

Social Media Advice for Parents



Social networking sites are a huge favourite with children because they allow them to stay in touch with friends in chat rooms, meet new people with similar interests and share photos and videos. Used appropriately, social networks are an excellent place for young people to demonstrate their creativity and, in certain respects, avoid isolation as they enjoy a sense of belonging.

To keep children safe when they're using and exposed to social media and networks, there is a level of knowledge required by those of us responsible for their care.

What you ought to know about social media and networking for children

The more you know about the kind of social networking sites your children belong to and what information they like to share, the more likely you'll be able to keep them safe:

- The age limit to join most social networking sites is 13 (difficult to enforce!)
- The most popular social networks include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, Ask.fm and Snapchat; sites aimed at younger children, like Club Penguin and Moshi Monsters, also have a social networking element
- Many sites include an instant message function that allows private conversations between site members
- You can create 'privacy settings' on most social networking sites, so only close friends can search for your children, tag them in a photograph or share what they post
- Most social networking sites have an app, which means your children will have access to the social network from their (or your) smartphone or tablet
- Facebook, for example, has a setting that allows your children to approve or dismiss tags that people add to their posts
- Information shared between friends can be easily copied and may spread widely
- It isn't easy to take back information once it's online, and it can be impossible to recover after someone has shared it
- Not everyone your child meets online will be who they say they are
- Chat rooms and forums are one of the places that online groomers visit to connect with children; they can also be places where people use a lot of sexual language and engage in online flirting.

What are the risks that children may need to deal with?

Unless used appropriately, children are at real risk of exposure to the following:

- Violent, sexual and pornographic content
- Inaccurate or false information, and extreme views
- Harmful behaviours, including self-harm, anorexia and suicide
- Oversharing of personal information
- Bullying, intimidating or frightening behaviour, including actively or unintentionally getting involved in this conduct
- Fake profiles that people use for mischief-making, sexual grooming, stalking, blackmail, extortion, identity theft or hacking.

How such exposure could affect children

Children will be affected in many ways, but here are the most common:

- Fearing they will miss out, which may lead to excessive use
- Getting upset by things they have seen and being uncertain what to do about it
- Engaging, or being pressurised into engaging, in more risky behaviour
- Developing unrealistic ideals of body image and gender
- Being subjected to peer pressure that is difficult to handle
- Creating an online reputation, which may create problems in the future.

Keeping your children safe on social networks

There is no guarantee to keeping children entirely safe, but there are some golden tips:

- Educate yourself on what the various social networks and apps do
- Ask your children to show you which social media sites they use and what they like about them
- Agree with your children when they can join a social networking site and create their profile with them
- Help them to set privacy, location and tagging settings
- Show them how to report people and inappropriate conversations using the 'help' or 'report' tab, and keep a copy of the conversation as evidence

- Teach your children how to block or ignore people (or learn how to do this together), and create a sentence with your children that they can use if they wish to exit an online conversation that makes them uncomfortable
- Set boundaries about which sites they can use and for how long
- Teach your children not to share any personal details (e.g. passwords, address, their real names and their schools)
- Use the site yourself – you can be your children’s friend on Facebook or follower on Twitter
- Explain that friends should be people they know and meeting people they know only online can be dangerous
- Report directly to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) if someone is trying to meet up with your child, or if you think your child is in immediate or imminent danger
- Set rules about what they should and shouldn’t post
- Visit the social media sites and familiarise yourself with each site’s online safety guidelines; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat all have safety and reporting facilities
- Encourage your children to talk to you if they see anything that upsets them.

For more information

You can find out more about how children use social media, the apps they use, the risks they face, how to use privacy settings and tips on how to talk to your children on the following websites:

www.childnet.com/sns

www.internetmatters.org

www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety

www.parentzone.org.uk

www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents

www.askaboutgames.com

If you’re concerned about online grooming or sexual behaviour online, report it to the CEOP at www.ceop.police.uk.

If you stumble across criminal, sexual or obscene content on the internet, you should report it to the Internet Watch Foundation at www.iwf.org.uk.

How we can help you?

Should you need to discuss any of this information, advice and guidance with a member of staff, get in touch either by telephone on 020 8550 4630 or emailing admin@gilbertcolvin.redbridge.sch.uk.

We’re here to help.