BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

VIRTUAL CONTACT WITH FAMILIES
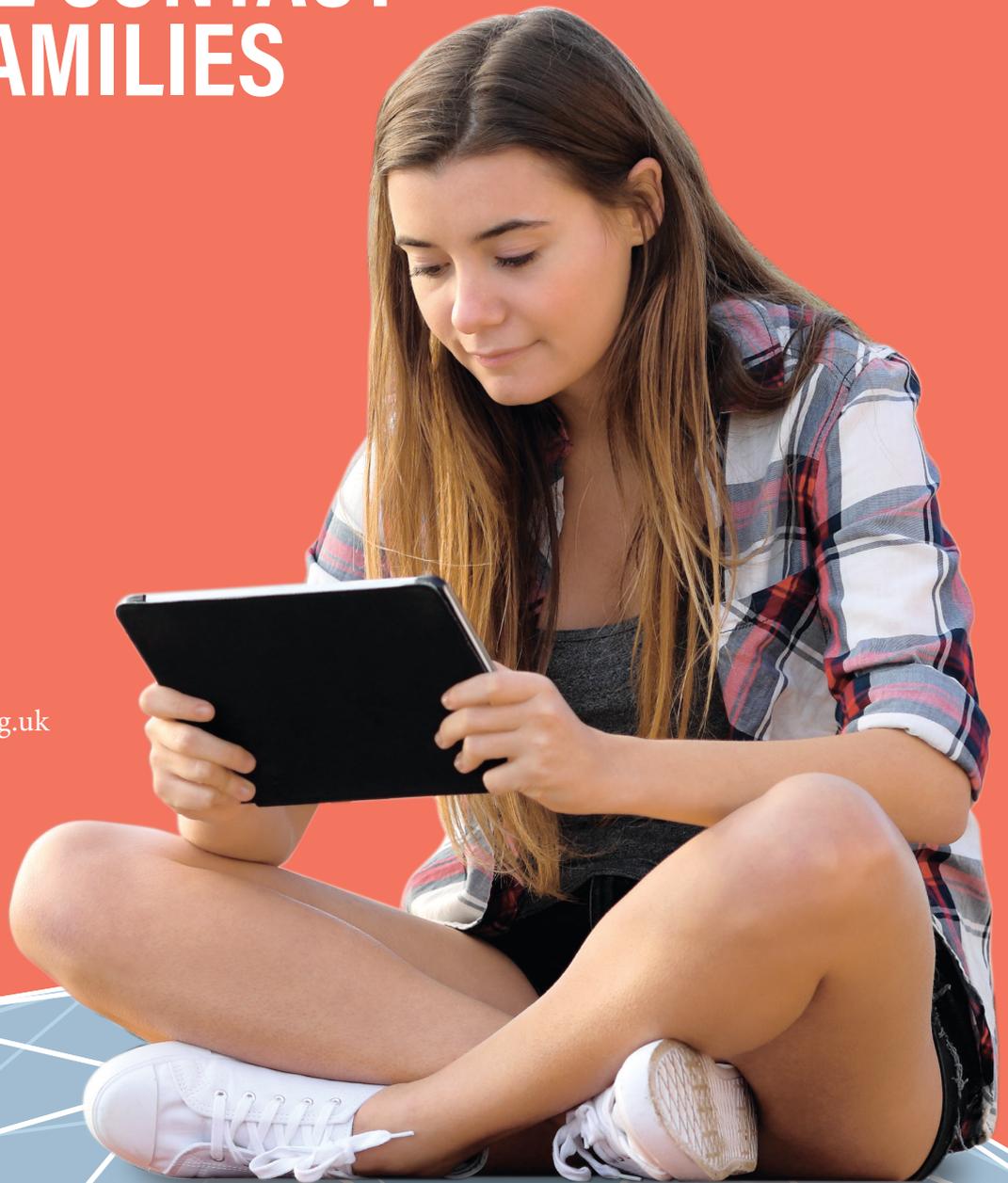
VIRTUAL CONTACT WITH FAMILIES

The guidance covers best practice on conducting video calls with families and other professionals. The guide is not aiming to be prescriptive, but instead to highlight a wide range of good practice which professionals can learn from and adapt.

The guidance notes that we should not assume that online communication is worse than in person, with professionals finding that young people are more comfortable online, and that there can be 'better and more open communication with children and young people and some parents online.'

Maintaining a "3D" relationship in a two dimensional screen can be difficult, but it is recommended to keep the number of call participants to a minimum, to maximise eye-contact during the call, and be mindful of non-verbal cues that can be picked up.

BEFORE THE CALL

What's the purpose of the video call?

Agree the best time for the video call or virtual home visit and the approximate length of the virtual home visit or the video call/ contact

Check your organisation's IT and digital or social media policies

If in doubt, confirm with your manager

Speak with the young person and/or the parents and carers about the technology they prefer to use

When selecting an online platform consider the safety and security of the platform

Familiarise yourself with the technology including its security settings

It is good practice to test the app with a colleague to make sure everything works and you can navigate your way around and log into and out of the meeting

DURING THE CALL

Do not allow technical glitches to steal the focus of the meeting

Try to login a few minutes early but be patient with others

Ask everyone to introduce themselves by calling on everyone one by one to avoid people speaking over each other

Discuss the purpose and length of the call

Be clear about ground rules and whether people need to mute their mic or use their camera

Emphasise that the child and family can intervene and ask to speak at any time during the meeting if they have any questions or anything they wish to share

Be clear about turn taking and raising hands before speaking

Ensure that children and families know that they can ask to speak at any time and that their voice has primacy over everyone else's

An hourly break can be helpful

Make the meeting only as long as it needs to be by balancing structured and formal engagement with more informal and interactive conversation

You can see your own image at the corner of the screen as it is seen by others. This offers opportunity for reflection

At the end of the call it is good practice to ask the young person and the parents, carers and others about their experience of the call and what they found helpful and if there is anything they would like to be different in the next call

RESEARCH

Research by Simpson (2005) and Croty (2012), suggests that the quality of a pre-existing relationship is important to factor into this process. Where relationships are strong, both find that the quality of interaction over technology can be the same as it would be face to face, whereas where relationships are weaker, technology can impede building stronger relationships, in part because of the large proportion of interactions that are non-verbal, and may be lost over the phone or even a video link.

What Works for Children's Social Care's summary of a systematic review of web-based parenting programmes shows some positive indications of effectiveness, particularly where these are guided by professionals.

The independent evaluation of a DfE innovation fund project run by the University of Kent found that an online platform, as well as a 'virtual flat' had the most traction with young people on helping them to cope with the effects of trauma.