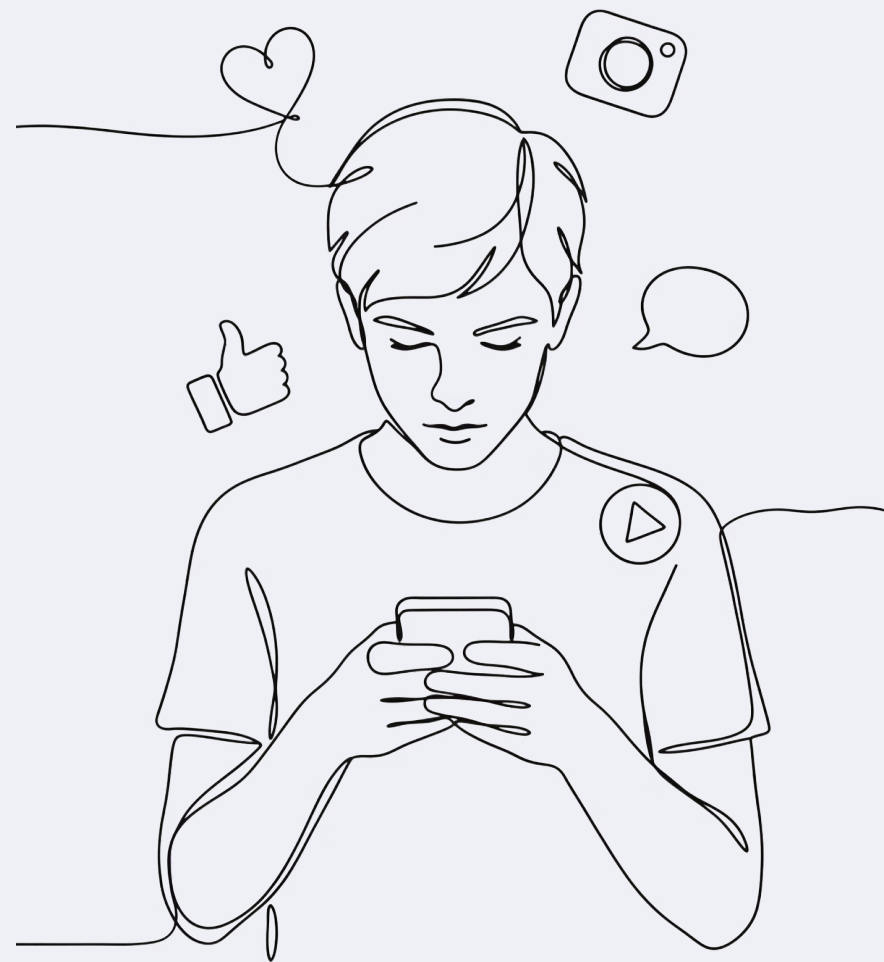




When Online Meets Offline

A practical, interactive workshop exploring how algorithms, AI companions, online communities and personalised feeds shape young people's identity, relationships, wellbeing and behaviour — and what we can do about it.

60-MINUTE WORKSHOP

INTERACTIVE & SCENARIO-BASED

Welcome & Ground Rules

Who Is This For?

Educators, coaches, youth workers, community leaders, and tech-literate older teens who work alongside or care about young people navigating digital life every day.

How We'll Work Together

- All contributions are valued — there are no wrong answers
- Speak from experience, but protect identities
- Challenge ideas, not people
- Phones welcome — we're talking about them after all
- Leave with something you can use tomorrow

Workshop Agenda

One hour. Four themes. Lots of practical takeaways.

01

The Blurred Line

Why online and offline lives can no longer be treated separately — setting the scene.

03

Scenario Lab

Realistic case studies to identify risks and explore where professionals can step in.

02

Under the Influence

Algorithms, feeds, AI companions and online communities — how they shape identity and behaviour.

04

Practical Toolkit

Strategies and conversations you can take straight back into your setting.



