



# PSA SAFEGUARDING BULLETIN

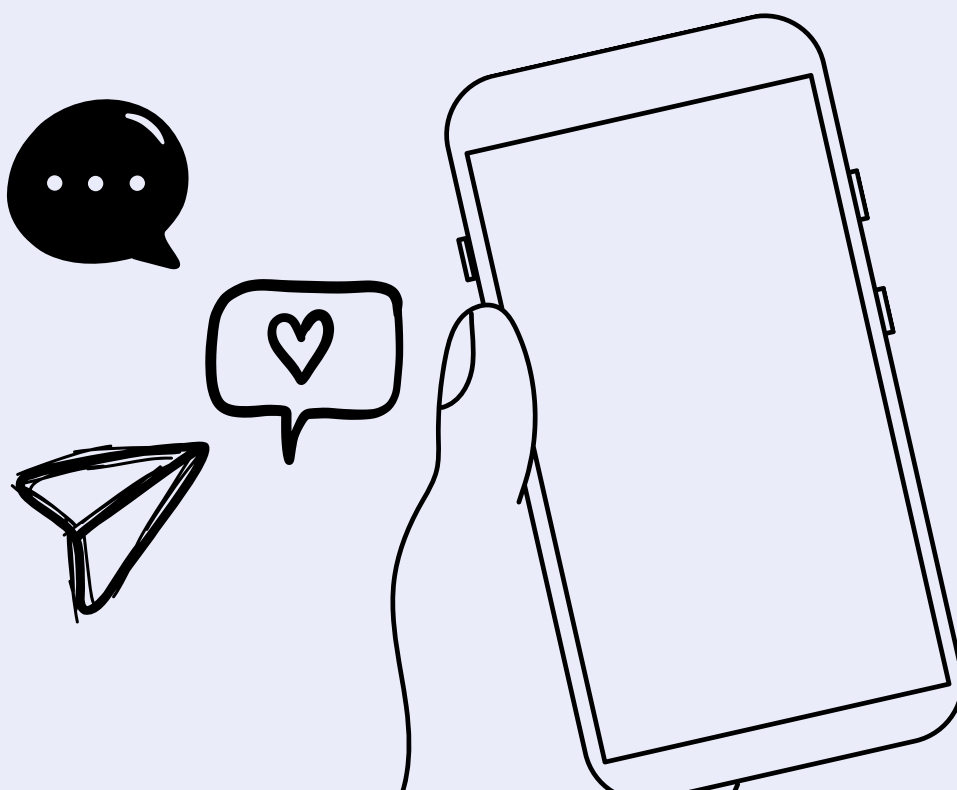
Welcome to the PSA safeguarding bulletin. These will be sent out regularly with the latest news. It is our collective responsibility to keep your children safe, in and out of school, from any harm. We would encourage you to speak to your children regularly about the items featured in this bulletin. Thank you in advance for your support in promoting these messages.

## MOBILE PHONES AND CHILDREN: SUPPORTING SAFE AND HEALTHY USE

Mobile phones have become a normal part of everyday life for many children and young people. They can help young people stay connected with family and friends, access learning resources, and develop digital skills that are increasingly important in modern life. However, phones also provide access to the wider online world, which means children can sometimes encounter risks such as inappropriate content, cyberbullying, online grooming, or pressure from social media.

Recently, the Department for Education (DfE) updated its guidance on mobile phone use in schools. The guidance supports schools in limiting phone use during the school day so that students can focus on learning and minimise distractions. Reducing phone use in school can also help protect students from some of the pressures and risks associated with constant online access.

While schools can manage phone use during the school day, parents and carers play a key role in supporting safe and healthy phone use at home. One of the most common questions families ask is when a child is ready for their first phone and how to introduce it safely. On the next page, we explore some helpful guidance for making this decision.



# IS YOUR CHILD READY FOR A MOBILE PHONE?

There is no single “right age” for a child to receive their first phone. Every child is different, and readiness often depends on maturity, responsibility, and how well they understand online safety.

