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Child Safety Online:

A practical guide for parents and carers whose children are using social media

Social networking is hugely popular. Many young people are sophisticated in the way they use social media apps and websites, tailoring their communication for different audiences, and accessing them from a range of devices including smartphones, tablets, and games consoles.

But social media, like all forms of public communication, comes with some risks. Not all of these risks turn into actual problems; and if children never face any risks, they never learn how to deal with them. By helping your child understand what the risks are, you can play a big part in preventing them from turning into problems.

Why children use social media

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Understand the risks children may need to deal with

What they could see or do:

- Seeing or sharing of violent, sexual and pornographic content
- Inaccurate or false information and extreme views
- Promotion of harmful behaviours including self-harm, anorexia and suicide
- Over-sharing of personal information
- Actively or unintentionally getting involved in bullying or hurtful behaviour

Who they might meet:

- People who might bully, intimidate or frighten
- People posing behind fake profiles for:
  - Mischief-making
  - Sexual grooming and stalking
  - Blackmail and extortion
  - Identity theft and hacking

How this could affect them

- Fear of missing out leading to excessive use or exaggeration
- Getting upset by things they have seen and being uncertain about what to do
- Engaging, or being pressured into engaging in more risky behaviour either by accident or by design
- Developing unrealistic, and perhaps depressing ideals of body image and gender
- Becoming subject to peer pressure or interactions that are intense or too difficult to handle
- Creating an online reputation that may create problems for them in the future

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Practical tips to help minimise the risks your child might face

It's good practice for apps and websites to have safety advice and well-designed safety features which can make a real difference to how safe your child will be when using them.

Work through safety and privacy features on the apps that your child is using, or might use. Make sure they understand the point of these and how to use them. Don't be put off by believing your child knows more than you: the tools are actually quite easy to manage.

- **Ask them to show you** which social media apps they use and what they like about them. Talk about how they use them and what makes them so engaging.
- **Explain** how you can use privacy settings to make sure only approved friends can see posts & images.
- **Check if any of their apps have 'geo-location'** enabled, sharing their location unintentionally.
- **Show them how to report offensive comments** or block people who upset them.
- **Check 'tagging' settings** so that when others are posting or sharing photos online, your child's identity is not revealed. Also, get people's consent before sharing photos.
- Encourage your child to **come and talk to you** if they see anything that upsets them.

Keep talking and stay involved

In a mobile age, children can't be completely protected, even by the best privacy controls; another child may use different settings. So it's important to keep talking to your child about the implications of social media. Getting a sense of what they think is a useful place to start; you may be surprised by how much thought they may have given to the issues.

Encourage your child to think carefully about the way they, and others behave online, and how they might deal with difficult situations.

- People may **not always be who they say they are** online: how can this create problems?
- Why is it **unwise to meet** anyone in the real world that you've only ever met online?
- Even if you think your messages are private, remember that words and images can always be **captured and broadcast**.
- People **present themselves differently online** - do they really look like that? Are they always having that good a time?
- Be aware that screens, and especially being anonymous, can lead people to say things they **wouldn't say to someone's face**.
- What does **being a good friend and a likeable person** online look like?
- There can be **pressure to be part of a particular group** online or to be seen to be **following a certain set of ideas**. How can you take a step back and make your own decisions?

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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 advice and tips about how to talk to your children at:

- www.childnet.com/sns
- www.internetmatters.org
- www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety
- www.parentzone.org.uk
- www.thinkyouknow.co.uk/parents
- www.askaboutgames.com

To make a report

Concerned about online grooming or sexual behaviour online? Contact CEOP: 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: www.iwf.org.uk