

# **The role of new media technologies and the internet**

Coping with risks, maximizing opportunities and promoting mental health and well-being:

Key messages and  
compass for action

By Professor Ingunn Hagen

## **New media technologies are central in young people's lives**

- **Young people increasingly interact, play and learn through new media**
- **Young people move constantly between online and offline worlds**
- 75% European children use the Internet
- Mobile phone users are increasingly younger
- Electronic games are central for many children
- Television is still a central medium for children

# Inequalities in access to and use of ICT across Europe

- **Digital divide depends on region, socio-economic class and gender**
- **Children's use of internet continue to grow**
- Parents are catching up with their children
- Gender inequalities seem to disappear
- Socio-economic inequalities remain in most countries
- **Different opportunities for learning, communication and e-health programmes**

## Internet and other media can be valuable resources to promote mental health and well-being

- Internet enables autonomous conversation, learning and play which appeal to children
- ICT offers opportunities for **connecting with peers**
- The majority of children's online communication is **friendship driven**
- ICT also offer opportunities for interest driven meeting points
- Internet can be a valuable and low-threshold source for **information on mental health and well-being**
- ICT can also be used as flexible and proactive therapy sources

# ICT hold potential threats to children's mental health

- **Substantive risk of excessive use of ICT**, such as the internet and games
- Another risk is exposure to **age-inappropriate content**
- The internet and mobile phones can be used for **bullying and sexual harassment** or “sexting”
- The **concentration capacity** of young people may be **undermined**, due to for example multi-tasking
- The internet can also be a source of **misleading information about (mental) health**

## **Empowerment through digital media literacy as the solution**

- **Research on the consequences and effects of media and internet exposure is contradictory**
- **Crucial to empower children and young people through increased digital media competence**
- Parents and teachers need support in guiding children's use of ICT
- Education has an important role to play in enhancing children's coping and safe ICT use
- **Use ICT actively in promoting good mental health for children**

# How to make it happen: Policy and legislation

- *Action 1:*
- **Establishment of advisory mechanisms to support policy and facilitate collaboration and network activities** between researchers, educational and policy actors on mental health and new media in the European and national contexts.
- *Action 2:*
- **Engagement in partnerships with the ICT and media industries** (hardware producers, software developers, internet and media providers) on mental health opportunities and risks, including marketing and economic arguments.
- *Action 3:*
- **Appointment of youth ambassadors** to empower and involve youth and to reinforce peer learning related to new media technology in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing.

# How to make it happen: Large-scale programmes and measures

- **Action 4:**
- **Awareness raising initiatives such as public awareness campaigns, carried out through a variety of media and public schools,** which increase the knowledge of children and young people on responsible and safe use of media, games and the internet, including support resources for those in need (supportive discussion sites, help lines and processes for reporting harmful content or contact, such as the awareness raising activities of the Safer Internet Programme),
- **Action 5:**
- **Use new media actively in the promotion of mental health,** for example by government and (mental) health departments using web sites, social net working sites, blogs, and video clippings to involve young users in discussions about their lifestyle and mental health related topics (stress, coping, anxiety, depression, anorexia, suicide, emotions, loneliness, love, hate, fear, joy etc, like the UK New Horizon initiative). Such programs should be available in national languages.



# How to make it happen: Large-scale programmes and measures

- *Action 6:*
- **Development of age-appropriate e-mental health promotion sites or programmes, with young people as front-line partners.** This should include moderated discussion sites and fora where young people can find reliable health information on issues of risk to their mental health, such as self-harm, depression, suicide, pro-anorexia, drugs, hate/racism, bullying, gambling and addiction. National language is especially important in mental health promotion sites for younger children.
- *Action 7:*
- **Initiatives, including strengthening of regulatory or self-regulatory frameworks in Europe,** to prevent and report misleading mental health information online or through other media, to prevent harmful effects from the use or excessive use of new media technologies, games and the internet, and to report websites addressing children and young people with potentially harmful content.

# How to make it happen:

## Research and training

- *Action 8:*
- **Research on the positive and negative health-related behaviour and effects of the use of media and internet** (e.g. help-seeking, bullying, addiction) and on groups at risk.
- *Action 9:*
- **Training and awareness raising among health professionals, teachers and professionals in media and internet sectors** on the mental health impact of new media/internet technologies and the tools available to them to manage its positive and negative aspects.
- **Action 10:**
- **Training and education for youth ambassadors** to enable them to recognize risky media and ICT use, risky lifestyles and mental problems, initiate self-help groups, and to motivate other young people.

# Summary:

## Possible priorities I

- *Action 3:*
- **Appointment of youth ambassadors to empower and involve youth and to reinforce peer learning** related to new media technology in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing.
- **Action 10:**
- **Training and education for youth ambassadors to enable them to recognize risky media and ICT use, risky lifestyles and mental problems, initiate self-help groups, and to motivate other young people.**
- *Action 8:*
- **Research on the positive and negative health-related behaviour and effects of the use of media and internet** (e.g. help-seeking, bullying, addiction) and on groups at risk.

# Summary:

## Possible priorities II

- *Action 4:*
- **Awareness raising initiatives such as public awareness campaigns, carried out through a variety of media and public schools, which increase the knowledge of children and young people on responsible and safe use of media, games and the internet, including support resources for those in need (supportive discussion sites, help lines and processes for reporting harmful content or contact, such as the awareness raising activities of the Safer Internet Programme),**
- **Action 5:**
- **Use new media actively in the promotion of mental health, for example by government and (mental) health departments** using web sites, social net working sites, blogs, and video clippings to involve young users in discussions about their lifestyle and mental health related topics (stress, coping, anxiety, depression, anorexia, suicide, emotions, loneliness, love, hate, fear, joy etc, like the UK New Horizon initiative). Such programs should be available in national languages.

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