digital inclusion & mental health

Hints & Tips
Making it work for you

What is digital inclusion?

Digital Inclusion is about ensuring that as many people as possible have access to, and skills to use, technology like smartphones, tablets and computers, social media and the internet. This lets them participate in and benefit from the new technology, and then be more included in their communities.

People with poor mental health are less likely than the general population to use the internet and digital ways of communicating. They are less likely to have internet access at home.

We talked to people about what the barriers are for people with poor mental health. We also heard about the benefits people get when they do have access to digital technology, and what their advice is for other people on ways to be digitally included and also keep safe and well.

These tips are for people with mental health problems to help you get the most from their smart phone, tablet, and computer and the internet. They come from the experience of people across Scotland and from examples of good practice.

Benefits for people

We asked people with mental health problems what they saw as the benefits of having access to the internet and using it more. They told us about the wide range of things they use the internet for.

Looking after our mental health and wellbeing

The internet can be a good source of information and support for people and for their families and friends who care about them. A range of internet services have been developed for people with mental health problems including online community forums and places for advice and support.

"I watch relaxation and mediation websites on YouTube - it calms me down and lifts my mood."

"I research my condition and also talk to people on an e- forum. It's just for people with mental health problems and is very supportive. It has someone in charge of the discussion which makes it safer and everyone is supportive."

There are helpful websites which offer help and support 24 hours a day. Sometimes people find these are easier to use instead of phoning someone, although that option is there too. There is a list at the end of these Hints of websites that people found helpful.

Exercise and eating healthily

"I like the workout videos on YouTube they are great fun and free. I also check out different easy to cook recipes."

"I find it helps to do my food shopping online. I don't get into a panic and buy things that are not good for me, the way I sometimes do in supermarkets. I'm saving money too."

Keeping in touch with family and friends

For some people, keeping in touch with the people who matter to them is the main way they use digital media, and often the most important.

People thought that too much use of digital media could get in the way of real conversations, but saw benefits in these forms of contact.

"I use facebook and social media to keep in touch with friends. Sometimes I don't really want to see people so this makes my life easier and I can see what is going on with everyone else."

"I can keep in touch with old friends who live a distance away. We can talk to each other through the internet, share the good days and the not-so-good times."

"Just getting a text message to say 'Are you ok?' can feel like a lifeline some days."

"Having contact with people through social media is better than no contact with anyone."

"It can be a route to keeping existing friendships and making new friendships. There are people you come across on forums or at support groups and then we talk on the phone or chat online."

"Using social media to keep in contact in between meeting up maintains relationships and can make it easier when you see people again."

Checking out what is going on locally

"I like it for seeing what's going on in my community. I also do some self-help research on how I'm feeling and what support I can get."

"There are all sorts of things that are free and you can enjoy. It is easy to hear about them once you get onto the right local websites."

Buying items more easily or more cheaply

There are now many situations where it is easier – and often cheaper – to buy things through the internet. Some of the examples people gave were

- Making savings on buying services online like insurance, gas and electricity
- Better deals on items like food, clothes and books
- Travel tickets
- Tickets for events like concerts and films.

"I have booked concert tickets and paid for them online - I'm well chuffed and will do it again!"

"One of the guys at the Centre was looking for cheaper house insurance. Then some of the rest of us tried it too. You really can get savings by shopping around."

Banking

People liked being able to managing their money through online banking and getting better deals for savings and borrowing.

"I do my banking online. I find it much easier than having to go into a bank and speak to someone."

And more

Other suggestions for using the internet include

- Checking timetables for trains and buses
- Playing games such as scrabble and chess
- Finding out how to do things
- Getting recipies
- Listening to music and radio
- Watching television and films
- Pursuing hobbies and interests and connecting with people who do the same

- Looking at maps to plot walks
- Checking driving routes before leaving home
- Recording steps and activity levels
- Looking for music for a singing group
- Finding out about family history

"You can live at a time and pace that suits you. For example, if you have trouble sleeping you can sort out your food shopping to be delivered. With different time zones and the whole world using the internet there will always be people awake and willing to talk."

