Digital Passport

An Introduction

Helping children, young people and their carers make the most of technology through relationship building and communication

Contents

Welcome to the Digital Passport!

This suite of documents has been created for you by a team of expert volunteers, committed to keeping all children safe online. We know that as foster carers you already do an amazing job. We also know that the children in your care enjoy and benefit from being able to connect online, to game, to chat, to relax, to create. But, of all children, they are most at risk online and these documents have be written to help you and them prevent risk turning into harm, together.

One of the most important ways of keeping children and young people safe online is for them to have regular conversations with a trusted adult about what they do, why they love it and if they have any concerns. You may well be that person – and if you didn't grow up with tech in the same way today's children have, that can be daunting.

These documents provide support for talking about the child's digital life in a way that empowers them and should help you. You don't need to know everything about every app, game or livestreaming platform. You do need to know how to have a conversation about tech and where to get help, and these documents offer a structure and resources for that. They may not be right for every child every time – but even through the piloting process they have already helped some children.

The Digital Passport was the idea of Adrienne Katz and was created by her with expert input from Adam Gordon, Dr Simon P Hammond, Steve Bailey, and all of the members of the UKCIS Vulnerable Users Working Group. It's a privilege to work with such a talented team of experts and we hope these documents help you and the children in your care.

Claire Levens
Policy Director, Internet Matters
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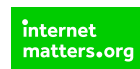
Introduction

This Digital Passport is designed to help you have conversations with the children in your care about their online lives. Children and young people don't see a boundary between online life and 'real life' so understanding what they do online and why is crucial to getting to know each child.

We hope this document provides a way for conversations about online life to happen – not in an intrusive or controlling way but by helping promote understanding and enabling you to provide support. As you care for children who may have experienced trauma or rejection, being able to help them to recover and thrive in all aspects of their lives will be at the heart of your success.

Online risk and harm are not encountered to the same extent by all children. Research has found that vulnerable and differently-abled children, especially those who have experience of the care system, are more likely to encounter risks. They are also much more likely to benefit from the connection, education and entertainment the internet brings[1] – so removing access is not the answer.

This document is only one step towards fully integrating their digital lives into the support they receive. It may help you find additional ways to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights in the digital world.

We hope this is useful for you.

The Digital Passport has three parts which should all be used together:

1. Digital Passport: An introduction
2. Digital Passport: For adults and carers
3. Digital Passport: For children and young people

Note: throughout the Passport the term 'child' refers to anyone under the age of 18. All children and young people are recognised in law as children, and it makes the text simpler to read.

1. Adrienne Katz and Aiman El Asam, 'Vulnerable Children in a Digital World', Internet Matters. Aiman El Asam and Adrienne Katz, 'Vulnerable Young People and Their Experience of Online Risks'. Human Computer Interaction, 2018
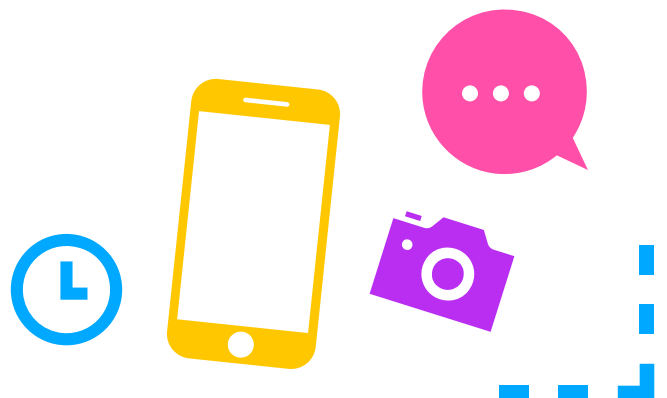
ABOUT THE DIGITAL PASSPORT

Its purpose

1. To help enable the child's digital life in a positive and supportive way.

2. To provide carers with a tool to support discussions and understanding about online life.

3. To help negotiate agreements about internet access and device use between carer and child.

4. To provide consistency if a child or young person has to move to another placement or home environment.

5. To create a record to improve safeguarding.

6. To make the most of what technology offers and open up opportunities for children and young people, especially those in or leaving care.

The Passport can be used as a way of recording agreements made, as well as checking whether they are still working for the child. Talking about the Passport can be a way of developing new agreements and opening up a conversation about how you can best support the children in your care.