Opening Activity

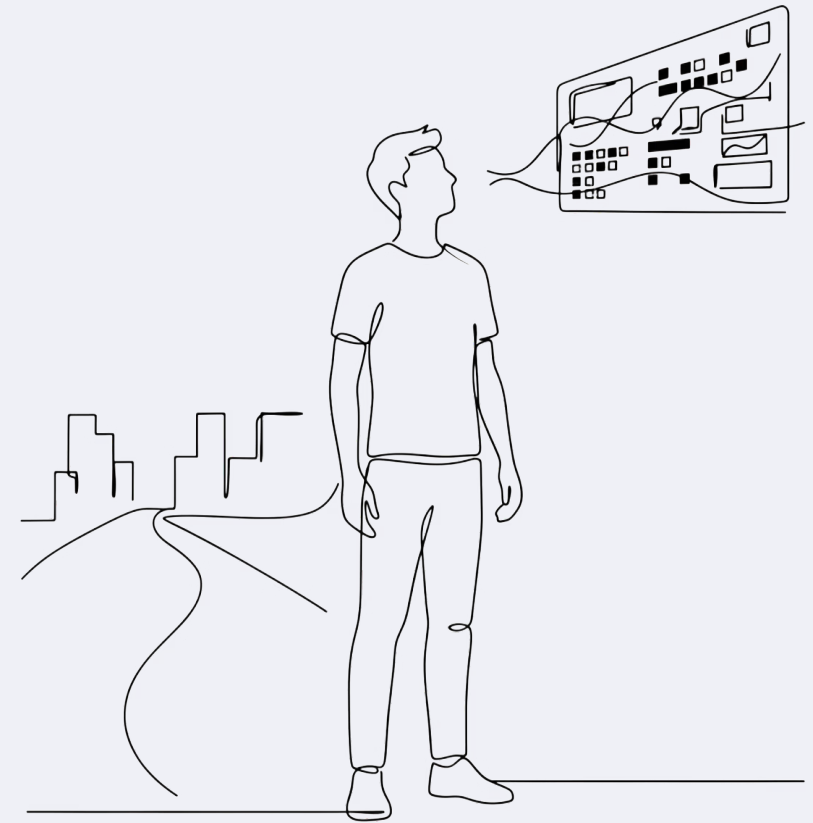
How do we spot online safeguarding issues?

Consider this: If a safeguarding issue starts to arise online, how would we know? What are the subtle signs, the changes in behaviour, or the digital footprints that might indicate a problem?

The Blurred Line

For young people today, there is no clear boundary between "online" and "offline." Digital experiences shape real-world emotions, friendships, self-image and decisions — often in ways that are invisible to the adults around them. Safeguarding that treats these as separate worlds is no longer fit for purpose.

- ❏ The question is no longer "what are they doing online?" — it's "how is their online life shaping everything else, and how do we know what influence this is having?"





Opening Activity: Two Worlds or One?

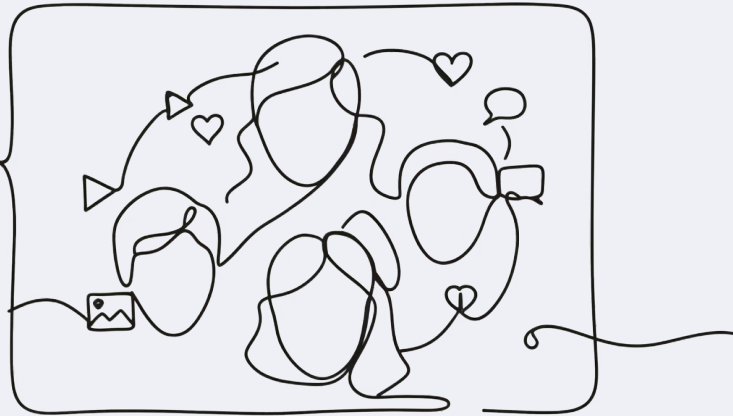
Take 3 minutes. On your own or with the person next to you, think of a young person you work with (no names). Answer these two questions:

Question 1

Can you think of a moment when something that happened online clearly affected how that young person behaved, felt, or related to others *offline*?

Question 2

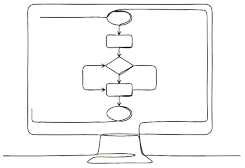
Did you know about it at the time — or did you only piece it together later? What made it visible (or invisible) to you?



Under the Influence

Four forces are quietly shaping how young people see themselves and the world around them. Understanding each one is the first step to meaningful support.

The Four Forces



Algorithms

Designed to maximise engagement, algorithms learn what keeps a young person scrolling and feed them more of it — amplifying anxiety, anger, or extreme views without any human decision-making involved.



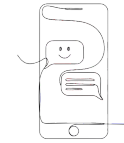
Personalised Feeds

No two young people see the same internet. A feed can become an echo chamber that reinforces insecurities, unhealthy behaviours, or radicalised viewpoints — while appearing entirely normal to the young person inside it.



