

Managing Social Media For Children

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Most social media services are restricted to over 13 year olds, however we know that children as young as 8 or 9 years old are using social media to communicate with their friends. A survey in 2014 found that more than half the children had **used social media before the age of 10**. It's an area where children can easily get themselves into a range of difficulties and one which parents should monitor closely.

Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Facebook all offer great communication possibilities but they are all designed for children over 13 years old. Unlike services designed for younger children these are not moderated and users are not verified. This means your child risks being exposed to offensive, illegal or unsuitable content (images, videos or text) for their age group either through their network/friend's posts or from the advertising within the service. As these services are used so widely by adults, the chances of inappropriate individuals becoming friends with your child is high and this leads to significant concern about grooming and cyber-bullying. Predators can very easily lie about their age and personal details.

If your child is under 13 years old we advise against them having social media profiles. Should you choose to allow your child to use social media, here are some tips for managing their behaviour and keeping them safe:

What your child needs to know

- Make your child aware of the dangers of social media:

- People can lie on their profiles – you don't really know who you're talking to unless you know them in real life. This also makes children vulnerable to **grooming**.
- Cyberbullying – they need to be aware both of being bullied and bullying others. **Cyberbullying** includes such behaviour as sending/posting insulting messages or rumours, or sharing embarrassing photos/videos.
- The content shared is permanent and can be seen by anyone – including people you might not want seeing it.
- Ensure your child knows they should:
 - NEVER accept friends they don't know in real life
 - NEVER give out any personal information about themselves or their parents to strangers or say anything that might reveal their identity or where they live. Don't use their real name in their username.
 - NEVER agree to meet someone in person that they have only ever met online before (or at the very least take a parent or trusted adult with them)
 - NEVER post anything online that they would not be happy for a parent or a teacher to see or that they are at all uncomfortable with, and don't bully or threaten anyone
 - NEVER post or re-post pictures, videos or text that is at all sexually explicit or uses inappropriate language

Tips for parents

Before your child uses social media

- Carefully consider whether your child is mature enough to understand how to behave on social media and the reasons for it
- Talk to your child about how they should behave online and ensure they are particularly familiar with the points above
- Set rules – e.g. no use in bedrooms, they must have you as a friend/follower/subscriber. If you have an older child make sure they have some space and freedom too

More tips

- Become familiar with what's **popular**
- Monitor what your child is doing – agree with them how you are going to do this such having access to their account, being their friend/follower/subscriber on the service (something we strongly recommend)
- Ensure your child's profile is private – their name, photo, location etc. should not be available to anyone you don't know in real life
- Make sure your child knows they can turn to you for help, whatever the circumstances, if they are at all worried about anything they have seen or been involved with online

- Get them to install the **CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) application**. This places a link to the CEOP and a Report Abuse button on their profile which can help deter inappropriate contact.
- Look at the **advice provided relating to each specific services**
- Encourage children to think about what they post, help them learn they may feel differently later and don't want to regret what they've posted, in many cases this information is permanently out there – e.g. how it might affect others, how it reflects on them as a person, what it might tell someone about you (whether it gives away any personal information such as where you live, when/where you're going on holiday), if there is anything that could be misinterpreted by others

Teenagers and social media

Social media is hugely popular with young people, but this isn't much different from your teenage years spent chatting on the phone. Make your child aware of the dangers and let them know that you trust them to be responsible by not prying and allowing them some freedom – your parents didn't listen to every conversation you had on the phone! As always keep the lines of communication open so if they do come across any problems, they know they can come to you.

When to worry

Signs to watch out for:

- Changing behaviour
- Secrecy and excessive solitary behaviour
- Hiding, deceitfulness – switching things off as you walk in
- Grades slipping
- Negative friendship changes

How to react:

- Talk to your child – try to understand any issues
- Speak to their friend's parents
- Discuss concerns with the school
- Escalate your response as appropriate