Example - Art Group for people with poor mental health

One group of artists meet up regularly for an 8 week art course. No one lives near each other and they tend to only see each other during the art sessions but they all get on well and have a lot in common with each other. But each time a new course started, after a break of a few weeks, they felt like they were getting to know each other again. So they decided to set up a facebook page just for them to use to keep in touch in between art sessions and between courses. It's a closed page so people have to invited to join. They share their art work and ideas and now meet up outside the art classes too.

Some downsides to think about

Nothing is perfect and there are some downsides to using the internet. People's experience is that if you know about the potential difficulties first it can help keep you safe.

It can be very easy to avoid social contacts and stick with using the computer. That's OK to get through that day or so, but in the long-term it is not as good as meeting people. The risk is that you get out of the way of engaging with people.

Try not to spend time on internet and social media instead of meeting people. Also set limits for yourself on how long or how often you use digital media. Meeting people and having a connection is generally good for your mental wellbeing.

Not all websites have accurate and helpful information. They can sometimes offer poor or misleading advice and information that doesn't help people. It's best to start by exploring websites that have been recommended to you by people who you trust.

Bullying and trolling can be a worry for people. Many of us have heard of it even if we haven't experienced it. Try to use social media forums where there is someone moderating or checking the discussion and report anything you are uncomfortable about.

Think about who you will contact if anything does upset you – talking to a friend, people at a wellbeing project or a support worker. In case you can't speak to someone for a day or so, have a plan for immediate reassurance. This could be going to music that you love or to one of the relaxation or positive wellbeing websites. It could also be an internet forum that is very supportive.

Don't give out personal information in internet discussions. In most forums you don't have to give your real name: you can use a nickname or user name which gives some protection.

We all worry about making mistakes such as clicking wrong button and buying things you haven't intended to buy. For most purchases, you are asked a few times to check before the sale goes through so you have time to change your mind or double check. You can always ask someone to double check for you. And you can send the item back if you don't want it.

"I worry that people can find things out about me. So I'm very careful never giving out personal information and making sure no one can see the screen I am using."

"My worker and friends have helped me feel confident using the internet."

Top Tips for getting online cheaply

All libraries have computers and free internet access. All you have to do is join the library.

"I use the library to get internet access. I don't have it at home. The library assistants are really helpful."

"Free access in the library and the help I get there is really useful."

There are digital cafes or other ways to get online at many Community Centres.

Check out if you can get lower prices if several of you buy computers or get other equipment or services.

There are mental health services that have space or times for people to use computers there.

"There are a couple of computers at the drop in that anyone can use."

"The project is running a digital inclusion club and teaching people how to use computers, use the internet and all that."

"I prefer to use computers when there are other people about anyway. That way if I get into a fankle someone can help me."

Top tips to keep you safe online

Be careful with your personal information.

- Avoid giving details of your full name, address, phone numbers and email addresses or images where they can be easily seen, especially in social media like Facebook or internet forums.
- Don't give too much personal information about location, address and names of friends and family on social media and internet forums.
- Never give out personal details to online friends you do not know offline and in real life.
- Do not share other people's personal information.
- Do not share passwords, user names, account numbers and passwords or your bank PINs with anyone.

Do not leave mobile phones or other personal electronics like tablets and laptops unattended in public places.

It can useful when learning how to do new things, like on-line shopping or buying tickets, to have other people around you to help you, check over things and talk things through if you are getting anxious.

Don't post anything online that you wouldn't want friends and family or future employers to see.

Don't say things that might violate the safety or rights of others, even if you mean it as a "joke".

Remember that once you post information online, you can't take it back. Even if you delete the information from a site, older versions may exist on other people's computers.

Don't open messages or attachments from someone you don't know. It could be a computer virus or an inappropriate image or film.

