FAQ guide to Kooth for parents and carers



We spoke to parents and carers across the UK with the aim of better understanding what questions they had about Kooth, our children and young people's service.

We collated the most commonly asked questions that came up about Kooth and have outlined everything you might want to know about us in this FAQs guide.

But first, here's a little bit of information about us.

Kooth is an online, mental health and wellbeing service for children and young people.

Some things we'd like you to remember about Kooth include:

- We're completely free to use.
- Children and young people are anonymous to us.
- No bullying or discrimination of any kind takes place on our site
- There's no need for any kind of referral to join.
- Signing up and getting started only takes a few minutes.
- No problem is too big or small.

What you'll find on Kooth includes:

- Live text-based chat sessions with a mental health practitioner.
- Send a message to our team inbox anytime.
- Support from our online community of young people.
- A range of self-help tools.
- Helpful content written by other young people and our professional team.

Live chat times are:

Monday to Friday: 12pm - 10pm
Saturday and Sunday 6pm - 10pm

Hours may vary during the Christmas period, new year period and bank holidays but we are available 365 days a year.

Children and young people can visit **www.kooth.com** today to start accessing support.

What will happen when my child logs in to Kooth?

Making an account at Kooth is quick and straightforward; we ask for a few bits of personal information, but nothing we could identify them from. The person selects a username and password, and then immediately they are able to access a lot of the site.

This includes articles, written by Kooth staff and by other service users, exploring different aspects of health, wellbeing, and day-to-day life.

There are also discussion boards around particular questions or concerns, and various spaces that individuals can use for themselves such as a journal, mini-activities (designed to support mental wellbeing), and a goal setting area. They can also, if they wish, send a message to our team of practitioners, or come and join the chat queue for a live text-based conversation with a practitioner.

If someone joins a chat with a practitioner, they will be asked to complete one or two questionnaires, to help us understand more about how things are for them at the moment.

They will then be offered up to an hour of 'speaking' (using text-based communication) to the practitioner, which will typically include thinking about any challenges or concerns they have, setting some goals, and considering how Kooth can best support them. For some individuals, we may suggest a series of weekly chats, with a named practitioner, working towards a particular outcome.



What qualifications and experience do the practitioners have?

Our practitioners are made up of counsellors and emotional wellbeing practitioners, all of whom have an enhanced DBS check. Our counsellors all meet the requirements to be eligible for counselling accreditation, and some have achieved that accreditation as well. Our emotional wellbeing practitioners are a multidisciplinary team of experienced mental health practitioners who have a qualification in a relevant field (e.g. social work, mental health nursing, psychology).

All of our practitioners are supported and supervised by an experienced team of qualified clinical specialists, and their work is governed and audited internally through an industry standard best practice.

What might be helpful things to say to my child if they say they are using Kooth?

If your child tells you that they're using Kooth, we understand that you might want to ask lots of questions about 'why' and 'what for.' We'd encourage you to thank them for telling you, and to ask more open questions such as 'are you finding it helpful,' 'is there anything you'd like to share with me about it' or similar.

You can also reassure them that, 'if you ever want to tell me anything about how you're thinking and feeling, I'm happy to listen.' Try not to ask them lots of questions, but to give some validation and encouragement about them seeking support if they need it, and that we all need some extra help at times.

How do you manage any safeguarding or risk concerns, when the young people using Kooth are anonymous?

We believe that our anonymity supports effective safeguarding, rather than acting as a barrier. We also believe that a young person who is actively choosing to sign up to the service and seek help, is taking a really positive step for them. Young people consistently tell us that the anonymity aspect of our service enables them to disclose things that they wouldn't otherwise tell anyone.

If any user tells us something concerning, regarding their safety, or that of anyone else, we would request their personal identifiable information in order to help us safeguard them. Sometimes, our users do not feel comfortable giving us this information. In these situations, we will work with them to develop a safety plan and to understand and address the barriers to accessing other services. We will also signpost them to other relevant services for young people who might be able to support them, such as SHOUT.

Why do you encourage users to keep their username and password private?

We encourage all of our users to ensure that their log in details are private. This is to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. We know that users may not disclose things if they are concerned that their family or friends are able to see that information.

However, a lot of our work often includes encouraging our users to speak to their friends and family about their difficulties, and to seek support from them.

How do I know that what's on Kooth is safe and appropriate for my child?

Everything that is submitted to the platform is moderated before it is published. This might be a comment on a forum or an article they've written for example. This is conducted by our team of highly skilled moderators, who have completed our bespoke moderation training.

Our moderators review all submissions to ensure that it meets our community boundaries and age ratings guidance. If a submission contains information that suggests a user is at risk from themselves or others, we would reach out to them with a message and escalate our processes appropriately.

Some submissions may be edited, or not published at all, if they do not meet our boundaries and guidelines. This process ensures that no bullying, harassment or trolling takes place on the site and this is something we feel very strongly about.

Can an adult sign up to Kooth and what happens if they do?

Our sign up process relies on trust that people select accurate responses around their demographic information, including age. This does mean that it is possible for adult individuals to sign up with an account where they are claiming to be a young person.

However, our continuous safeguarding and moderation processes ensure that even if this was the case, they would not be able to interact inappropriately with other users. Service users are also unable to privately message each other on the site.

We also ensure that no personal identifiable information of any users is published to the site.

