuse of personal data:** I have had: my social media account hacked, personal details stolen or hacked, credit card details stolen and used, I've been: tricked into paying money for something I did not want to buy, I've been tricked into buying fake goods.'

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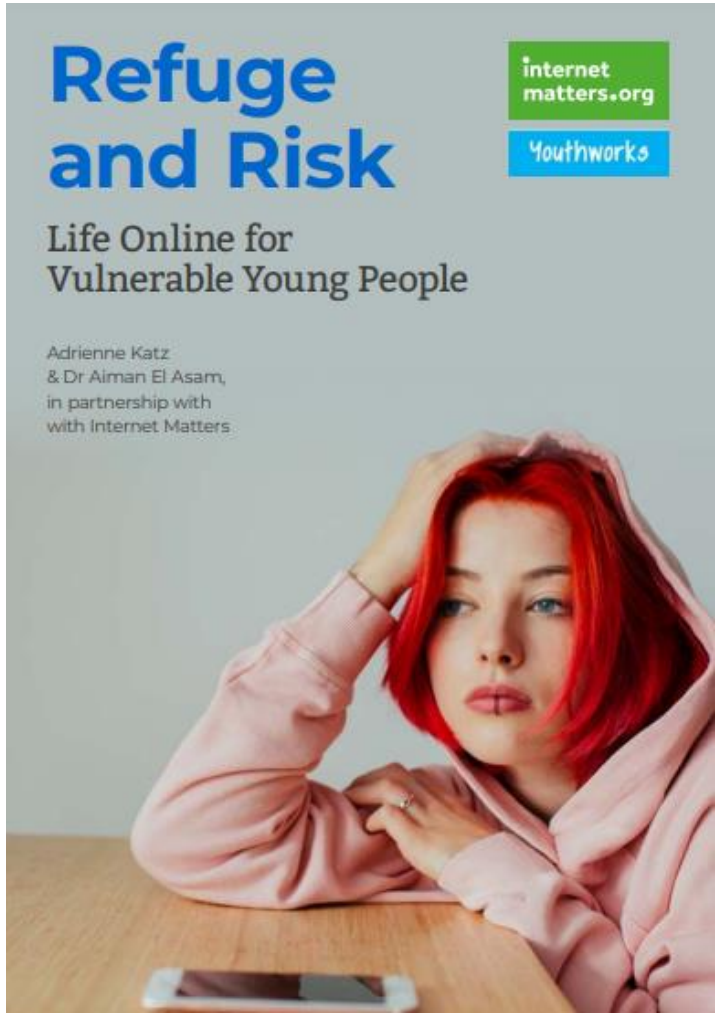
The research: online experiences



Refuge and Risk (2021)

- Survey of c. 15,000 young people aged 11-16 in 2019.
  - 9,000 reported no offline vulnerabilities
  - 4,000 had one offline vulnerability
  - 1,000 had two
  - 1,000 had three
- 2% of the sample (358 young people) were in or leaving care
- Questions on the previous 4 categories of risk plus two more: cyberaggression and compulsion
- Also questions about the benefits of being online