Learn to look after yourself at times when you may be more vulnerable. For example, don't do complicated purchases when you are feeling tired and can't concentrate so well.

"I do worry I that have got the wrong dates for tickets and things but I check and double check before I press the button. It's been OK so far but I can't afford to waste money."

Quick tip for online safety

Many websites ask for personal information, either for security reasons or for their own marketing purposes – but you don't need to give your real information. Giving something made up is actually better for safety, as no-one else could know it.

For example: what school did you got to?: Polar Bear High School. Mother's maiden name?: Godzilla.

Top Tips for groups

These are suggestions for any groups: of friends, when people come together at a community project or a mental health services, or a Mental Health Forum or other participation group.

You can help each other learn and become more confident around the technology, such as computer buddies, or sessions on how to cope with new mobile phones.

You can be there for each other if anyone gets anxious or upset about anything.

Have safe ways for people to be part of the group through social media, such as a closed Facebook page. This also helps people learn about how to keep themselves safe.

Give people who do not have access to technology themselves opportunities to use it through the group. An example is encouraging people who have not done this before to be part of the newsletter group and learn about putting things online as well as designing it on the computer for the print version.

Look for ways to let people have access to technology or build up their confidence. An example could be letting people who are in touch with a service use office equipment: set a time when it is not being used for people to come along, with password protection for staff's files so everyone knows there is no risk of anyone's confidential information being shared.

Finally

The people who helped us develop these Hints found that that using the digital technologies and the internet had improved their lives, making some things easier and giving alternative ways to do things.

"I can keep in touch with people when I don't feel like going out and seeing people."

"It opens the world so you don't feel so isolated."

"I'm confident with computers and technology but ask for help when I need it. YouTube is really good for watching how to do things."

Some useful websites

Mental health websites

Doc Ready is a useful website to help you prepare for talking to your doctor about your mental health.
http://www.docready.org/static/client/index.html#/home

Moodjuice is a website that helps you explore your feelings and thoughts. It is developed by Choose Life Falkirk and the Adult Clinical Psychology Service, NHS Forth Valley
http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk

Breathing Space is a website and phoneline for times of difficulty to provide a safe and supportive space by listening, offering advice and providing information.
Telephone 0800 838 587
http://breathingspace.scot

Mindwaves is an online space to read and share positive news about mental wellbeing. A network of Community Correspondents seek out stories to keep you informed about what's happening in Greater Glasgow and Clyde area.
http://www.mindwavesnews.com

OPEN Glasgow Community Map is an example of interactive tool to share local knowledge on services and activities in the community.
http://open.glasgow.gov.uk/community

Ayemind shares the experiences of how young people between 15 and 21 used the internet in relation to their mental health. It is a collaboration between NHS Greater Glasgow, Mental Health Foundation, Young Scot and Snook.
http://ayemind.com

The young people explored the kind of services that would help foster mental wellbeing. Developing the ability to understand, express and share problems and emotions constructively is key. It doesn't necessarily prevent the onset of mental illness but is necessary to manage it positively.
http://ayemind.com/co-design

A Day in the Life is a year-long project to collect the everyday experiences of people who experience mental health difficulties in England. The everyday life of people with mental health difficulties has tended to remain hidden. The project is also designed to better educate and raise awareness among the wider public of the reality of mental health issues.
https://dayinthelifemh.org.uk

Bipolar Uk is a website and community forum that supports people
http://www.bipolaruk.org.uk/e-community

Scottish Recovery Network shares information for people affected by mental health problems to help them in their recovery journey.
www.scottishrecovery.net

Write to Recovery is a website that helps people write their recovery story. If they want to, they can then share it with other people.
http://www.writetorecovery.net

Help with using the internet

Let's get on is a website to encourage and support people to develop online skills, or help friends and family take that first step.
http://www.letsgeton.sco

Learn my way has information and short courses to help people get started using the internet safely and specific courses on how to use online banking, how to buy things and how to use social media.
http://www.learnmyway.com/subjects/online-plus

Contact and thanks

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