SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

Secondary | November 2025

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Helping young people think critically: misinformation and conspiracy theories online

Today's young people are growing up in a world where news, opinions and videos appear instantly - often before they've had time to think them through. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and X (Twitter) are now where many children get their information about the world.

What's the challenge? Not everything they see is true. Some of it is misinformation (false or misleading information) and some are conspiracy theories - such as ideas claiming secret groups or plots are controlling world events. These can spread quickly online, often designed to shock, anger or persuade.

Why young people are drawn in

It's natural for children to explore big questions and look for answers. Online content that sounds bold or mysterious can feel exciting and convincing- especially when it's presented confidently or emotionally.
Apps and algorithms can reinforce this by showing users more of the same kind of content they've watched before. For example:

- **TikTok** and **YouTube** use recommendation systems that can lead from harmless curiosity to more extreme or misleading videos.
- **Instagram** and **Snapchat** may spread rumours or fake stories quickly through friends' posts and private messages.
- **X (Twitter)** and **Reddit** often mix real news with speculation, which can make it hard for young people to tell fact from opinion.

The more time children spend on these platforms, the more normal this flood of conflicting information can feel.

A shared responsibility

If our young people are using social media, we can't control every video or post our they see, but we can teach them how to question and think critically about it. By staying involved, showing interest and keeping conversations open, parents and carers can help young people grow into informed, thoughtful digital citizens who can tell fact from fiction.

In a world full of loud voices, the ability to pause, question and think is one of the most powerful skills our children can learn.

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Staying safe at parties: helping young people make good choices

As children move through secondary school, their social life becomes a huge part of growing up. Parties, gatherings and sleepovers are where friendships deepen and independence grows, but they can also bring new challenges, especially when adults aren't around.

Unsupervised parties at a friend's house can seem harmless or 'normal', but without adults present, situations can quickly get out of hand. Alcohol, peer pressure and risky behaviour can all play a part, even when no one intends for things to go wrong.

The goal isn't to stop young people from socialising, it's to help them stay safe, make good choices and know they can always turn to you for help.

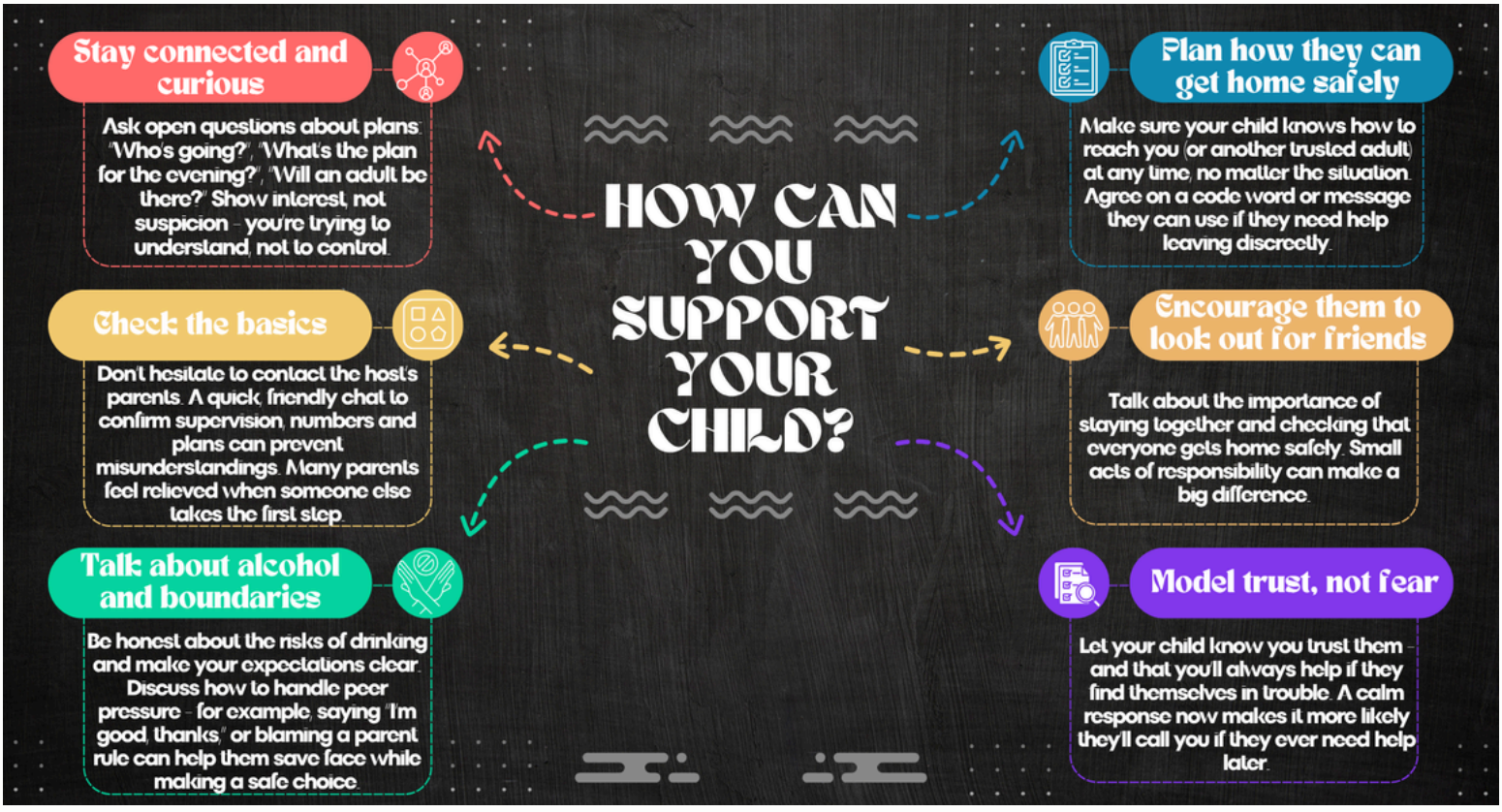
What makes unsupervised parties risky?

Even well-meaning plans can become unsafe when:

- alcohol or vaping is introduced
- word spreads on social media and far more people turn up than expected
- guests don't all know each other
- there's no adult to manage boundaries or call for help if needed
- peer pressure makes it hard for young people to say no.

Most young people want to do the right thing - they just need support, information and a plan.

What to do if you are hosting

If your child wants to have friends over, consider:

- Keeping the group small and supervised.
- Agreeing clear start and finish times.
- Keeping alcohol out of reach and monitoring any social media sharing.
- Being visible — even if you're just "around" in another room.