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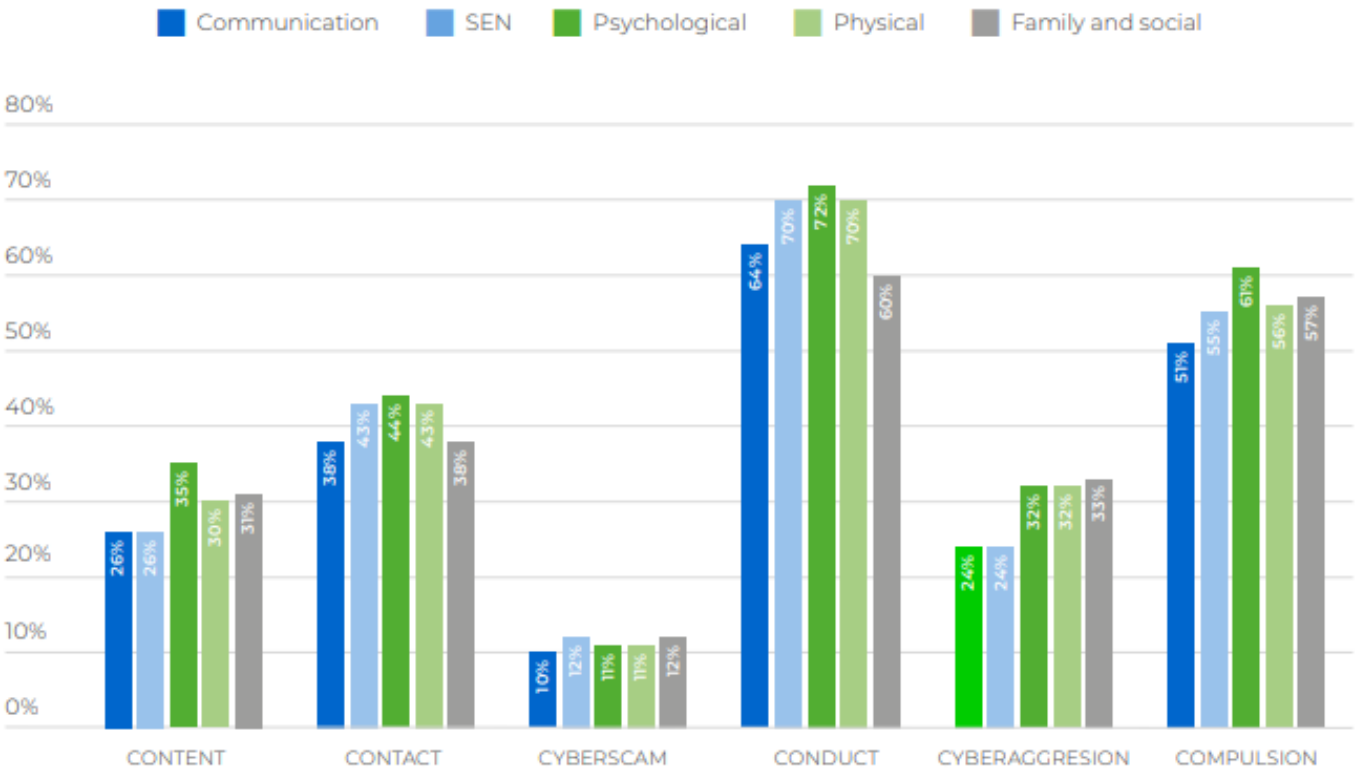
The research: online experiences

CHART 1: 6 Categories of risk, by vulnerability

*% of young people in each vulnerable group who have experienced each risk category**



