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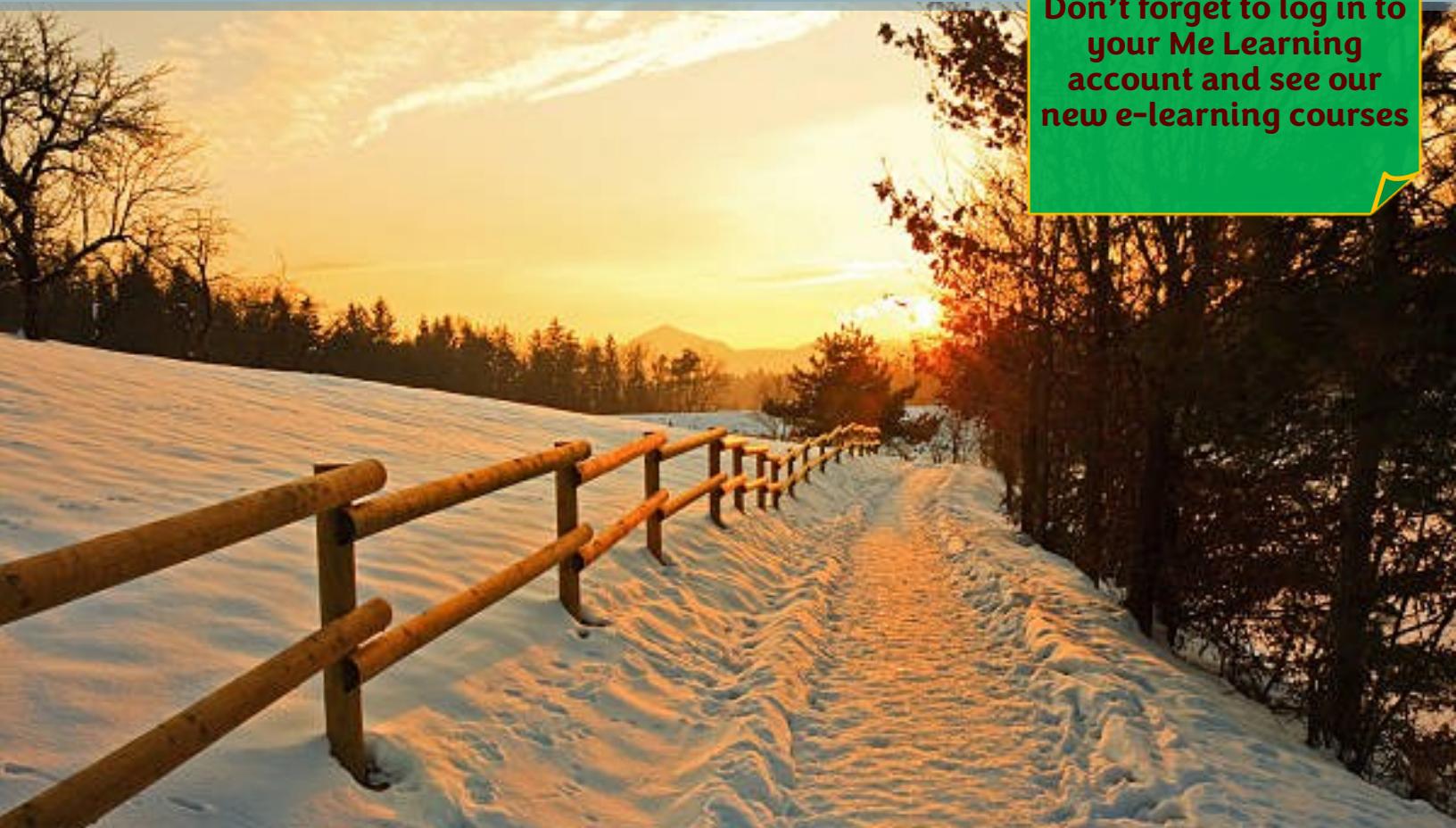
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## Welcome to our January 2026 Newsletter

In this newsletter, we bring together information which we hope you will find useful and we highlight how the Partnership continues to communicate and keep in touch with all our agencies and provide guidance to support you in your role working with children and adults. In this edition, we bring you information in the spotlight about Safer Internet Day, updates and also information about Partnership work, important safeguarding updates and new training dates.

### Me Learning

Don't forget to log in to your Me Learning account and see our new e-learning courses



## In the Spotlight: Safer Internet Day 10th February 2026

Safer Internet Day 2026 will take place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2026, with celebrations and learning based around the theme '**Smart tech, safe choices – Exploring the safe and responsible use of AI**'.

Artificial intelligence has moved from science fiction to everyday reality. From voice assistants like Siri and Alexa to chatbots that help with homework, from recommendation algorithms on social media to AI-generated content, young people are interacting with AI daily, often without fully understanding how it works or the implications.

