SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

Working together to keep our young people safe

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WEST LAKES ACADEMY

As teenagers gain independence, their online lives grow more complex - they use social media, messaging and chat apps to connect, express themselves and build friendships or relationships. These platforms can be positive but also bring risks like exposure to adult content, grooming, harassment and pressure to overshare. The following summaries highlight popular apps and what parents and carers should know in order to guide their children safely online.

In this issue:

- New devices, new apps
- Personal safety

Reddit

What it is?
A massive forum-style site where users discuss almost any topic imaginable in themed communities called Subreddits.
What are the risks?
Many Subreddits include adult or explicit content. Some discussions can normalise harmful behaviour and anonymity may encourage bullying or misinformation.

Omegle/ OmeTV:

What it is?
Apps that connect users with strangers around the world via random video or text chats. Omegle itself has been shut down, but many copycat apps exist.
What are the risks?
High risk of exposure to nudity, sexual behaviour and predatory adults. Conversations are often unmoderated and users can record or screenshot without consent.

Telegram

What it is?
A messaging app with encrypted chats, large group channels and file-sharing.
What are the risks:
Encrypted chats make it difficult for authorities to track harmful or illegal content. Young people may encounter extremist groups, scams or explicit material.

Hoop

What it is?
An app that connects Snapchat users, allowing them to add new friends based on profiles and photos.
What are the risks?
It functions much like a teen dating or ‘friendship’ app, with swiping and photo-based profiles. Fake accounts, catfishing and inappropriate contact are common.

Grok

What it is?
An AI chatbot available on the social platform X (formerly Twitter), designed to provide conversational answers and interact in a humorous, opinionated tone.
What are the risks:
Can produce misleading or inappropriate responses. X itself also exposes users to hate speech, adult content and unverified information.

Parents and carers can stay involved in their child’s online life by keeping communication open and showing genuine interest in what they enjoy online. Setting shared expectations around screen time and privacy builds cooperation rather than conflict, while modelling healthy tech habits shows balance in action. Focusing on values like respect and responsibility helps young people think beyond safety to how they treat others and protect themselves. By staying informed about new apps and trends, parents and carers can guide their child through the digital world with understanding and trust instead of control.

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Personal safety for young people

As the dark nights have drawn in, young people learning how to stay safe in public becomes essential. Independence is an exciting part of growing up, but it also comes with responsibility. Knowing how to plan ahead, stay alert and act confidently can make a big difference in keeping themselves and their friends safe.

How parents and carers can support their child's independence

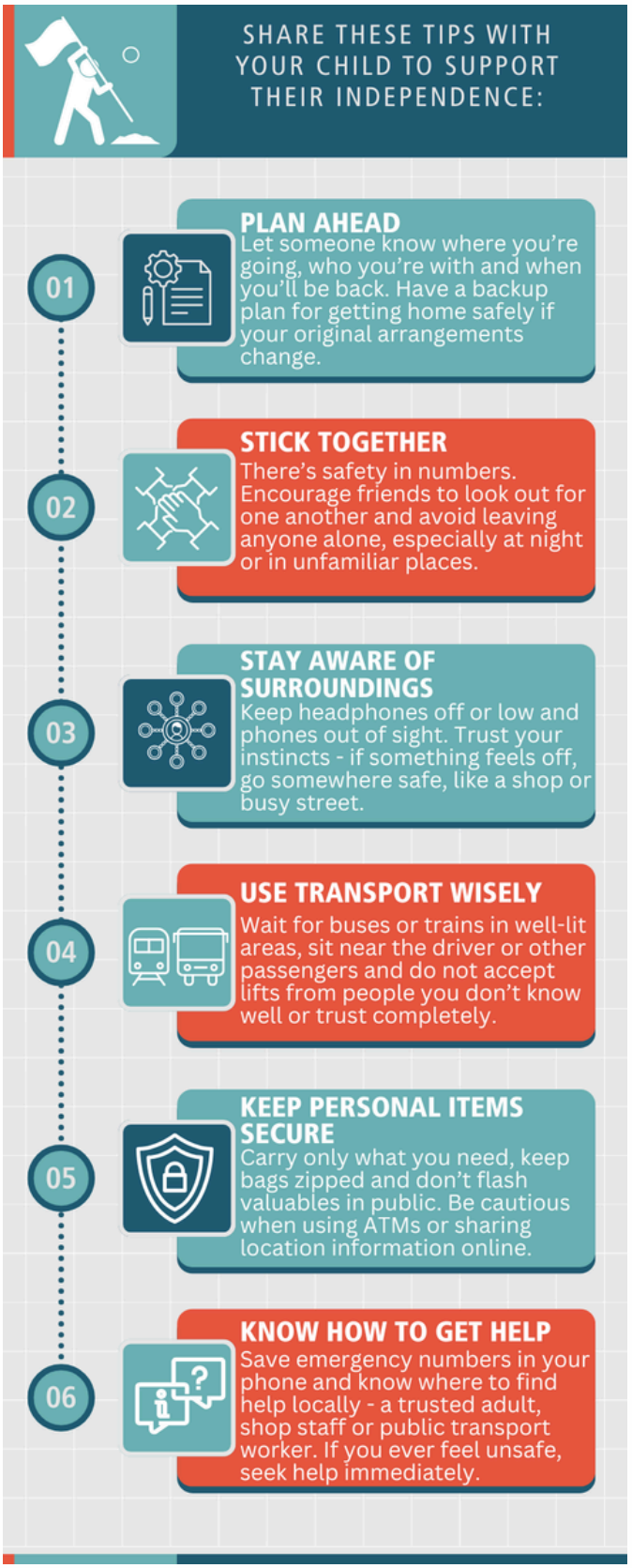
As teenagers begin to explore the world on their own, it's natural for parents and carers to feel both proud and worried. The goal isn't to remove all risk, but to help young people develop the judgement and confidence to handle challenges when they arise.

Start with trust: Let your child know you believe in their ability to make good decisions - that trust helps them take safety seriously.

Talk, don't lecture: Regular, calm conversations about plans, transport and what to do if something changes are more effective than strict rules.

Agree on check-ins: A quick text when they arrive somewhere or when plans change can give peace of mind without feeling like surveillance.

Teach problem-solving: Discuss realistic 'what if' scenarios - like a phone running out of battery or being separated from friends - and how to handle them safely.

Celebrate responsible choices: Acknowledge when your child shows good judgement or communicates well; it reinforces independence and responsibility.

Growing independence is one of the most rewarding parts of the teenage years - for both young people and their parents and carers. Learning to move confidently through the world, make good decisions and manage risks is a vital step toward adulthood. When teens understand how to stay aware and look out for one another and when parents and carers provide calm, steady support, everyone feels more secure. Personal safety isn't about fear - it's about empowerment, awareness and building the skills that help young people thrive wherever life takes them.