** For full table of risk categories please see Table of 6 risk categories page 10*

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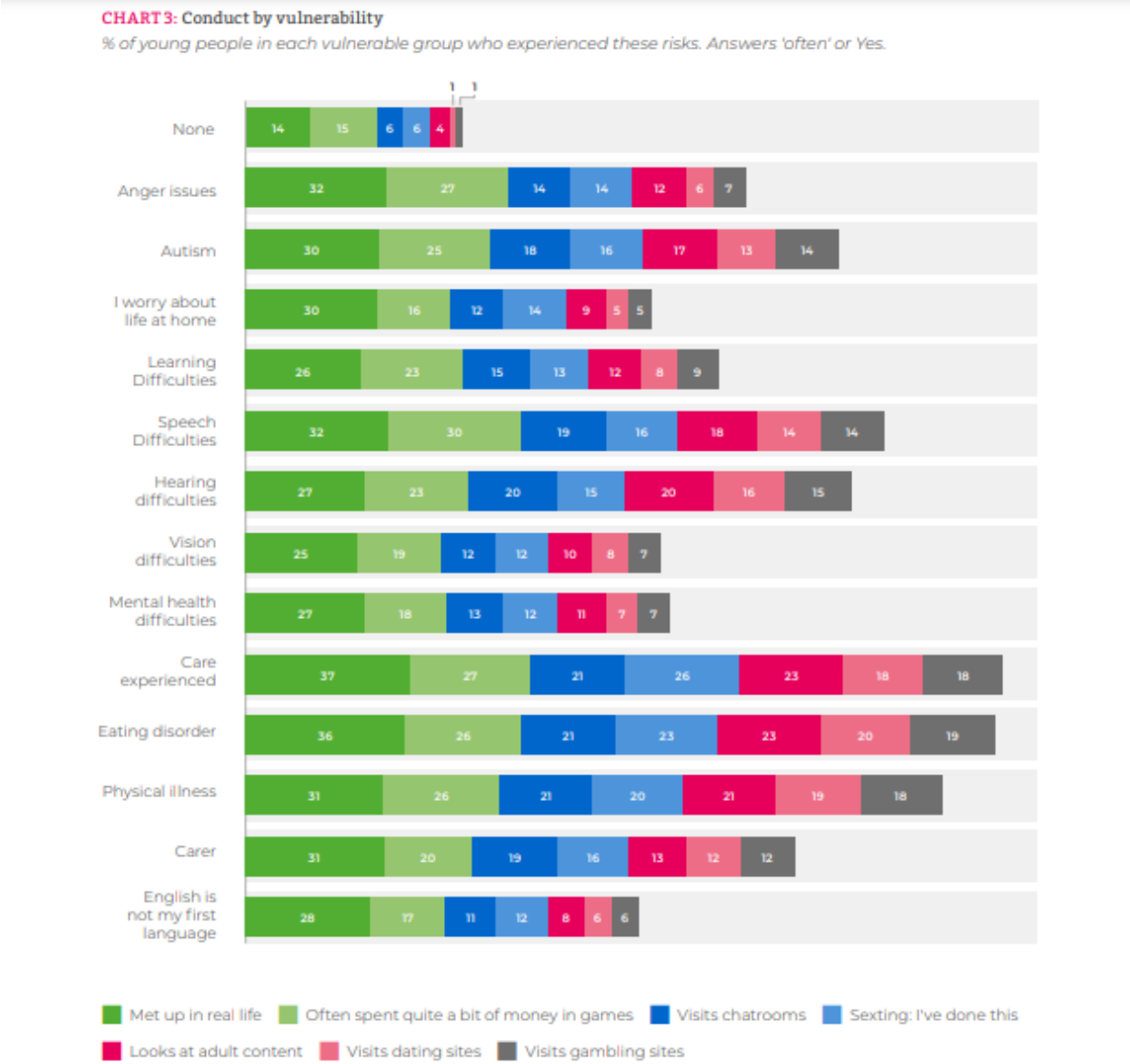
The research: online experiences



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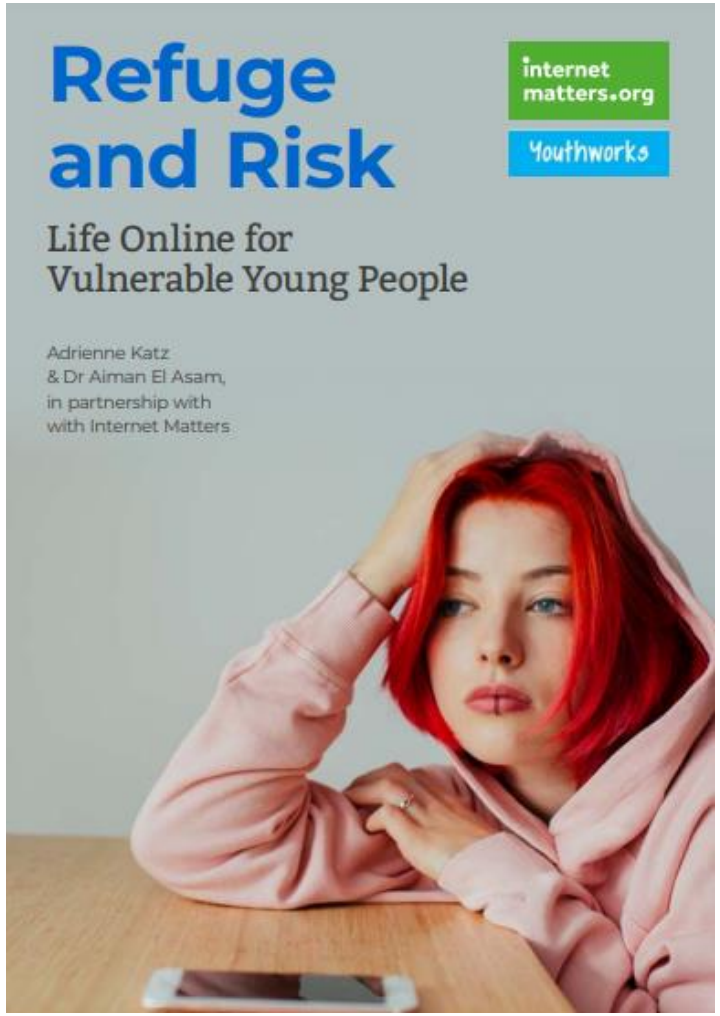
The research: online experiences