As always with Safer Internet Day, the focus is not purely on the risks, although of course it is important to identify them. Instead, the emphasis is on how to gainfully use these technological developments with reasonable safety. This positive, empowering approach recognises that technology is neither inherently good nor bad – it's how we use it that matters.

### Opportunities and Challenges

Certainly, developments in AI pose threats. Young people need critical thinking skills to question what they see online and recognise when they might be interacting with AI rather than a human being. However, AI also offers immense opportunities. It can personalise learning, provide instant translation, and help young people explore creative pursuits.

### Getting Involved

The UK Safer Internet Centre offers free educational resources for schools and youth groups, designed for different age groups and adaptable to various educational settings. We hope as many organisations as possible will join us in promoting [Safer Internet Day 2026](#).

Schools, youth groups, community centres, libraries, and businesses all have a role to play. Whether you host an assembly, run a workshop, or simply spark conversations about AI and online safety, every contribution matters.



## **#LookCloser Week of Action 2026**

The next **#LookCloser** week of action is on 2nd-6th March 2026. And as part of our work for our award-winning campaign in partnership with the British Transport Police and the National County Lines Coordination Centre, we are offering free online training on 'Missing and Exploitation' for professionals based in the North of England.

We have two dates available (with limited spaces!). Please note that both of these sessions are the same, so you only need to book onto one of them.

**Tuesday 3rd March 10am-12pm:** Book Your Place [Here](#)

**Wednesday 4th March 2pm-4pm:** Book Your Place [Here](#)

Bringing to life the themes of the next **#LookCloser** campaign awareness week and County Lines Intensification Week, this learning session will highlight the connection between children going missing and different forms of child exploitation.

**Why this session matters:**

This session will examine why young people who go missing face significantly increased risks of exploitation and other serious harm and will highlight how going missing is itself a critical warning sign of potential exploitation. It will also explore how professional fatigue, victim blaming language and failure to share or act on key information can mean that perpetrators are not stopped and that young people face ongoing harm.

Drawing on The Children's Society's practice experience, learning from recent research and input from partners in law enforcement and the voluntary sector, this session will explore the changes to mindsets and systems which are needed to improve professional responses to missing young people to prevent and disrupt child exploitation.

**This session aims to equip professionals to:**

- Understand the links between missing episodes, child exploitation and abuse, and serious violence and why all missing episodes should be viewed as safeguarding concerns and indicators of exploitation
- Consider how to better use available tools to safeguard young people in advance of and following a missing episode
- Build positive relationships with young people to uncover the root causes of missing episodes and address them
- Use appropriate language when discussing young people who are currently or have previously been missing
- Explore the disproportionate representation of specific demographic groups among young people who experience missing episodes and how to support them



# Government to drive action to improve children's relationship with mobile phones and social media



The UK government has launched a consultation on children's use of social media to protect young people's wellbeing and ensure safer online experiences. The consultation will seek views on various measures, including: the right minimum age for children to access social media, including a potential ban for children under a certain age; ways to improve the accuracy of age assurance for children; restrictions on addictive features of social media; and further interventions to support parents in helping their children stay safe online. Immediate action will include Ofsted checking school mobile phone policy on every inspection, with schools expected to become phone-free. The government will respond to the consultation in the summer. The NSPCC has published a response highlighting the role of social media and online communities in children's lives and calling for technology companies to be held to account.

The social media consultation will seek views on a range of measures, including:

- determining the right minimum age for children to access social media, including exploring a ban for children under a certain age
- exploring ways to improve the accuracy of age assurance for children to support the enforcement of minimum age limits so children have age-appropriate experiences and see age-appropriate content
- assessing whether the current digital age of consent is too low
- removing or limiting functionalities which drive addictive or compulsive use of social media, such as 'infinite scrolling'
- exploring further interventions to support parents in helping their children navigate the digital landscape, for example further guidance or simpler parental controls

Read the full news story [here](#)

# OUR PLEDGE

To have open, honest, bold conversations with each other as multi-agency partners in order to do the very best we can for adults and children in Darlington.

For many families across Darlington, multi-agency working is vital to maintain a focus on children and adults while also keeping them at the heart of all decisions.

Our Pledge is an opportunity to:

- Seek out professional conversations with each other at the earliest opportunity
- Have a shared understanding of the strengths and risks within a family
- Actively listen to each other and share important information
- Respect each other's expertise
- Be open and empathetic to the professional views of others
- Be professionally curious and evidence what we say
- Use common language that everyone understands



Concerned about a child?

Contact the Children's Initial  
Advice Team  
Professionals on **01325 406252**  
Public on **01325 406222**

Concerned about an  
adult?

Contact the Adult  
Contact Team  
on **01325 406111**



## Statutory Safeguarding Partners

James Stroyan, Executive Director of People

Nicola Lawrence, Detective Chief Superintendent

Hilary Lloyd, Chief Nurse