



Young People and Social Networking Platforms

Social networking apps such as **Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat** are very popular with young people, even those who are of primary age. These types of services allow young people to be creative online and keep in touch with their friends, as well as share photos and videos. On some social networks, young people can follow their favourite celebrity which means they can access the content they update and share. However, for parents and carers it's important to have a look at these services either by creating your own account to try an app out, or by creating an account together with your child to familiarise yourself with how it works. **Most services stipulate a minimum user age of 13**, although some interactive services are designed specifically for younger children.



By understanding these services and their potential risks you can help to support your child in choosing an appropriate service and using it in a safe and constructive way, and be able to help them if they need it.

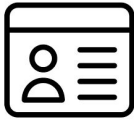
Many things can contribute to your child's **digital footprint** including what they post and who they interact with. Young people are accessing and using social networking services on a range of devices such as mobile phones, tablets and gaming devices. They use social networking services for many different purposes; to communicate with their friends, to share photos, to play games and to find out new information. **You need to remind your child however that they need to be careful about what they're posting online and who can see it.** Children can sometimes believe that social networking services are a private space for them and it can be difficult for them to realise that actually what they're posting online may be public and can be spread very quickly and to a large audience.



Content: Children who **create or post inappropriate, offensive or even illegal content in their own or others' pages** and feeds could get themselves into trouble with their school, friends, or even break the law, depending on the nature of the material. It's also important that young people understand the longevity of posting something online. **Once content is uploaded, it could potentially stay online forever.** Regardless of whether the owner takes down the content, anyone who had access to that content could have copied it for themselves, kept it for their own records or distributed it further. Content which is uploaded online can be **copied, altered and reposted by anyone** and it is very difficult to 'take back' things that may be later regretted. This can damage friendships/relationships, reputations and even future prospects.



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Contact: Young people need to be aware that any **personal information they upload could potentially reach a much wider audience than intended**. If a user of a social networking service doesn't protect their information by enabling the correct privacy settings, they could be exposing their information to strangers and as a result be at risk of online contact and grooming. Posting or chatting about personal details might enable someone to identify and contact your child online or in person.

There is also the more likely risk of **cyberbullying** with young people intentionally harming another person online. Talk to your child about why protecting their privacy online is important and talk through the available privacy settings with them. It's a good idea to talk to your child about their social networking life online. In the same way that you might ask them about their social life offline, talking about social networking services together is no different. Why not start with a positive conversation about what they like to do online, and why they like the services that they use? You can then ask them whether they know where to go for help, or whether they know how to make their profile private, or even ask them to help you with your privacy settings.

There are a range of free resources available for parents and carers, which you can use to support your child online:

Useful conversation starters for parents and children

www.childnet.com/have-a-conversation

Guides to safety features on social networking sites

www.saferinternet.org.uk/safety-tools

Tips and guidance on the privacy features of popular social networking sites

www.saferinternet.org.uk/checklists

Advice for parents and carers on hot topics in online safety

www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics

SMART Rules to go through with your children

www.childnet.com/primary

To report any suspected online sexual abuse or grooming to the police, please go to www.ceop.police.uk

Further advice to discuss with your child



Privacy settings: These settings give the user the ability to control who they share particular content with, for example making a photo you post visible to friends only or to the public. Encourage children and young people to use the privacy tools available on the



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social networking service to protect their personal information and to keep their passwords private (even from their friends). Information on how to do this can be found at www.saferinternet.org.uk/checklists

Most social networking sites give safety advice and information on their safety tools. Links to this advice and information can be found at www.saferinternet.org.uk/safety-tools

Online Friendship: Remind your child to consider carefully **who they add as friends or followers**, and what those friends and followers can see once added to a contact list. Your most trustworthy online friends are the people you also know and trust offline.

Geolocation: Young people must be aware of **who they are sharing their location with**. If they are accessing a social networking service via a smartphone or mobile device, they might be disclosing their location without realising it. **Location services** can be turned on or off per app within the settings of a device.