Some families choose to begin with a basic phone that allows calls and texts only before introducing a smartphone later. This can help children learn how to use technology responsibly before gaining full access to apps and the internet.

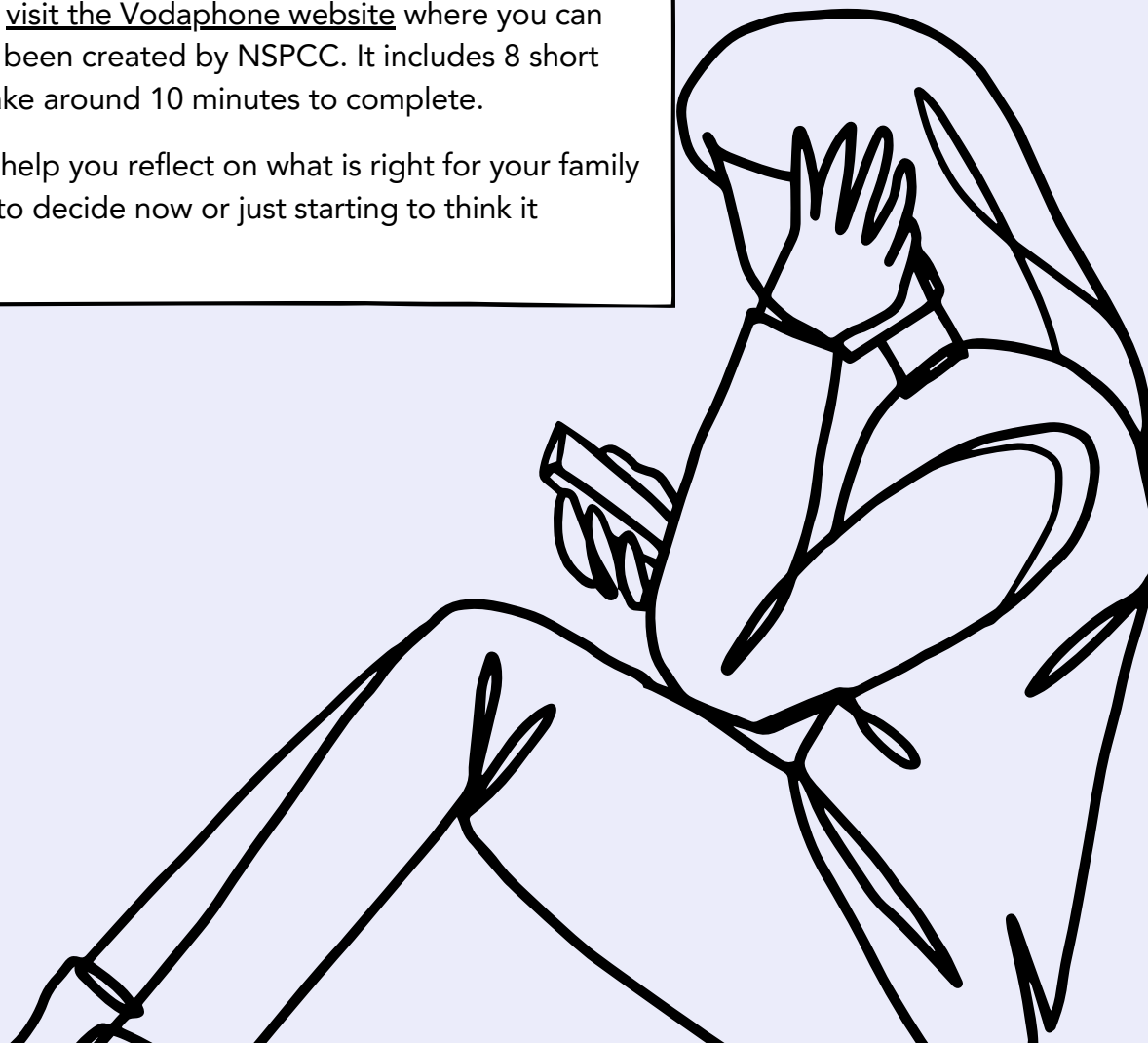
Clear boundaries and expectations can also help children develop healthy phone habits. Parents may wish to consider agreeing simple family rules such as:

- Setting reasonable screen time limits
- Keeping phones out of bedrooms overnight
- Deciding which apps or social media platforms are appropriate
- Regularly checking privacy and safety settings
- Talking about who children communicate with online

Establishing these boundaries early can help children build positive digital habits that last into adulthood.