What is in it

The Digital Passport has two main sections. One brings together information for foster carers, and other professionals, on the digital life of the child. The other is for the child to express their wishes and feelings, hopes and interests.

Who can use it

While the Digital Passport has been designed for children in care and their foster carers, it can be used by any professional or person chosen by the child. Children should be able to have a say in who sees their section of the Passport.

The team around the child are encouraged to see this as part of their record. Social workers have a role to play in providing foster carers with initial information. It is a living document that will develop and change, and should make an ongoing contribution to reviews and supervision for foster carers. Social workers should ascertain key information for the foster carer at the start of a placement. After that the carer and the child can add to or change it when needed.

In the section for the child to use for their wishes and views, they can state their aims and aspirations. Maybe the young person is hoping to get a particular device, thinking of creating digital content or learning to play the guitar through online videos. You might do some planning together to achieve this. Should the child's situation change, any long-term plans can be shown in the Passport.

A Digital Passport should be given to all foster carers. Schools can be made aware that there is one in place. It could be helpful for example, in an Education, Health and Care Plan review or Personal Education Plan meetings held termly with the child, the social worker, carer and designated teacher.

It may also be helpful for pastoral leads, SENCOs or those with a therapeutic role such as counsellors or psychotherapists. The child should be able to choose whether their section is shared or not.

A supervising social worker or foster care manager may use the Passport to review what is happening in the online lives of children, or when safeguarding concerns are present. Discussions around it might reveal that the foster carer needs specific support.

Reviews can be used as opportunities for the carer to raise topics they'd like to discuss and to develop the Passport further as the child grows and matures. The child may be more likely to engage with this process once trust is built. The child should be enabled and encouraged to change or add to it. This will give a sense of autonomy and choice.

"As the form tutor of a looked after child, I was primarily responsible for co-ordinating with his foster parent and the social care professionals around him. I would also be the main link to the school for sharing important/relevant information about him with the rest of the staff team."
– Form Tutor

When to use it

"I wasn't sure how to start the conversation about life online. I was worried it would show how little I know." – **Foster carer**

The section for foster carers can be used at any point in a child's journey through care. Information provided by a social worker can be added to by the carer.

While you are encouraged to adapt questions to suit the age, development or ability of the child, the core principles and approach described in this section should remain in place. Depending on the circumstances which led to them becoming Looked After, it may be helpful to use the Passport when the child comes into care with input from their birth family, or at the start of a new placement.

The child's section should be used at a time and at a pace which makes most sense to the child. This might be within on-going day-to-day chats to get to know one another, or as part of a structured conversation. Their past experiences online should be considered, if known, so that they can be sensitively handled. Each time their section of the Passport is changed or adjusted, a new version should be saved and the date written on it.

Within school, Passport sections might contribute to the Education, Health and Care Plan and be looked at in Personal Education Plan reviews.

"Siblings in separate placements were joined up again. All had different rules about online life. The Passport could help sort out new arrangements." – **Foster carer in a consultation**

Digital records such as this, with their flexibility to be updated, can provide additions to digital life story work. Audio, video and photographic material can be easily uploaded and included, such as the day the child got a new game or phone.

"The high value placed on digital technologies by adolescents means that just the very use of computers can attract the attention of disengaged and socially excluded young people. Digital technologies and media, such as the mobile phone and internet, provide an attractive approach to use with this group, as it conforms with their existing practice of using such technology to spontaneously record events from their worlds." – **Simon Hammond**[2]

2. Simon Hammond, Chapter Digital Life Story Work in Action in Ryan and Walker, 2016.

How to use it

> *"All these people prying into my life.*
> *I just didn't want to answer anything."*
> *– Girl, 14*

Children in care explain that they are required to answer many questions about themselves (often repeatedly to different people). In addition, they might not want to talk about what they see as a private part of their life.

With this in mind, you might create opportunities to add to the child's section of the Digital Passport gradually. When trust is built up or the right moment arrives, conversations exploring what the child enjoys online, what they hope for, or any worries they might have can happen naturally.

For many children, disclosing harm which has happened to them, on or offline, is a complicated process rather than a single event. They may communicate this through their behaviour and overall mood or confide in other friends or other trusted adults.

Worrying about a 'secret' or fearing some dreadful fallout may occur if they have been threatened or blackmailed online, can lead to extreme distress. This may be played out internally (depression, withdrawal) or externally (challenging behaviour).

