SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

Secondary | May 2026 | In this issue: Beauty and fitness influencers | Stress and resilience

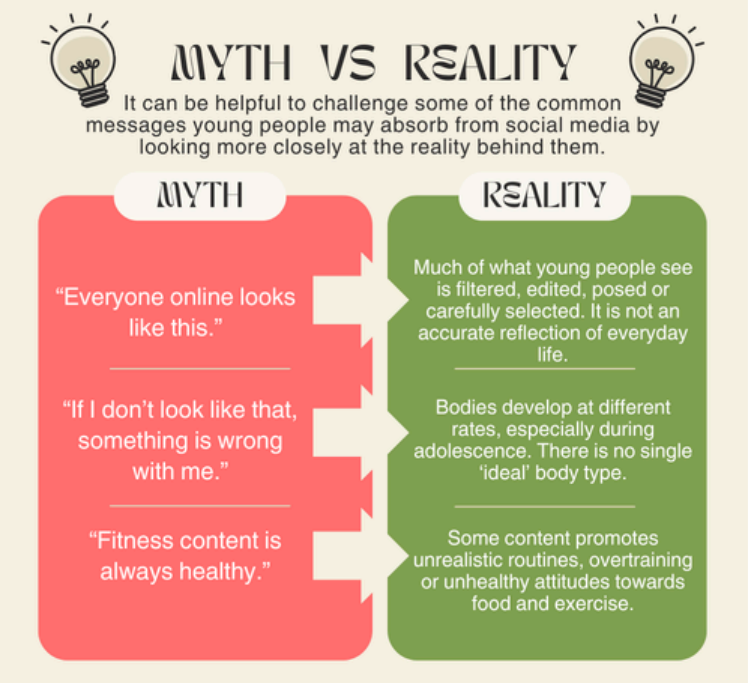
Understanding the influence of beauty and fitness content on young people

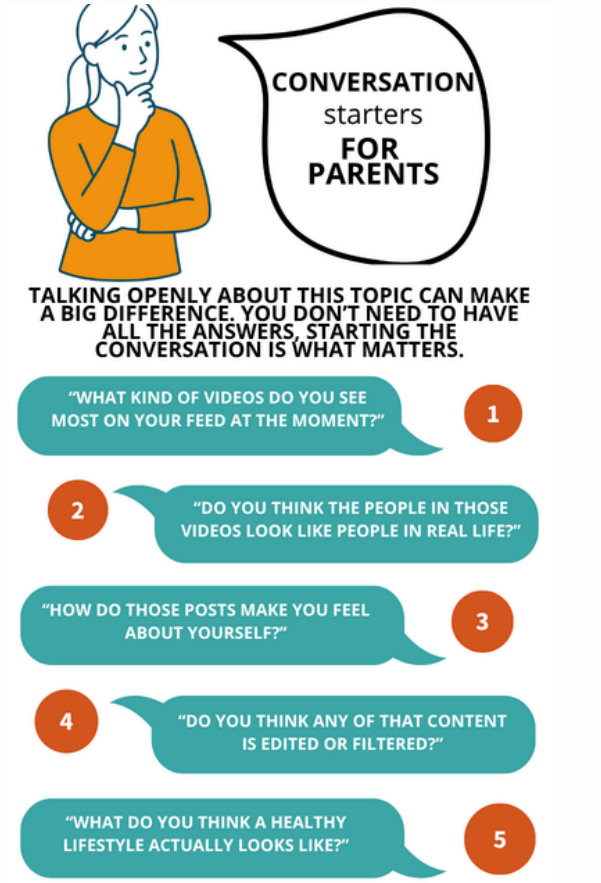
Social media is a central part of many young people's lives and while it can be a space for creativity and connection, it also exposes children to powerful messages about appearance, body image and self-worth. One growing concern is the rise of beauty and fitness influencers - content creators who focus on appearance, dieting, exercise routines and 'ideal' lifestyles. While some content can be positive or motivating, much of it promotes unrealistic standards that can negatively affect how young people see themselves.

What is this content, why are children seeing it and how can it be harmful?

Platforms like **TikTok, Instagram and YouTube** use algorithms to show users more of what they engage with, so even brief interactions can quickly shape what a child sees. This often leads to repeated exposure to beauty content (more commonly targeted at girls) and fitness content (more commonly targeted at boys), which can appear within minutes of using an app.

While some of this content can be positive, frequent exposure can lead young people to compare themselves to unrealistic or edited images, feel pressure to look a certain way and develop low self-esteem. It can also promote unhealthy habits and narrow ideas about appearance, making it difficult for young people to recognise its impact.





How to reduce this content in your child's feed

While you can't control everything your child sees, there are practical steps that can help reshape what the algorithm shows them:

Encourage mindful scrolling: remind your child they don't have to engage with every video. Even pausing on content can signal interest to the algorithm.

Use 'not interested' features: most platforms allow users to hide or reduce similar content.

Diversify their feed: encourage following accounts based on hobbies, interests or positive role models outside of appearance-focused content.

Review screen time and usage together: regular check-ins can help you understand what they're seeing.

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Helping your child navigate stress and build resilience

As parents, it's natural to think of stress as something that mainly appears around exams. But for many secondary school students, stress can show up in everyday life, often in ways that are easy to miss.

Understanding what stress looks like, how it affects young people, and how to build resilience can make a lasting difference to your child's wellbeing.

When do children experience stress and how does it affect them?

Stress can arise from everyday experiences such as friendship changes, social pressures, busy schedules, family situations or uncertainty about the future. What may seem minor to adults can feel overwhelming to a young person who is still developing the skills to manage these challenges.

When stress builds up, it can affect both emotional wellbeing and physical health. Young people may struggle to concentrate, feel constantly tired or become more irritable and withdrawn. You might also notice changes in sleep, appetite or motivation, alongside physical symptoms like headaches or stomach aches. Over time, ongoing stress can impact confidence and enjoyment of school and daily life.

Signs your child might be stressed

Every child is different, but some common signs include:

Emotional signs

- Increased anxiety or worry
- Becoming withdrawn or unusually quiet
- Low mood or tearfulness

Behavioural signs

- Avoiding school or activities they used to enjoy
- Changes in friendships
- Procrastination or loss of motivation

Physical signs

- Trouble sleeping
- Frequent illnesses or complaints of aches
- Changes in eating habits

Often, it's a change from *their usual behaviour* that matters most.

Why resilience matters

Resilience is the ability to cope with challenges, adapt and recover from setbacks. It doesn't mean avoiding stress altogether, because that's not realistic, but rather helping young people understand that difficult feelings are a normal part of life and will pass. When children develop resilience, they begin to see that they can handle challenges, learn from setbacks and build confidence through experience. These skills not only support them in school but also play a vital role in their long-term wellbeing, relationships and future independence.

How you can support your child

You don't need to 'fix' everything- small, consistent actions make the biggest difference.

Keep communication open

Make time for regular, low-pressure conversations. Car journeys or shared activities can be easier than direct questioning.

Listen more than you solve

Sometimes children need to feel heard rather than given solutions straight away.

Normalise stress

Let them know it's okay to feel overwhelmed sometimes and that it happens to everyone.

Help them build routines

Sleep, meals and downtime are powerful protective factors.

Encourage problem-solving

Support them in thinking through challenges rather than stepping in immediately.

Model resilience

Children learn a lot from how adults handle stress. Talking openly about your own coping strategies can be powerful.

At North Durham Academy, the safety of our students is our top priority. If you require any assistance or support, please reach out to the Designated Safeguarding Lead at d.menear@ndacademy.co.uk orcall/text 07818505360.