Online Communities

From gaming clans to niche forums, online communities provide belonging and identity — but can also normalise harmful behaviours, enable grooming, or pull young people away from real-world relationships.



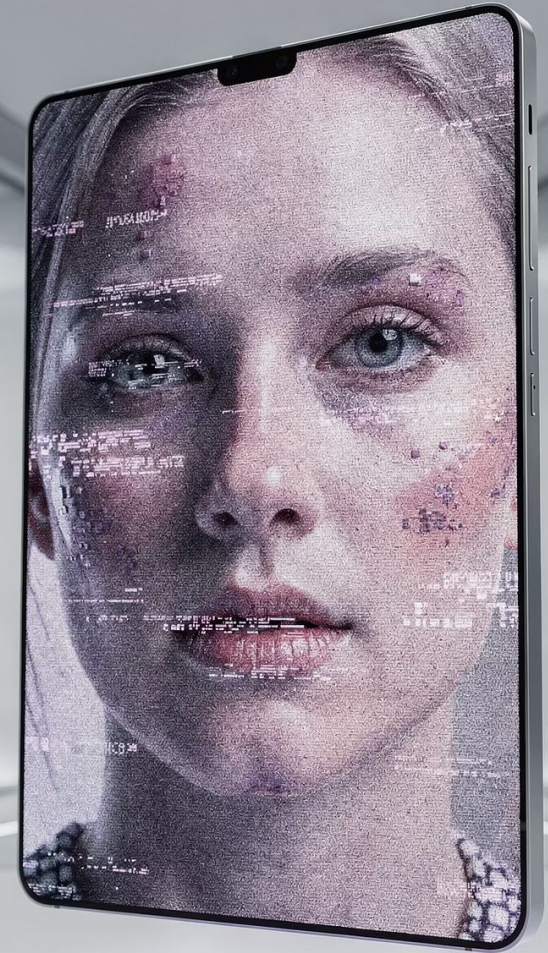
AI Companions

Apps like Character.AI offer always-available emotional connection. While potentially helpful, they can displace human relationships, reinforce distorted thinking, and create dependency in vulnerable young people.

Synthetic AI Image Abuse: A New Frontier

The rapid evolution of accessible AI tools allows for the creation of highly realistic, deceptive images. This new form of abuse, often involving non-consensual intimate imagery or harmful misrepresentations, presents significant safeguarding challenges. It can devastate a young person's reputation, mental health, and sense of safety, further blurring the lines of truth and trust.

And thats before we think of the legal consequences...



How These Forces Affect Young People

Identity

Filtered images, influencer lifestyles and viral trends set impossible standards. Young people increasingly build their sense of self around online validation — likes, followers, and comments.

Relationships

Online dynamics bleed into friendships, romantic relationships, and family life. Social exclusion, peer pressure, and manipulation can all play out digitally — with real emotional consequences.

Wellbeing

Sleep disruption, anxiety, body image concerns, and loneliness are all linked to patterns of online use. The impact is rarely dramatic — it accumulates quietly over time.

Behaviour

Online experiences can escalate risk-taking, normalise aggression, fuel impulsivity, or — conversely — motivate positive activism, creativity and community-building.



Scenario Lab

In your table groups, read your assigned scenario. You have **8 minutes** to discuss and feed back on three questions:

1 What are the risks?

What harm could occur — to the young person, to others, or to relationships and trust? Consider both immediate and longer-term consequences.

2 What are the signs?

What might you notice — in behaviour, language, mood or social patterns — that could flag something is wrong? What might easily be missed?

3 Where can you intervene?

At what point could a professional step in helpfully? What would that look like in your specific setting — school, sports club, youth group, community space?

Scenario Cards

Each group takes one. All are based on patterns that professionals encounter regularly.

Scenario A — The Feed

15-year-old Maya has become increasingly withdrawn. Her coach notices she's stopped eating lunch with teammates. Her TikTok algorithm has been serving her a stream of "clean eating" and "body check" content for months. She now follows several accounts that celebrate extreme restriction.

Scenario B — The Community

16-year-old Jordan has found an online gaming community where he finally feels respected. Over time, the group's chat has shifted — political rhetoric, dehumanising language about certain groups, and pressure to "prove loyalty" are now regular features. His school performance has dropped sharply.