They might opt to 'test' out the new adults in their lives with partial pieces of information to check out how an adult may react, whether they will be supportive or blaming.

A child may also give an answer to a question about their online life that they later wish to revisit. They may hold back from doing so through fear that they might be seen as having lied, rather than simply not being ready to talk.

Keep the 'door' open and accept new information calmly and without judgement.

Particular attention should be paid to what has happened to a young person online in the past and if they have been upset or harmed by anything online. Disclosing harm can cause a young person to re-live trauma. Some risks and harms make it more likely that this young person may experience other risks - in 'ripples' or in clusters of consequences.[3]

The information contained in the Digital Passport should be regarded as personal details and treated with care in line with GDPR requirements.

Who should keep it

The child can keep their section of the Passport if they wish to. This will differ from child to child. Some may feel that an extra form or tool to keep is too much responsibility, so it may be helpful to agree between you and the child who holds onto their section and how easily or often they can access it. Children must be able to have a say in which adults can see their section.

The Digital Passport should be a live document, updated regularly and used to develop a good understanding of how best to help the child in a fast-changing digital world. It is not intended to be filed away and forgotten, or used as set of rules. Therapeutic teams and other agencies around the child might use updates to the Passport as a timely reminder to consider digital life fully in their support for this child.

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3. Adrienne Katz and Aiman El Asam, 'Look At Me: Teens Sexting and Risks', 2020. Internet Matters.

Things to consider

Corporate Parenting Principles were introduced in The Children and Social Care Act 2017. These include the need to:

a. act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people

b. encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings

c. take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people

d. help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners

e. promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people

f. (aim) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work

g. prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living

In addition, the approaches taken in this tool are:

Flexible, not rigid - the Digital Passport aims to develop respect and support between foster carer and child but not limit creative ideas or reasonable adjustments that suit the needs of the child or family. Questions can be adapted to the ability and/or developmental stage of the young person.

Non-judgemental - anyone can be targeted or manipulated online. This is especially true for vulnerable children. In addition, persuasive design used by gaming and other online sites is a powerful tool that few can recognise. Online incidents can be learning opportunities.

Sharing experience and embracing powerlessness - adults carry a large responsibility and may feel out of their depth at times. They will be working with risk and might feel powerless, but they have valuable life experience. They can show how we all learn from mistakes. Embracing powerlessness, it is argued, can lead to opportunities to develop digital resilience together.[4]

Modelling the behaviour you want - adults can model appropriate behaviour, for example, not using their phone during mealtimes or when having an important talk with a young person.

Balancing risks and opportunities - it is challenging to manage risk and, at the same time, help a child towards independence. Yet fear of risk can dominate the thinking of social care professionals and carers so much that young people's longer term digital resilience is not encouraged.[5] Young people need to learn from challenges, and approach life without crippling fear. Problems can be learning opportunities for both adult and child.

It is time to talk and think digital - more than twenty years since phones connected to the internet, it is time to reject negative expectations of technology and a risk averse approach, in favour of recognising the benefits as well as the harms of the digital revolution. Children make up one in three of the world's internet users.

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4. Hammond. S P Embracing Powerlessness in Pursuit of Digital Resilience: Managing Cyber-Literacy in Professional Talk

Trauma informed thinking

You will know that by the time a child comes to live with you, they will have already faced some significant challenges which will influence how they interact online, especially given the pressure to engage immediately with new people or to re-establish their identity and relationships.

It is likely they may make some decisions under pressure and they will need your support. Support should be provided in a way that minimises the chances of adding to a child's stress or distress, and should follow the principles of trauma informed thinking.

It has been suggested that if the child's situation is seen through a 'trauma lens' the adults around the child might behave differently. They might try to avoid or reduce the chances of adding to that stress, or even unintentionally reminding the child of their past traumas. The focus is on how to help that child heal.

For this, these core values, among others, can help:

1. **Safety:** all interactions encourage a sense of safety

2. **Trustworthiness:** decisions are fair and consistent, and the child can understand them

3. **Choice:** the child's voice is heard

4. **Collaboration:** doing it with the child not to the child

5. **Empowerment:** the aim is to give the child the ability to navigate the online world and to build on their strengths

Aim for an approach that looks at the whole child, their health (including sleep), their wellbeing, welfare, emotional and mental health, and behaviour. Challenging behaviour can be a form of communication.

