

Online safety needs to be trauma-informed

Most children and young people in care have been through a lot. For many, their experience coming into care has been traumatising. Some have had many placements in their lives. Some have been abused. Some have seen things that no one should ever see, especially not someone their age.

Trauma affects us all in different ways. That includes our behaviours, attitudes and actions, including what we do online.

As carers, we need to be trauma-informed when we think about online safety. We need to make sure that our help is the right kind.

Children and young people in care face the same online risks and benefits as other kids.

But trauma can make them more vulnerable. Kids in care might:

- Take more risks
- Trust someone too easily because they are seeking affection
- Fall in with a bad crowd online
- Find it harder to understand the risks and dangers of some activities
- Seek out harmful content to help make sense of their own life experiences

There are also some unique online safety issues faced by children and young people in care. Kids in care might:

- Be contacted or stalked by disallowed people, such as on social media or in games
- Be bullied for being in care
- Get confused by different rules across different households with carers, biological families and respite carers
- Miss out on online safety topics at school due to changing schools often.

Sometimes, other parents, teachers and people in their lives don't understand these challenges.

Trauma can affect how children and young people respond to rules.

Some parents recommend restricting internet access or taking away devices. But for some kids in care, a phone or tablet gives them a sense of security. The internet can help us stay connected when we feel disconnected. That's important for young people, especially when entering care or changing placement. Strict rules can make kids feel more isolated, or more different from their peers.

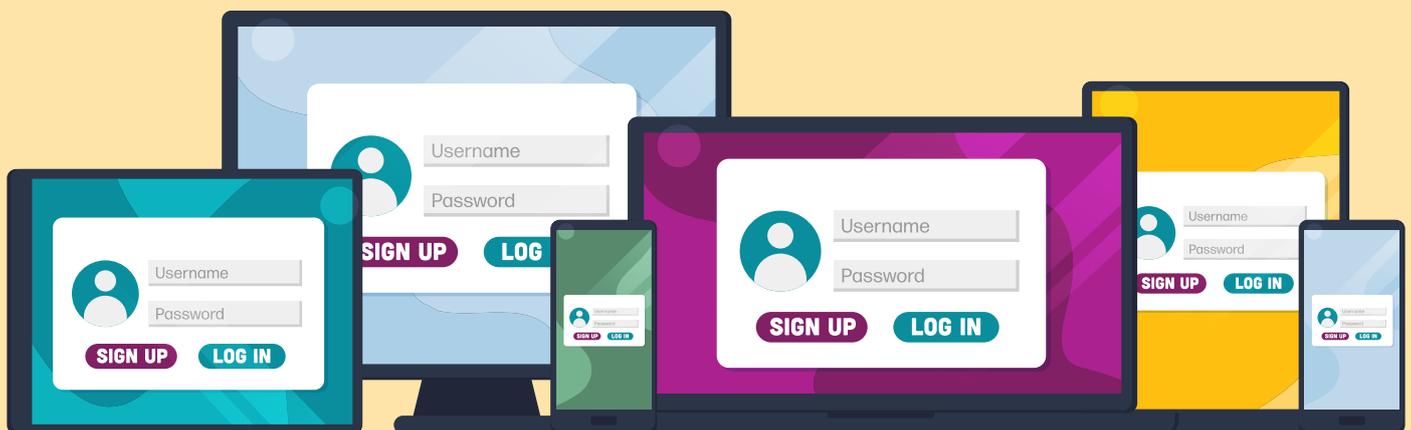
Every child and young person is different. The ways we keep them safe need to be adjusted to suit them. We need to think about their age, developmental stage, trauma, life experiences, and recent experiences in care. We might need to have some hard conversations.



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Some kids in care told us they can be themselves online. On the internet, they can be just another kid. This is especially true for young people who are LGBTQIA+, who have disability, who are being bullied, who have diverse cultural backgrounds, and who experience mental ill-health. Many young people find their community online.

While the internet can be dangerous, it can also really help young people in care.



Key messages

- ➔ Trauma means children and young people in care might be more vulnerable to online danger.
- ➔ Managing the unique online safety issues that face kids in care can be very challenging.
- ➔ Rules are important, but they might cause harm to kids with trauma. Rules need to be carefully considered, and trauma-informed.
- ➔ Online spaces can also be very helpful for young people with trauma.
- ➔ Ask your caseworker to plug you in to expert advice.

