



## Our Futures and AI

# Risks of AI in a Youth Work Setting

Engaging with AI in youth work brings unique risks and challenges that require careful navigation. AI is not a neutral tool. It can reflect and amplify existing social biases, privacy issues, and ethical dilemmas. In youth work, where the wellbeing and development of young people are central, it is essential to recognise and mitigate these risks. Proactively addressing them helps to:

- Protect young people from harm, misinformation, and exploitation.
- Uphold rights-based practice in line with the UNCRC.
- Build digital resilience and critical thinking among young people.
- Ensure that AI exploration is conducted safely, ethically, and inclusively.



# Potential Risks and Strategies:

## 1. Misinformation & “AI Hallucinations”

- AI can generate plausible but incorrect or misleading information.
- Impact on young people’s understanding of topics, news, and facts.
  - » **Strategies:** Fact-checking, source verification, and critical questioning.

## 2. Bias & Discrimination

- AI systems often replicate and amplify societal biases, including gender, race, and disability.
- Risk of reinforcing stereotypes or excluding underrepresented groups.
  - » **Strategies:** Practical activities to help young people identify and challenge bias in AI outputs.

## 3. Privacy & Data Security

- AI tools may collect, store, or misuse personal data.
- Risks related to sharing sensitive information with AI platforms.
  - » **Strategies:** Guidance on choosing tools with strong privacy policies and strengthening young people’s data literacy.

## 4. Mental Health & Wellbeing

- Exposure to AI-generated content that promotes unrealistic beauty standards, harmful comparisons, or negative self-image.
- AI-driven social media algorithms can amplify anxiety, loneliness, or cyberbullying.
  - » **Strategies:** Facilitating discussions about digital wellbeing and healthy online habits.

## 5. Over-Reliance & Skill Erosion

- Risk of young people becoming dependent on AI for tasks like writing, problem-solving, or creativity.
  - » **Strategies:** Balancing AI use with the development of independent research, critical thinking, and creative skills.

## 6. Ethical & Legal Concerns

- Use of copyrighted material in AI training without consent.
- Deepfakes, synthetic media, and identity misuse.
  - » **Strategies:** Promoting ethical AI tools and prompting, discussing the concept of digital dignity, and ensuring young people know how to report synthetic abuse on platforms they use.

## 7. Access & Digital Exclusion

- Not all young people have equal access to devices, data, or digital skills.
- Risk of widening inequalities if AI activities assume a high level of digital access.
  - » **Strategies:** Suggestions for low-tech or unplugged alternatives.

## 8. Safeguarding & Inappropriate Content

- AI tools may generate unsafe, violent, or age-inappropriate content.
  - » **Strategies:** Importance of using moderated, youth-friendly platforms and setting clear boundaries.

## Practical Risk Mitigation Strategies for Youth Workers:

- **Pre-session checks:** Test AI tools in advance for suitability and safety.
- **Clear guidelines:** Co-create ground rules with young people about AI use.
- **Use of approved tools:** Recommend platforms with strong safeguarding features.
- **Ongoing conversations:** Regularly reflect with young people on their experiences with AI.
- **Signposting:** Know where to refer young people for support if they encounter harmful content.

## Contributors

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**digital**  
YOUTH WORK

Digital Youth Work  
[digitalyouthwork.scot](http://digitalyouthwork.scot)

YouthLink Scotland  
[youthlink.scot](http://youthlink.scot)  
[info@youthlink.scot](mailto:info@youthlink.scot)

Caledonian Exchange, 19A Canning St  
Edinburgh, EH3 8EG  
Scottish Charity No. SC003923