5. Hammond. S P. Embracing Powerlessness: How professionals can promote digital resilience through everyday talk with vulnerable adolescents. Youth and Society, 2015.

The online world may be a refuge

Children can use the internet or phones to self soothe, to escape from their worries and tension, or to feel better. Research suggests that children with care experience, like all children, enjoy the benefits of connectivity but feel its absence more acutely[6].

For this reason taking away a device can be highly damaging. Young people can feel bereft, cut off from friends and isolated. Some feel their identity has been erased. While safeguarding is the absolute priority, taking away a device might make it more likely they receive one from someone else or stop talking to you about their online world.

"When I'm online I escape my real life." – Boy, 12

"If I feel really angry or sad, and I play my games, it calms me down." – Boy, 16[7]

"I feel my online self is my identity." – Girl, 14

Decisions made under pressure or for emotional reasons

Some decisions children make online could be coping mechanisms, or stem from emotional need as they try to balance social pressures and their longing to be loved and accepted. This could influence how they respond in an online situation that might also represent something risky or scary.

If they don't join in with something, there could be a social cost of being left out or socially isolated. On the other hand, they could be being

manipulated by others who often identify and take advantage of their neediness. There are children who believe that only their followers understand them or that their real self is the online character they have created.

"My online self is much better than my real self." – Young person

"I felt I was just not worth it, so I didn't care if I took risks, I just wanted people to react to my photo." – Girl, 14

Progress towards staying safe and thriving online will not be steady and linear

Children learn new behaviour in fits and starts. If it seems things are going well, do not be disheartened if there are moments when everything seems to slip back.

If things go wrong, try and manage how you feel and stay outwardly calm. Adults can contain the problem. Be clear, firm and supportive. Distinguish between the child and the behaviour. It is the behaviour that is not liked.

Depending on the age, development and ability of the child you can choose questions that suit them best. The Digital Passport offers basic suggestions that will fit many situations, but also gives you other optional questions to use in the Question Bank.

Adults modelling the behaviour they want

Children learn by observing adult behaviour. Your own digital use will act as a signal on what is and isn't appropriate, useful and kind.

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6. *Refuge and Risk, A. Katz, Internet Matters*

7. *Young people speaking in The Cybersurvey by Youthworks*

What information should be gathered by adults?

What internet connected devices is the child bringing with them? *(social worker)*

- Items (for example: a tablet, laptop, activity tracker, Xbox)
- Who owns these items?
- Who has/will have ownership and responsibility for the associated accounts?

Does the child have a mobile phone? *(social worker to inform carer)*

- Who owns the phone and pays for the contract?
- Are there any parental controls set up on this device?
- Can they be retained, or do new ones need to be set up?

Does the child have any existing social media accounts? *(social worker/carer)*

- Are there any reasons why the child should not continue using these?
- Who has the email address/passwords?
- Have there been any safeguarding concerns around their social media use in the past?
- Are there any restrictions, such as online contact with certain people, that new placements should be aware of?
- If the child is aged below 13, are they using any social media accounts for users over 13? If yes, what is the policy on these accounts?
- Are these accounts in their own name, making them searchable?

If the child is gaming, are they talking to players on other platforms? *(carer)*

- If yes, are these people safe and appropriate/known?

- If the child is aged below 13, are they using any social media accounts for users over 13 when gaming?
- If yes, what is the policy on these accounts?
- Are these accounts in their own name, making them searchable?

Does the child have an address through which the service can contact them? *(social worker)*

- Does the child have other online addresses?
- **Note**: An email or social media address provides a method to contact the child, which social worker may need to do. If setting up an email or social media address for a child or young person, choose one that does not include their name. This is more secure and will make it easy for the child to take it with them if they leave a placement. GDPR requirements can be met more easily if the email address does not identify the child.
- **Note:** If the child leaves the placement and details need to be given to the new carer, or passwords need to be changed, having a record within the child's Digital Passport can be useful.

Is the child part of an existing Microsoft family account, perhaps for Xbox or a Google family link account? *(social worker)*

- If yes, are there any settings/restrictions on these being maintained?
- If no, will they be part of a family account within the foster carer's home and are the settings /restrictions suitable?

Are there any risks or vulnerabilities identified with the child's online behaviour or experience? *(social worker/carer)*

- If yes, how have they been addressed?
- How can we manage these going forward?