

DIGITAL COMMUNITIES WALES

DIGITAL COMPANIONS – HOW YOU CAN HELP SOMEONE GET ONLINE

A digital companion is someone who gives up some of their time to help introduce a friend, family member or neighbour to the online world. If you want to show someone how to use the internet for the first time, or help someone to improve their skills, you can follow our step-by-step guide and top tips.

You don't need to be a computer expert to be able to provide good help. If you feel confident using the internet by yourself, you know enough to show someone the amazing things you can do when you go online.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Learning to use the internet might be a rather scary idea for someone who's never been online. Start small.

Your companion may be fearful of going online. They might feel nervous, think it's dangerous, think they're too old, or that there's no point. Being a companion takes patience. It might take some time, but there are rewards for both of you. You can really make a difference to that person's life.

STEP 01

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Life as a digital companion doesn't begin with technology. It all starts with a chat. You can find out about someone's history, ask what they enjoy doing in life, what their hobbies are and what activities they like taking part in. Do they like football, scrabble, knitting or cooking? Where did they grow up? Where have they visited on holiday? Where do they wish they'd been?

STEP 02

INTRODUCE THE TECH

Using what you've learnt about your companion, offer to help them follow these interests by introducing them to the online world.

Explain that you don't want to show them everything, but you think there are one or two things that they might find useful or interesting. Explain what the benefits are and give them the chance to ask questions. Try and make sure everything you show them relates to their life, hobbies and interests. This will help them to see that being online really is something that can benefit them.

On the first day it could be just checking the weather or what's on TV, which can give older people a sense of instant achievement. You could also try playing games, showing them news sites or watching videos.

Don't rush them: if they're not ready to start right now, try and agree a time that you can both put aside. Tell them they can stop anytime they want to.

STEP 03

KEEP IT GOING

Now is the time to look to the future and finding a way to keep your companion interested in being online. Think about more complex, longer-term goals, like having a video call with a relative, joining a group on Zoom, or tracing their family history.

Think about longer term options for connecting to the internet. You can also look at the different devices available and what might suit your companion. Explore these with your companion. You really will be making a difference in your companion's life, starting them on a journey that could provide benefits in so many ways.



TOP TIPS:

MAKE TIME

it doesn't have to be long - in fact, don't try to do too much at once – but avoid busy times with constant interruptions.

BE PREPARED

Make sure your companion can connect to the internet, has a device which meets their needs, and you've got all the passwords you'll need.

SLOW IT DOWN

Don't launch into anything straight away. Have a chat, find out what they want to learn. What they can do, what they worry about.

REASSURE

Remind them as much as they need to hear it, that they can do it, that you will support them, that they are doing well.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Do a little bit at a time, and don't overwhelm them. Stop when you think that they have had enough for one day. It may take some time, but it will be worth it.





RELAX

Try not to have a set idea of what someone should be doing online or have a list of things they must know – if they don't want an email address just now, that's fine.



FIND THE HOOK

Find out what they love, what they miss or what they would really like to be doing, and find a way to get them there online – watch sport, listen to their favourite music, find a place they used to visit. Engage them emotionally with the digital world if you can.



MIND YOUR LANGUAGE!

Be supportive in your language, but also be careful not to use words like swipe, download, google, browser, app – without explaining what you mean. We become familiar with terms that make no sense to someone who isn't online.



WHO'S DRIVING?

When someone learns to drive, they sit in the driving seat! Most people learn best by doing, not by watching someone else.



PROBLEM SOLVE

If you come up against a problem, spend some time away from the person researching a solution (YouTube is great for instructional videos and there are some great resources on the DCW website). You can then return with some new ideas.



FOLLOW UP

You can always follow up your support by emailing or sending some written resources. Sometimes giving the person things to try before you meet again can be helpful, but don't overwhelm them if they are not ready.



ABOVE ALL - MAKE IT FUN!

Try to make the sessions enjoyable, or at least have a laugh about it if it does go a bit wrong. And it probably will go wrong. Having a sense of humour is vital.