For further information, [visit the Vodaphone website](#) where you can also find a tool that has been created by NSPCC. It includes 8 short questions and should take around 10 minutes to complete.

The tool is designed to help you reflect on what is right for your family - whether you're ready to decide now or just starting to think it through.



# RECOGNISING AND MANAGING STRESS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

Stress is something everyone experiences at times, including children and young people.

Schoolwork, exams, friendships, social pressures, and changes at home can all contribute to feelings of stress. While a small amount of stress can sometimes motivate young people, too much can affect their mood, sleep, concentration, and overall wellbeing.

Research shows that many young people report feeling regularly overwhelmed. If stress continues for long periods without support, it can lead to more serious challenges such as anxiety, low mood, or disengagement from school. Recognising the early signs and supporting children to develop healthy coping strategies can make a real difference. [recognising-and-managing-stress](#).

## Recognising the signs

Children do not always say when they are feeling stressed, so it can be helpful to notice changes in behaviour or mood. Signs might include irritability, withdrawal from activities they usually enjoy, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite, headaches or stomach aches, or struggling to concentrate on schoolwork.

## Supporting your child

Open and regular conversations can help children feel safe sharing how they feel. Listening calmly and reassuring them that it is okay to talk about worries can build trust and help them seek support when needed.

Encouraging healthy routines can also help reduce stress. Physical activity, time outdoors, good sleep habits, and limiting screen time before bed can all support emotional wellbeing. Simple relaxation or breathing exercises can also help children calm their minds.

By recognising stress early and offering reassurance and guidance, parents can help children develop resilience and healthy ways to manage challenges as they grow.



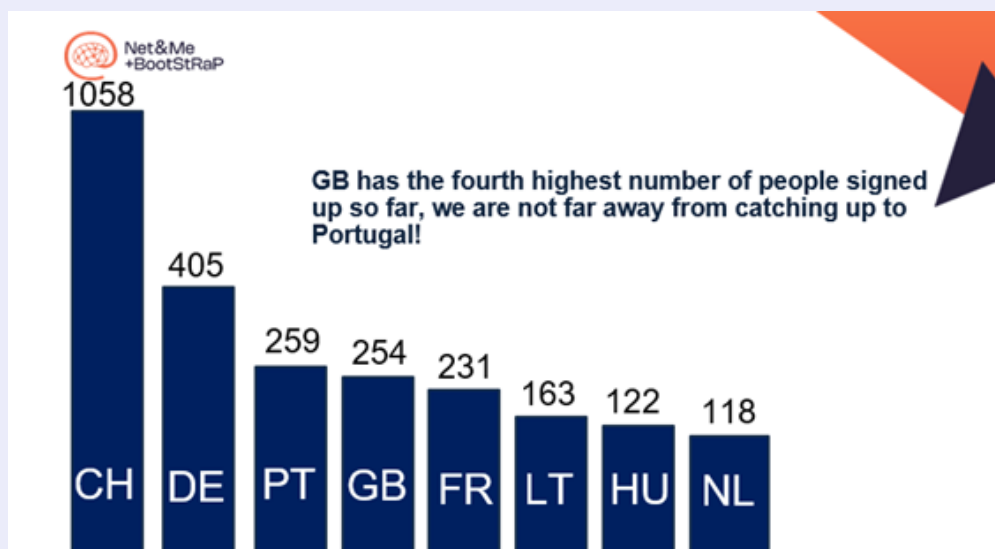
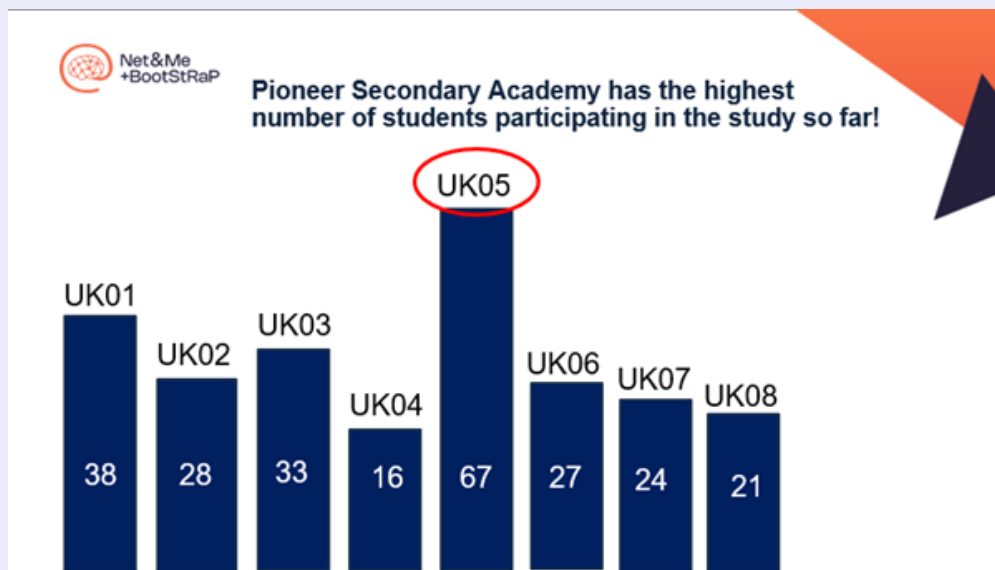
# THE BOOTSTRAP STUDY