Headlines for children in or leaving care:

- Teens who are care experienced report high levels of conduct risks.
- At the same time, they were subjects of intense cyberaggression themselves: 2 in 5 experienced cyberbullying, over a third insulted about how they look, and one in five received threats to harm themselves or their family.
- They encounter a great deal of potentially harmful content with more than one in five seeing content about suicide and 15% seeing material supporting extremist views.
- Nearly one in five (18%) of them report contact risks such as people trying to persuade them into unwanted sexual activity.

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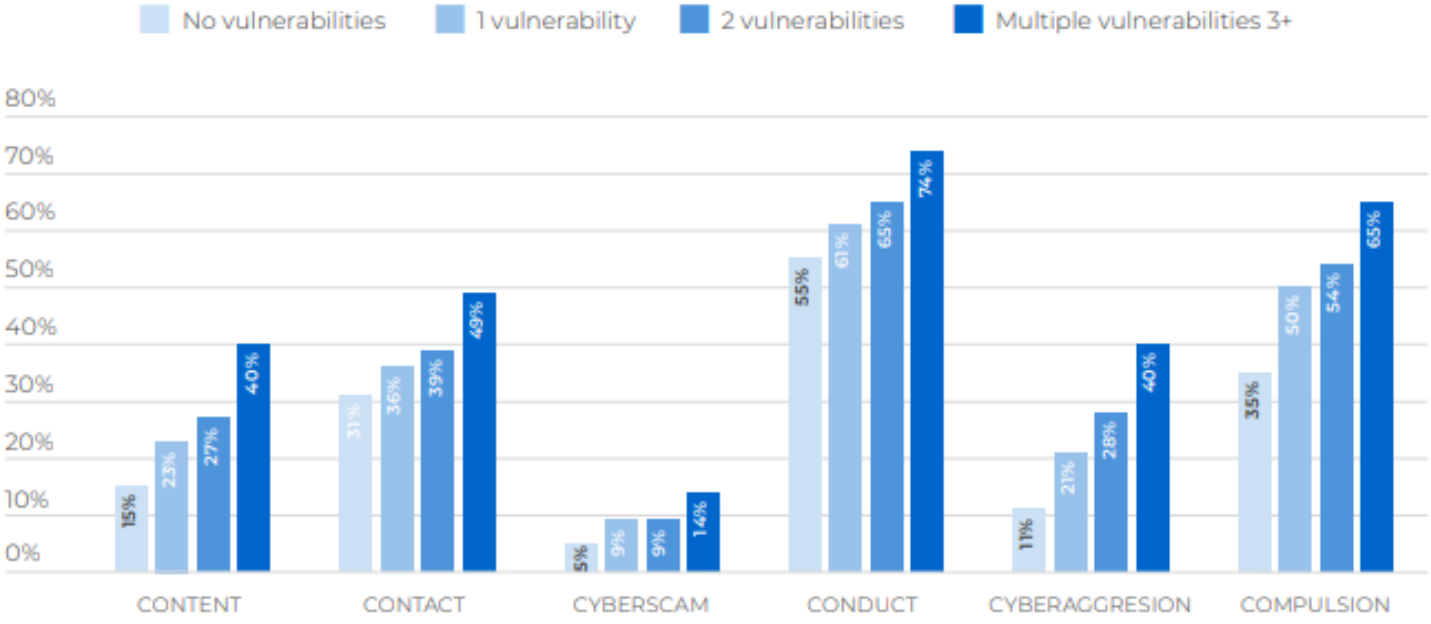
The research: online experiences

CHART 2: Multiple offline vulnerabilities increase risk

% of young people by number of vulnerabilities who experience each risk category.*