What if the advice that young people give each other is not safe, helpful or evidence based?

We find that a lot of our users really value the opportunity to connect with their peers. It helps them to feel that they are not alone with their difficulties, and to hear more about how others might have managed them.

A lot of our users also appreciate being able to offer support to others through the Kooth community. Our moderation processes ensure that we don't publish inappropriate or dangerous advice.

Why can't I be informed of what my child is discussing/sharing, especially if it involves risk to their health and wellbeing?

We know that, as a parent or carer, you want to be aware of any important aspects of your child's life, including their mental health. We also know that, for all of us, it's important to have spaces that feel safe and where we can share some of our thoughts and feelings, without worrying about the impact on the person that we're talking to.
There are a lot of reasons as to why people may not feel able to share their difficulties with friends and family.
Please be assured that we would encourage individuals to speak to their support network about what they were experiencing, and that if we are able to, we will ensure that key figures such as parents/carers are aware of those difficulties.

One of the things we also consider and assess, is whether somebody has the mental capacity and understanding to consent to counselling. This is something that they have the right to consent to, if they have the capacity to do so, without their parents or caregivers being informed. If someone does not have the capacity to consent to counselling, we would adjust the way in which we work with them, offering more of a 'key work' style of support. Essentially, we always think about how to provide each service user with the most appropriate and effective support for them.

Why might someone use Kooth instead of accessing face-to-face support?

There are lots of great face-to-face services that can provide effective support for people. However, there are some barriers to these services, including their geographical location, waiting lists, and thresholds for accessing them.

We've found that some people prefer to use a service like Kooth, which they can access outside of 'traditional' hours and from wherever they are. We do not have a waiting list or thresholds for access, so it can also be helpful for people who want to access support at the present moment, before things may worsen with their mental health.

Some people also feel there is some shame and stigma attached with attending face-to-face mental health services, especially if their peers may see them e.g. at school. Anonymity can support individuals to access support in a way that remains confidential from those around them.

In addition, young people who have additional needs, neurodiversity, or disabilities that make traditional services inaccessible or difficult to navigate, may find Kooth a more manageable way to access support.

Why might my child not get to speak to a practitioner when they request a chat session?

When a service user joins the chat queue, we try to connect them with a Kooth practitioner as soon as possible. Unfortunately the service does get very busy at times, especially towards the end of the evening shift which runs up to 10pm.

If it looks like someone is not going to be able to access a chat, we will ensure that we send them a message, to try and offer some support and to signpost them to other relevant resources and areas of the site such as activities, articles and journaling.

We also look to take into account when prioritising the chat queue anyone who has tried to speak to a practitioner that week, but has not been able to.

What if my child asks for counselling but they are not ready for it?
One of the things we always consider and assess, is whether someone has the 'mental capacity' and understanding to consent to counselling.

If someone does not have the capacity to consent to counselling, we would adjust the way in which we work with them, offering more of a 'key work' style support. This focuses on the 'here and now,' and developing coping skills and strategies.

How can I trust Kooth provides effective support?
Kooth was established in the UK over 20 years ago and is the largest digital provider of mental services for children and young people.

It is commissioned primarily by the National Health Service (NHS) and is the only digital service of its kind to be accredited by the British Association of Counseling and Psychotherapy (BACP). There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating its impact for children and young people in the UK.

Our approach is tried and tested and always taking into consideration our 'user voice' - in other words Kooth has been built for young people WITH young people. Please do contact us at contact@kooth.com if you would like to see some of our publications demonstrating our reach and impact in the UK which you can find at **koothplc.com/about-us/research.**

How can I help my child if they are experiencing mental health difficulties?

It can be really difficult to know how best to support someone you care about, when they're experiencing mental health difficulties. There are some great support spaces for parents and carers, such as the Charlie Waller Trust.

There's a lot of truth in the cliche that you need to look after yourself in order to look after others! It's okay to feel frustrated or helpless at times. Try to show your child that you care about them and are there to support them, but without forcing them to talk to you.

Sometimes it can be helpful to ask what they need, e.g. 'I know that things are difficult for you at the moment. I really want to help, but I'm not sure of the best way to do that. Is there anything that you think I could do to support you?' Of course, at times you may as a parent need to be more assertive around ensuring they access support, or seeking medical treatment when required, and we would encourage you to discuss any of those concerns with their GP or with mental health professionals.



Do we offer any support for adults?

The answer is yes. Our adult service is called Qwell and offers a very similar support package to Kooth. However, everything on offer has been catered to the needs of adults as opposed to children and young people.

Qwell is an online, mental health and wellbeing service for adults.

Some things we'd like you to remember about Qwell include:

- We're completely free to use.
- You're anonymous to us.
- No bullying or hate speech takes place on our site.
- You don't need any kind of referral to join.
- Signing up and getting started only takes a few minutes.
- No problem is too small to share with us.

What you'll find on Qwell includes:

- Text-based counselling and wellbeing support.
- Send a message to to our team inbox anytime.
- Support from an online community of other adults.
- A range of self-help tools including your own journal space and goal tracking.
- Helpful content written by other adults and our professional team.

Live chat times are:

Monday to Friday: 12pm - 10pm
Saturday and Sunday 6pm - 10pm

Hours may vary during the Christmas period, new year period and bank holidays but we are available 365 days a year.

Visit **www.qwell.io** to get started.