Pioneer Secondary Academy is currently working in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire on the BootStRaP study, a research project exploring mobile phone use and mental health among 12-16 year olds. The study takes a collaborative, preventative approach to promoting positive digital wellbeing.

Students who take part will trial a four-week programme, with follow-up over three and a half months, designed to encourage healthy online behaviours and support wellbeing.

Recruitment will close as we break for Easter, but there is still time for your child to get involved (they must be aged 12-16 years). The project is being delivered across eight European countries, with eight schools participating in the UK.

In the UK, the study aims to recruit 400 students. So far, 191 students have received parental consent. Every additional participant helps ensure the research can reach its target and make a meaningful contribution to understanding young people's digital habits and mental health. If you would like your child to take part, [please click here to provide consent](#). If you have any questions, please contact the research team: [bootstrap@herts.ac.uk](mailto:bootstrap@herts.ac.uk)



# UPCOMING LIVE WEBINARS

Below is a list of upcoming live webinars for parents and carers by Anna Freud. To register for them, simply click on the "Register" links:

<b>Anxiety in adolescence</b> Thursday 23 April, 12-1pm	<a href="#">Register</a>
<b>Transitioning to Secondary School – supporting your young person with the ending and a new beginning</b> Tuesday 28 April, 5-6pm	<a href="#">Register</a>
<b>Early emerging school based non-attendance</b> Thursday 30 April, 12-1pm	<a href="#">Register</a>
<b>Understanding the impact of bullying on a young person's mental health</b> Thursday 7 May, 12-1pm	<a href="#">Register</a>
<b>How to support your young person with low mood</b> Wednesday 13 May, 12-1pm	<a href="#">Register</a>
<b>Adolescent self-harm</b> Tuesday 19 May, 5-6pm	<a href="#">Register</a>
<b>Supporting your young person to stay well online</b> Thursday 21 May, 5-6pm	<a href="#">Register</a>



# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about ONLINE TRENDS ENCOURAGING VIOLENCE

7 out of 10 teens report seeing violent content on social media, with over half of that content featuring fights involving young people. Most don't 'seek' it but are shown it through social media feeds or messaging groups. 91% of young people involved in violence have seen violent social media content. Viral trends, challenges, or 'wars' that are spread online risk encouraging violence offline, while real-world incidents may also be recorded and promoted online.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### ALGORITHMIC EXPOSURE

Social media platforms are designed to keep users engaged, meaning dramatic or extreme content can spread widely and quickly. Algorithms often recommend content that reflects users' past interactions. As a result, young people may see more violent material if they have viewed, commented on, or shared it before. Repeated exposure can make violent content appear frequently in their feeds without them fully understanding why.