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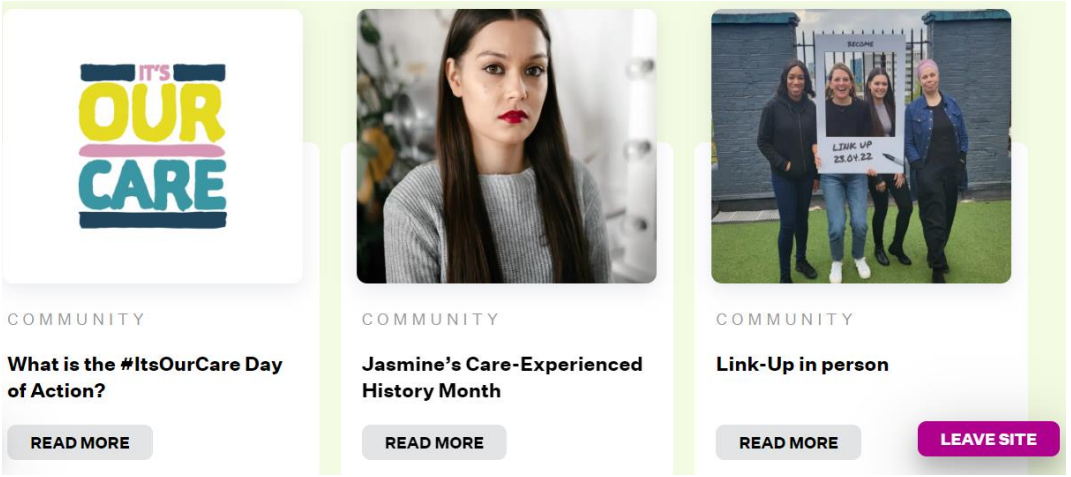
The research: online experiences



IMPORTANT: the benefits of being online

- Helping young people in care to find and talk to people like them
- Helping them to feel supported and connected to people
- Opening up possibilities – e.g. to learn new skills
- Helping them to escape their problems and have fun
- Many more – particularly in Covid

The research: practitioner responses

Changing conversations: empowering vulnerable children in a digital world (2022)

- Tendency for those working with vulnerable children to focus simply on restricting access rather than engaging the young person in discussion and helping them to problem solve
- Limitations of this approach:
  - Doesn't allow them to enjoy the benefits of being online
  - Can lead them to adopting riskier behaviours without your support
  - Doesn't help to prepare them for online life in adulthood
- Solution: use resources, advice and guidance available to develop young people's **digital resilience**

Tailored resources

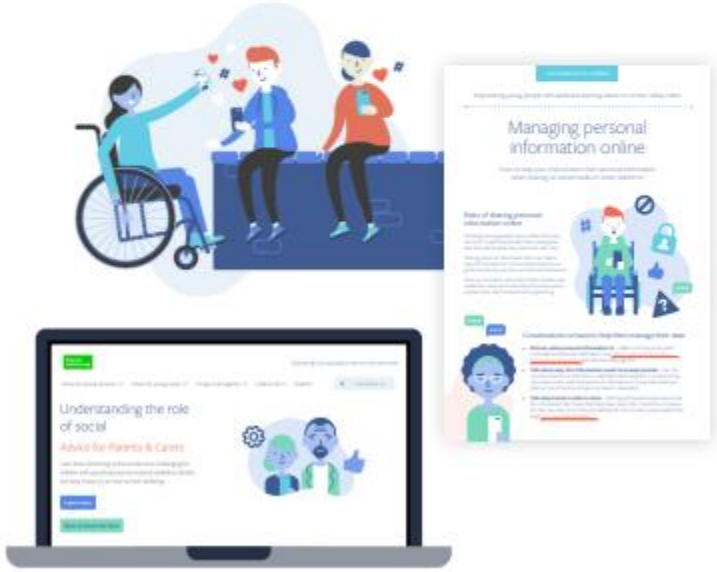
Two online hubs: Inclusive Digital Safety and Connecting Safely Online

INCLUSIVE
Digital Safety

This hub was created with SWGfL, funded by the Home Office. The resources provide support and advice for parents, carers and professionals supporting the digital lives of children and young people with special education needs and disabilities, young people who are care-experienced and those who identify as LGBTQ+.

Connecting Safely Online

To help support parents, carers and young people with additional learning needs, we created this hub of tailored advice on how to connect safely online across a range of social platforms.



