

MARCH 2026 ONLINE SAFETY UPDATE

For this month's online safety update, our theme is: Chatbots

Chatbots are computer programmes designed to simulate conversation, often using artificial intelligence (AI) to answer questions, give advice, or chat socially.

While many are helpful, there are risks for teenagers, especially in relation to mental health and exposure to harmful content. Some chatbots may give inappropriate, inaccurate, or even distressing responses. There have been known cases where chatbots have reinforced negative thinking patterns, provided unsafe advice, or even encouraged self-harm and suicide. The AI systems behind chatbots often gather their information from content that is already available - meaning that they may also regurgitate biased or false information, even racist or sexist viewpoints.

Young people with additional needs may be vulnerable because they might rely on chatbots for companionship, social interaction, or support, especially if in-person connections are limited. They may have difficulties recognising unsafe or manipulative responses, interpreting context, or questioning the reliability of the information. This can make it easier for harmful content to influence emotions, self-esteem, or decision-making.

What to do:

- Talk openly about online interactions, encouraging teens to cross-check advice from trusted adults or professionals,
- Set boundaries around chatbot use (e.g. all devices in communal family areas so they can be seen and overheard)
- Reinforce that chatbots are tools, not human friends or mental health professionals

Remember, the pastoral team are here to support you with any online safety concerns: call 0121 569 7089.

