

Briefing for the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Children and Equality on 30th April, “Technology, Social Media and Children” by Youth Advocate Programmes Ireland.

Thank you for inviting us here today to speak to you about Technology, Social Media and Children. My name is Amber and this is Miah.

In the audience are Blossom and Mia. Siobhán O’Dwyer, CEO of YAP Ireland is here with us today. Firstly, a little bit of information about YAP Ireland.

Youth Advocate Programmes Ireland is a registered charity providing a range of services to Children, Young People and Families who need support across 25 counties. Many Young people are referred by Tusla Child and Family Agency with others from the HSE. The YAP Model is a strengths-based, family focused, wraparound service that achieves positive outcomes. The model is unique in Ireland as we employ community-based advocates to work directly with Children, Young People and Families where they live and support them to achieve their goals. We also provide Independent Advocacy Services for CAMHS and Separated Children Seeking International Protection. In 2025 we worked with over 600 young people and families. Please see our website for further information and stories from young people and families.

We spoke to young people across YAP Ireland to get their views on the impact of social media and possible solutions.

I want to start with the positives.

Technology is a big part of our daily lives. We use it for school, to stay in touch with friends and for entertainment.

Having social media makes it easier to keep in touch with friends especially outside of school and can help you feel included and less alone.

Social Media Platforms like Tik Tok or Instagram let you express your personality through photos, videos, outfits or art and can boost your confidence when people like what you share.

You can pick up useful stuff like study tips, life advice and awareness about things like mental health or other world issues.

Social Media helps us connect, learn new things and express ourselves.

It can be fun watching funny video's, dances or creative clips.

While social media can be fun and useful, it also comes with some challenges for children and young people.

Spending too much time on screens. It is easy to lose track of time scrolling on apps like Tik Tok or Snapchat which can take away from sleep, homework or time spent with friends and family in the real world.

Cyberbullying. Sometimes people say things online that they wouldn't say in person. This can make you feel upset, sad and excluded. This can affect your confidence, wellbeing and mental health.

Sharing too much information. Children and Young People might not always realise how much personal information they are sharing which can lead to safety risks. Being contacted by people who are not who they say they are.

Social Media can make you want things or experiences that you can't afford or have. This can lead to feeling jealous and left out.

Solutions. What can young people do?

Keep your accounts on private. Set up filters to block words that are hurtful to you.

You can block people who are mean and unfriend them.

Think about what you are posting – don't share personal information outside of close friends and family groups.

Set limits on screentime for yourself. Make sure you are taking a break and not spending too much time scrolling.

Buy an alarm clock so you don't have your phone in your bedroom at night.

What can parents do?

Set up parental controls straight away when a young person gets a phone.

Talk to young people about the positives of social media as well as the negatives. Young people have grown up now with access to social media so you can help them to make sure they are using it safely and if there are any issues they can talk to you.

### Education and Schools.

Social Media tips training for all children aged over 10 in primary schools. Should not just be the negatives but how to use private settings, block people etc.,

Tips training should change with the age of young people ie., different issues for those over 13 or 16.

Schools could offer social media tips training also for parents. Invite them in the evenings to support them to understand how parental controls work, how to set accounts to private, how to talk about social media to young people and how to report to companies or the Guards if needed.

### What can social media companies and TD's do?

They should take young people seriously and if they report an issue, they should block the person or take down posts immediately. Often, they do not agree that the posts or comments are hurtful , but they are. They must listen to young people when they report and take action.

When social media companies are found to be acting against the law or regulations, they should be subject to much bigger fines. They make a lot of money and so fines should be really big or they won't take them seriously.

They can build social media channels just for children under 16 like TV channels. They should have no adverts on them.

They can change the algorithms that send posts and adverts to you constantly. If you click on something, you get sent lots of similar posts and adverts for days and must block them or not click on them. They could stop the system doing that.

### Phone companies.

They could make phones for under 13's that are preset for no social media access.

For 13 to 16 year olds, the phone can have social media apps that are all preset to private or to children only channels.

#### TD's and the Dáil.

If Young people have to prove their age using Photo ID to open or access social media channels. This could be a good idea but some young people will not have photo ID or find it easy to get it. How will they be supported and if they aren't then it will increase the digital divide between richer and poorer families.

Can you trust the social media companies with this data? What about if they are hacked or use the information in a bad way? How will children and young people be protected.

Thank you for listening to us and we hope that you take our views seriously when you are making decisions in the future about legislation and regulations to support and protect children and young people online.

Thanks again.