### WEAPONS AND CRIMINAL RISK

Teens exposed to high levels of real-world violence on social media sometimes report feeling an increased need to carry a weapon for 'self-protection'; however, carrying a weapon increases the risk of victimisation (harm and injury by others) for young people. In addition, carrying a weapon is a serious offence that can lead to police arrest and a criminal record.

### SHARING VIOLENT CONTENT

Encouraging or assisting an offence is a crime in the UK, including via social media, and can lead to arrest. This means sharing, forwarding, or reposting violent content carries a risk for young people too. Showing examples of content to a trusted adult is appropriate, but young people should take care not to further spread violent material by posting it online or sharing it within large messaging groups.

### FEAR, ANXIETY, AND MARGINALISATION

Research shows young people's emotional wellbeing can be negatively impacted by repeated exposure to violent online content, especially when it depicts 'real-world' violence (as opposed to fictional depictions in games or films). Posts featuring weapons, threats, attacks, and fights – or content that appears to glamorise gang activity – can increase feelings of anxiety or fear among young people. Material that encourages violence targeting people because of their identity, such as their nationality or religion, can also create disproportionate harm for children belonging to those groups.

### AVOIDANCE AND ISOLATION

Real-world violence on social media can increase young people's belief that their local communities – or the 'outside world' more generally – are unsafe places. This can result in avoidant and isolating behaviours, which may negatively affect their wellbeing. As well as feeling fearful of others, teens also report feeling judged for spending time together in large groups, which may affect their social interactions and leisure time.

## Advice for Parents & Educators

### STAY INFORMED

Stay alert for updates from police, schools, or local authorities, and follow the advice provided. Be cautious about unofficial accounts, fake content, and misinformation, which can spread quickly online or in chat groups. Ensure you get accurate information from trusted sources and encourage young people to do the same. Remind them never to share violent content online and to speak to a trusted adult instead.

### TALK CRIME AND SAFETY

In most of the UK, the age of criminal responsibility is 10 (12 in Scotland). This means there can be serious criminal consequences for carrying a weapon, taking part in violence, or filming or sharing violent content. Discuss the law with young people alongside practical safety strategies. Ask questions such as: "What could you do if you feel unsafe?" Work together on action plans and remind them they can contact a trusted adult or the police if they witness or experience violence.

### DISCUSS SOCIAL MEDIA

Encourage young people to talk about the content they see online and the effect it can have. This can be an opportunity to discuss topics such as misinformation, AI-generated material, the attention economy, and algorithms, helping them understand how and why extreme content can spread online. Explore tools available to block, report, and remove harmful content, and signpost where to get support and advice, such as [reportharmfulcontent.com](https://reportharmfulcontent.com).

### ENCOURAGE POSITIVE ACTION

Focus on strengthening young people's positive experiences both online and within their local communities. Discuss strategies to reduce negative social media effects, such as time limits, unfollowing certain accounts, or taking breaks from apps. Encourage offline activities such as spending time with friends, visiting local places, and taking part in hobbies that bring them joy, purpose, and connection. Remind them they can seek support with any concerns at any time via [childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk).

## Meet Our Expert

Dr. Holly Powell-Jones is the founder of Online Media Law UK and a leading UK expert in media law, online safety, and young people. Her PhD investigates youth understandings of criminal and legal risks in a digital context. She works in schools to provide award-winning education on the criminal, legal, and ethical considerations of rapidly advancing technologies.



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# PSA SAFEGUARDING TEAM

Should you have any concerns / issues regarding safeguarding, you can talk to the following designated safeguarding leads or any other trusted adult in the school. You can also email [safeguarding@psa-bucks.com](mailto:safeguarding@psa-bucks.com).



Miss Day  
DSL



Mrs Summerell  
DDSL

