

# EXPLORING IDENTITY ONLINE

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

“It’s almost as if you can’t be who you are. In an ideal world I’d be a person who would like anything without someone having an opinion on it. But you can’t. You have to like certain things; you have to be a certain way or you’re just going to get negativity from all people.”

- STUDENT, AGE 15

The internet and social networking have become a huge part of our lives. The online world brings lots of advantages – it enables us to connect with others, share our ideas, get creative, have fun and express ourselves. But there can be downsides. Research conducted by The Diana Award in partnership with ASKfm and psychologist Dr Linda Papadopoulos shows how much pressure the online world can cause, including pressure to be online all the time, reply to things quickly and look a certain way to fit in with others.

Research commissioned by The Diana Award and carried out by independent third-party research supplier YouGov (February 2018) revealed the following trends:

**63%**

of young people age 13-17 believe people behave differently online to the way they do offline

**25%**

have felt they had to ‘like’ a post or picture they don’t actually like

**50%**

have felt pressured to reply to people’s messages quickly

## GROWING UP ONLINE\_

Childhood and adolescence is a time when we are discovering who we are, developing with our identity and learning from mistakes. When this process is taken online, the amount of people who have an influence on how we feel about ourselves can go from just a small circle of friends and family to a potentially huge pool of thousands of online friends and followers.

## THE IMPACT\_

Our identity is what makes us who we are. It is formed of a huge number of different factors - from our likes and dislikes and strengths and weaknesses, to who our friends and family are and what we have achieved. When there are hundreds (if not thousands) of people giving you feedback on your identity in the form of likes or comments online, this can cause a lot of pressure. Often, it can make you feel the need to fit in with others in the pictures and posts you put online. It can even lead to pressure to respond to messages quickly to keep up your online presence.

## WHAT TO DO?

We’ve put together some advice to make your experience of the online world a positive one.

### DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF\_

Try not to compare yourself to others online. Remember that you are about more than just your online profile or appearance.

### SOCIAL MEDIA FOR GOOD\_

Use social media in a positive way to reflect your personality and share what you’re passionate about.

### THINK BEFORE YOU POST\_

If you feel like you’re posting just because you have to, take a step back and think about whether what you’re posting is really something you want to say.

### DIGITAL BREAK\_

A lot of social media apps have features that encourage users to stay connected and post often. If the pressure to be connected gets to you, take a digital break and do something you enjoy offline.

### MAKE A LIST\_

List things you like about yourself: positive qualities, strengths, hobbies, favourite features - remind yourself of these when you’re feeling pressured to look or act a certain way on social media.

### MAKE THE RULES\_

Remember that you make the rules online! Unfollow or unfriend people who don’t make you feel good, follow positive or inspirational people and try to disengage from pressure to fit in online.

### MINIMUM AGE\_

Remember that most social networks have a minimum age of 13. This is in place to protect you, so it’s important to wait until you’re this age before you sign up.

### TALK TO SOMEONE\_

Chat to someone you trust offline, such as a friend, family member, or teacher, about how you’re feeling.

In partnership with:

**ASKfm**



FROM THE DIANA AWARD

## For further support\_

The Diana Award Crisis Messenger provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK. If you are a young person, you can text DA to 85258 for support with bullying behaviour (including online bullying behaviour), stress, anxiety and more.

We're proud to be the only charity set up in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales and her belief that young people have the power to change the world. It's a big mission but there are two things within it that we focus our charity's efforts on – young people and change.

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Throughout all of our programmes and initiatives 'change' for and by young people is central, including our anti-bullying work which encourages change in attitudes and behaviours.

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We hope you found this resource useful and wish you all the best in your anti-bullying journey. If you would like to help us create more resources and train even more Anti-Bullying Ambassadors you can make a £5 donation by texting CHANGE 5 to 70470 or visit [diana-award.org.uk/donate](https://diana-award.org.uk/donate)

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