Scenario C — The Companion

14-year-old Priya tells her youth worker she doesn't need friends because her AI companion "understands her better than any real person." She's begun cancelling plans with peers and becomes distressed when the app is unavailable. She says she's in a "relationship" with her AI.

Scenario D — The Persona

17-year-old Tariq has built a large following online with a persona that is nothing like who he is in person. He's exhausted maintaining it, terrified of being "found out," and has started lying to family and friends to protect the image. He recently declined a significant real-world opportunity to avoid exposure.

Feedback & Discussion

Each group takes 2 minutes to share their key insight. As groups feed back, consider these cross-cutting questions for the whole room:



What surprised you?

Were there risks or warning signs in the scenarios you hadn't considered before? What made them hard to spot?



Where's the window?

At what point in each scenario was there a real opening for a trusted adult to make a difference — before things escalated?



What connects them all?

Despite different platforms and risks, what common threads run through all four scenarios? What does that tell us about where to focus?

Where Professionals Can Make a Difference

You don't need to be a tech expert. You need to be a trusted, curious, non-judgmental adult. Research consistently shows that young people turn to professionals they already trust — not specialists they don't know. Your existing relationships are your greatest asset.



Practical Strategies: Across All Settings

→ Ask curious, open questions

"What are you into online at the moment?" is a far more powerful opener than "Are you being safe online?" Curiosity builds trust; interrogation closes doors.

→ Understand their digital world

You don't need to be on every platform — but knowing what TikTok, Discord, Roblox, and Character.AI are, and how they work, makes you a far more credible and effective supporter.

→ Notice the offline signals

Changes in mood, appetite, friendships, sleep, and motivation are often the first visible signs of an online issue. Don't wait for disclosure — notice and gently name what you observe.

→ Build media literacy into everyday practice

Regular, low-key conversations about algorithms, filters, and online personas normalise critical thinking. Make it part of the culture of your setting — not a one-off lesson.

Setting-Specific Actions

Education

- Embed digital wellbeing into PSHE and form time, not just e-safety lessons
- Train all staff — not just DSLs — to spot digital distress signals
- Create peer-support schemes where students discuss online pressures

Sport & Coaching

- Establish clear team norms around group chats and social media tagging
- Use pre/post-training check-ins to pick up on mood changes
- Address online trash-talk and exclusion as seriously as physical misconduct

Youth Work & Community

- Create safe spaces for young people to share online experiences without judgment
- Partner with parents and carers — they often need as much support as young people
- Map local digital support pathways so you can make informed referrals

Cross-Setting Principles

- Follow your safeguarding procedures when online concerns meet thresholds
- Document concerns carefully — patterns matter as much as single incidents
- Never promise confidentiality; always explain what you will and won't share



Personal Commitment Activity

Before you leave, take 2 minutes to write down your answers to these prompts. You don't need to share them — but you do need to be honest with yourself.

1

One thing I'll do differently

What's one concrete change you'll make in how you engage with young people about their online lives — starting this week?

2

One thing I'll learn more about

Which platform, trend, or digital risk do you feel least informed about? Commit to spending 20 minutes finding out more before next week.

3

One conversation I'll have

Who is one young person — or colleague — you'll have a more open conversation with about online life in the next fortnight?

Key Takeaways

One world, not two

Online and offline lives are inseparable. Safeguarding must reflect this reality.

The risks are subtle

Algorithms, AI and online communities cause harm gradually — through accumulation, not single events.

Relationships are the intervention

Trusted adults who ask curious questions and notice offline signals are the most powerful safeguarding tool we have.

Small actions matter

You don't need to overhaul your practice. One better question, one noticed signal, one honest conversation can change everything.



Further Resources

Organisations & Platforms

- **Childnet International** — digital literacy and online safety resources for professionals
- **Internet Matters** — age-by-age guides and professional toolkits
- **NSPCC / Net Aware** — platform-by-platform parent and professional guides
- **UK Safer Internet Centre** — training, research and classroom resources
- **Common Sense Media** — reviews and ratings of apps, games and platforms

Keep the Conversation Going

Digital life moves fast. Staying informed is an ongoing commitment, not a one-time training. Consider:

- Signing up to Childnet's professional newsletter
- Following researchers like Amy Orben, Andrew Przybylski, or Jean Twenge
- Scheduling a regular team discussion about emerging online trends
- Asking young people directly — they are often the best educators

 The most valuable thing you can do after today: keep asking questions.