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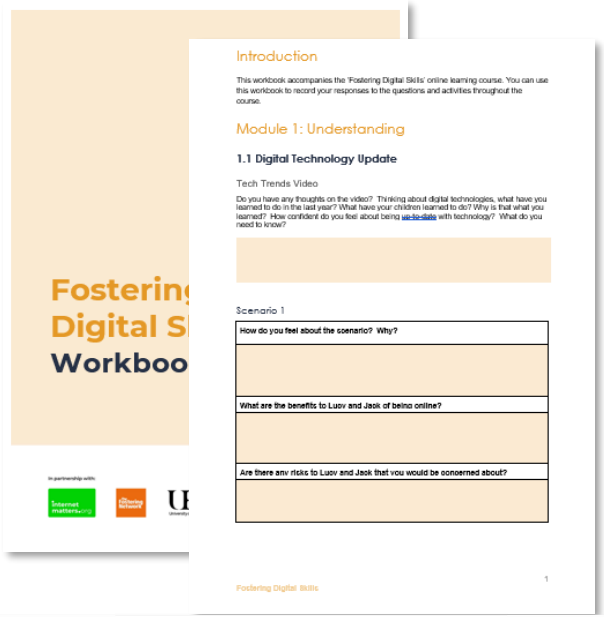
Tailored resources

Resources for foster carers – with the Fostering Network and UEA



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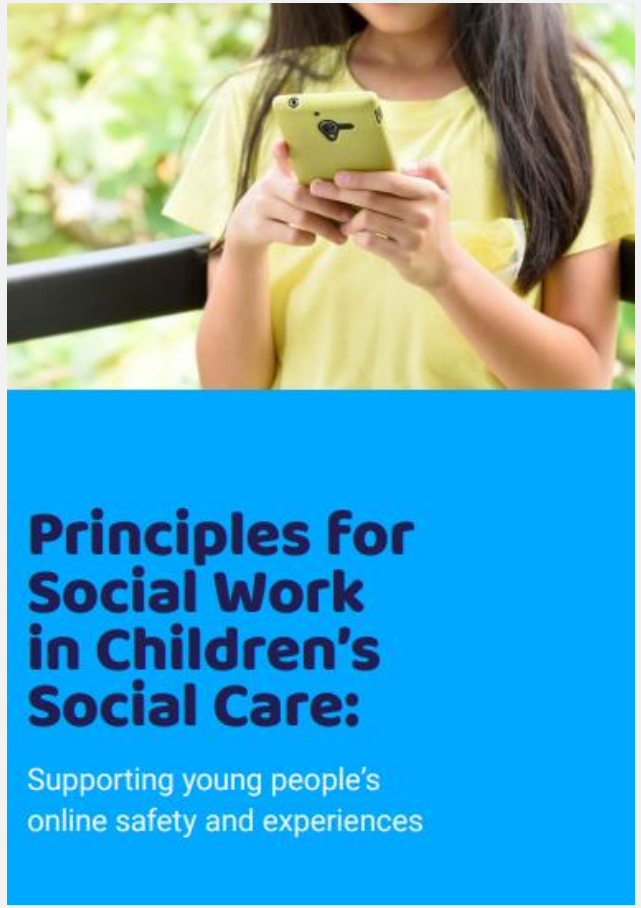
Tailored resources

From the Vulnerable Users Working Group: Digital Passport and Principles for Social Work



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Policy response

Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport

Ofcom

UK Council for Internet Safety

ico. Information Commissioner's Office

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Policy response

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

ONLINE MEDIA LITERACY STRATEGY

JULY 2021

Ofcom
making communications work for everyone

Ofcom's approach to online media literacy

Published 6 December 2021

Welsh version available: Ymagwedd Ofcom at ymwybyddiaeth o'r cyfryngau ar-lein

- Focus on "under-served" and "hard-to-reach" audiences including vulnerable children
- Cites IM research and work

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About the Vulnerable Users Working Group (VUWG)

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How can you get involved?

- Use our resources! All available for free at www.internetmatters.org or see me for hard copy leaflets with QR codes (can also send more by post)
- Share our resources with anyone who might benefit from them
- Participate in evaluation and/or piloting of our resources
- Talk to us – how best can we help you? What further resources do you need? How can we best reach frontline practitioners like you?

Please get in touch:
simone.vibert@internetmatters.org
Twitter: @SCVibert

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