

Screen time and online harms: resources for members



[Health Policy team](#)

This page brings together key resources on screen time and online harms to help inform conversations with families and guide clinical practice across the UK. We will continue to monitor developments and update these resources as new guidance emerges.

Last modified

16 January 2026

Post date

16 January 2026

Table of contents

- [Screen time](#)
- [Resources on screen time](#)
- [Online harms](#)
- [Resources on online harms](#)

Screen time

In 2019, RCPCH first published guidance on screen time. The way children and young people engage with technology is constantly evolving, and this guidance has since been superseded by resources published outside of the RCPCH by organisations with more specific expertise in screens and technology and has therefore been archived.¹

RCPCH does not currently formally endorse resources on screen time. However, this web page signposts a range of helpful evidence-based resources which paediatricians may wish to refer to when discussing screen time with children, young people and their families.

In January 2026, the UK Government announced that the Department for Education will issue its first guidance on screen use for under-fives in England in April 2026, with tips on how it can be incorporated into activities such as talking, playing and reading with children. The review is led by Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner for England, and Professor Russell Viner, former RCPCH President and former Chief Scientific Adviser to the Department for Education. We look forward to supporting this review as it progresses.

Resources on screen time

UK Government Education Committee Report - screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing

This report, [published by the Education Committee in 2024](#), sets out that children's screen time rose by 52% between 2020 and 2022, and that screen use starts as early as six months of age, with nearly all children owning a mobile phone by age 12.

The report recommends that screen time should be minimal for younger children and balanced with physical activity for older children and that formal monitoring of mobile phone restrictions in schools is considered.

Guidance for under-5's

The World Health Organization's [guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5](#) years of age set out that:

For infants (less than 1 year):

- Screen time is not recommended
- Encourage interactive, non-screen-based activities like storytelling, singing, and puzzles

For children aged 1–2 years:

- Sedentary screen time should be no more than 1 hour per day; less is better
- Promote physical activities and interactive play instead

For children aged 3–4 years:

- Limit sedentary screen time to 1 hour per day; less is better.
- Encourage at least 180 minutes of physical activity spread throughout the day.

Health Professionals for Safer Screens has produced a guidance poster [outlining tips for healthier screen time in under 5's](#), which provides practical suggestions for reducing screen time in this age group.

Resources across the devolved nations

The Welsh government hosts [resources on how to balance screen time](#) for children and young people, recognising the benefits and potential harms of screen time. This includes top signs of too much screen time and ways for parents and carers to help reduce screen time for children.

In Scotland, [Parent Club Scotland](#) provides practical guidance to help families balance screen use for school aged children, focusing on making screen time positive, age appropriate and part of a healthy routine that includes offline activities. [Mind yer Time](#), created by the Children's Parliament and Scottish Youth Parliament, offers child-designed advice, tips and resources to support healthy, positive and rights-based use of screens and social media for children and young people across Scotland.

Online harms

Increasingly, concerns are growing around children accessing harmful online content online. The College is working with its policy committees and our fellow Royal Colleges to develop an approach which supports children, young people and our members.

In Westminster, the Education Committee's report on screen time found that exposure to harmful content, including violent pornography, starts at an average age of 13 and that online bullying affects 19% of children aged 10–15.

In 2025, the Scottish Government launched an Online Safety Taskforce, focused on exploring actions to protect children and young people from online harms, including cyberbullying, violent and sexual content, hate speech and misinformation.

RCPCH will continue to monitor activity and encourages members to maintain the principles of individual and tailored care for their patients and their families, taking a harm reduction approach to supporting their patients in an age-appropriate way on this topic. We are actively working with the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges to ensure that protecting children from online harms remains a priority for the UK Government and devolved administrations. We will update this page as work in this space progresses.

Resources on online harms

The Internet Watch Foundation has an [online resource for parents with regard to protecting children from online child sexual abuse](#), which includes advice on how to talk to children and young people about this issue, including advice for parents with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

The Royal College of Psychiatrists have additionally [published guidance for parents and young people about the use of digital media](#) by children and young people. This sets out the potential problems that can arise and also advice for increasing safety when using digital media.

- [1](#)

The archived RCPCH Guidance on screen time (2019) can be accessed upon request by emailing archives@rcpch.ac.uk.