Think Before You Post: Emphasise the importance of thinking before you post something online. This can include writing a comment or sharing a picture. It can also include sharing on things that others have posted. Discuss with them what is and isn't okay to say in a post and remind them that sometimes messages online can be misunderstood. What may start out as a harmless joke for one person can be extremely hurtful for another individual and once something is posted online it is potentially there forever. Your online reputation can also be affected by other behaviour, such as groups you join or clicking 'likes'.

Consider the photos you upload: It's important that children consider the content of the images they share online, and the impact they may have on their own reputation, and the emotions of others. They should always ensure that they ask permission from others before posting pictures of them online.

Know how to block and report: Make sure children and young people know how to report abusive comments or illegal activity on social networking services. Many social networking sites allow you to report a comment or user who is potentially breaking their terms and conditions, by clicking on a report button or filling out an online form. If young people have concerns about cyberbullying then they should speak to a trusted adult as well as save the evidence, and use the tools available to block other users. If you have concerns that your child is or has been the subject of inappropriate sexual contact or approached by another person, it's vital that you report it to the police via the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (www.ceop.police.uk).

Security: Make sure your child chooses a strong password, avoiding identifiable words or phrases such as birthdays and pets names. A good password should also include a mixture of upper and lower case letters, numbers and symbols. Once your child has finished using a social networking service it is important for them to log out, especially when using a public or shared computer. Make sure they have locked their mobile device with a pin or password, as mislaid devices can mean that others could access their social networking accounts.



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Cyberbullying



Cyberbullying is when someone uses technology, such as the internet or a mobile device to bully others.

Cyberbullying includes things such as **sending nasty text messages, excluding others from messaging apps, 'hacking' into someone else's social media account, pretending to be them, 'tagging' people into statuses or embarrassing photos about them.** 'Indirect' cyberbullying is bullying where a name isn't mentioned, however it is obvious to all involved who is being talked about eg. 'You know whose dress is disgusting'.

Being a victim of cyberbullying can be very distressing for a young person as messages can be sent anonymously and it is difficult to know who the bully is. Moreover, the bullying doesn't always end once the victim has left wherever the bully might be (eg. school) as it can continue 24/7. When messages and embarrassing photos are shared online and not directly to the person, there are often lots of bystanders and victims can be very upset to see how quickly an embarrassing image or rumour can circulate online.

Tips to help with cyberbullying:

1. **Don't deny access to technology:** this may prevent your child from speaking to you about cyberbullying. When we asked a group of pupils about why they wouldn't tell someone, if they were being cyberbullied, their main response was that they were worried the technology that they use on a daily basis would be taken away from them.
2. **Discuss cyberbullying with your child:** ask them what their understanding of cyberbullying is, and how it is different to physical and face to face bullying. Often young people can confuse bullying with 'banter' and are reluctant to talk to others for fear of being seen to 'not be able to take a joke'. Ask your children how they would react if they were being cyberbullied, or if their friend was being cyberbullied.
3. **Save the evidence:** encourage your child to save the evidence of any messages they receive. They can do this by taking a screenshot of what is happening on the screen, or keeping the messages they've received. You can easily capture a screenshot on most smartphones and tablets by holding down several buttons on the device together (eg. the Home button and Power button). By doing this, they will have proof when they report the cyberbullying.
4. **Don't reply:** most of the time the person targeting them is looking for a reaction when they're teasing or calling someone nasty names. Tell your child not to reply, if they do they're giving them exactly what they want. Instead, they should tell an adult they trust about what they have seen. Reassure your child that if things have gone too far, even if they are at fault too, they should always come to talk to you or a trusted adult, and you will try to figure out together how best to resolve the situation.



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Additional Resources

Think You Know have produced lots of resources to support you and your child in staying safe online. There is a whole host of family activity packs, videos, discussion starters and top tips for parents.

https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets/?utm_source=Thinkuknow&utm_campaign=dd271ec52e-TUK_GLOBAL_12_11_20&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0b54505554-dd271ec52e-64894033
