Online Safety – Parent FAQ Sheet

1. How much screen time is actually safe for my child?

There's no single "safe" number, but research suggests that after around 40 minutes of continuous use, the body struggles to balance the dopamine released by social media use. Short, regular breaks and device-free times (e.g., at meals or before bed) are helpful.

2. How can I explain dopamine and addiction to my child without scaring them?

Keep it simple: explain that apps are designed to keep us watching because it feels exciting or rewarding, and taking breaks helps the brain reset. Emphasise awareness, not fear.

3. If apps are designed to be addictive, what can parents do to help?

Encourage healthy habits: turning off notifications, setting app limits, and having regular check-ins about how certain apps make them feel. Modelling healthy phone use yourself also helps.

4. How can I check or reset the algorithms on apps like TikTok or Instagram?

You can reset "interests" or watch history in app settings. You can also block or mark videos as "not interested" to retrain the algorithm. Encourage your child to be aware of why certain content appears.

5. Why are apps rated 13+ if it's about data, not safety?

The age rating allows companies to collect data legally. It doesn't mean the app is developmentally appropriate for all children. Families may still choose to delay access based on maturity.

Peer-to-Peer Issues & Exploitation

6. What signs might suggest my child is being manipulated, groomed or targeted?

Look for secrecy around devices, sudden anxiety, changes in friendships, new online accounts, or requests for privacy around chat apps. Trust your instincts and ask gentle, open questions.

7. If I suspect my child is a victim of sextortion, who do I contact first?

Contact the police immediately. You can also make a report through **CEOP**. Inform the school so they can support your child.

8. What should I do if I know my child has sent or received explicit images?

Do not store or forward the image. Contact the police for guidance. Reassure your child they are not in trouble for telling you—they did the right thing by coming forward.

9. How can I help prevent group chat problems like exclusion or late-night messaging?

Agree on boundaries, such as device-free time in the evenings. Discuss kindness, tone, and the impact of excluding others. Encourage them to leave chats that make them uncomfortable.

10. How do I explain the legal risks of sharing images without shutting down communication?

Keep calm and factual: explain that the law is there to protect young people, not criminalise them, and that sharing any explicit image of someone under 18 is illegal. Focus on safety, not blame.

AI, Deepfakes & Chatbots

11. Should parents worry about deepfakes affecting children?

Children should know that images and videos can be faked and that they should tell an adult if anything online feels threatening or untrue.

12. How can I tell if my child is interacting with a chatbot?

Chatbots often respond instantly, are available 24/7, and reply in an unnaturally smooth or overly supportive way. Talk to your child about who they're speaking to online and the risks of sharing personal information.

13. What's the safest way for children to use AI tools?

Use trusted platforms, avoid sharing personal details, and check with an adult before using new apps. AI should support learning—not replace thinking.

Practical Support & Parental Controls

14. What are the best parental controls for phones and apps?

Use built-in tools such as Apple Screen Time, Android Digital Wellbeing, or controls within apps like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. These can manage time limits, privacy settings, and content filtering.

15. Where can I access the resources mentioned in the presentation?

Search online for **Flintshire Digital Schools** for guides, links and online safety information. You can also report concerns to **CEOP**, and explore resources on **Hwb** and **National Online Safety**.