# Balancing online safety: expert insights on children's social media use



A recent discussion surrounding online safety has been sparked by the release of the Netflix drama "Adolescence," which has prompted significant nationwide conversations about the impact of social media on young people. Specialist psychotherapist and hypnotherapist Dipti Tait spoke to James Holt of the Manchester Evening News, offering insights into why children should not be entirely prohibited from social media. Instead, she suggests that constructive dialogue is essential for promoting safety.

The subject of protecting youth from harmful content is increasingly critical, particularly as "Adolescence" has illustrated the devastating effects that inappropriate material can have on young minds. In a notable event last week, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hosted Jack Thorne, the show's writer, and producer Jo Johnson at Downing Street. Representatives from the NSPCC and Children’s Society were also present, during which Sunak expressed a desire to address the societal responsibilities in preventing the escalation of negative influences on boys, particularly concerning hatred and misogyny.

In a significant step to widen access, Netflix announced that it will make the series available for free to all secondary schools across the UK. This move came following statements from Sir Keir Starmer, who noted that the digital space allows for ideologies to influence children directly, potentially harmful ones included.

The ongoing implementation of the Online Safety Act plays a crucial role in regulating online platforms, aiming to enforce strict codes of practice as outlined by Ofcom. This legislation aspires to protect users, especially children, from various forms of harmful content, including issues related to misogyny, racism, homophobia, and other inappropriate materials.

Dipti Tait, who has over 20 years of experience in adolescent mental health, contends that the anxiety surrounding technology is not inherent to the internet but stems from adults' misunderstanding of teenage experiences. “The internet isn’t actually the problem – it’s the adults,” she remarked, arguing that rather than imposing bans, parents should strive to understand the inherent nature of teenagers who are often seen as rebellious and thrill-seeking.

To foster open communication, Dipti suggests parents adopt strategies such as 'pattern interruption,' where the typical approach to discussions about online behaviour is altered. Instead of direct questions that may lead to defensiveness, she recommends using open-ended statements that promote dialogue, such as, "I imagine some of the stuff online must feel intense or overwhelming at times," which creates a safe space for sharing feelings and experiences.

Further advice includes guiding teenagers to tune into their feelings about online content. Instead of strictly dictating what is safe or unsafe, she encourages discussions about their emotional responses, helping them understand their reactions to different online scenarios. By shifting the dynamic from control to inspiration, parents can engage more meaningfully with their children.

Dipti also highlights the importance of discussing the concept of extremism and polarising views in an age-appropriate manner. “It’s about always ruling from a place of understanding and love,” she stated, stressing that if teenagers feel unable to communicate openly with parents or educators, they may turn to less informed influences for guidance.

By encouraging broader discussions about societal issues and helping young people navigate online complexities, parents can help foster independent thinking and resilience. Dipti advocates for a balanced view, suggesting that children should be guided to understand their place within the context of various viewpoints, preparing them for real-world interactions.

As the conversation about online safety continues to evolve, experts like Tait are providing essential insights into how parents can navigate the challenges posed by social media while supporting their children in developing healthy online habits.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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