



The Ultimate Parents' Guide To...



For more information and resources visit: www.thinkuknow.com

If you have any further queries about social media or have specific concerns with regard to your child please feel free to contact school.

Your first point of contact should be your child's form tutor and then their Head of Year.

If you have serious concerns about a child protection issue contact the Deputy Headteacher Pete Kenworthy.

General queries about social media can be directed to our Computing Department.



Social Networking



The Ultimate Parents' Guide to Social Networking

The purpose of this guide is to help parents of children starting secondary school to understand some of the issues surrounding social networking sites and other forms of social media.

When your child leaves primary school and begins the next stage of their education it can be a scary time for you and them for many reasons.

Many parents take strict control over what their children do online when they are at primary school but often this changes when they reach secondary school age. For many children this is the first time they are given a smartphone and have instant access to the internet in their pocket - away from their parents' eyes. Parents are naturally concerned over what their children may be experiencing.

This guide will give you some idea of the ways in which your child could be accessing social media, what they may experience on social media sites and how they can protect themselves. This guide is not against social media in any way. We feel that there are many benefits to social media and it is an integral part of modern life. It is, therefore, very important that children use social media responsibly from the outset.

Understanding Privacy Settings

Privacy settings can be a minefield for children and parents alike. They are useful but they are not failsafe. Many sites default to public sharing and often sites like Facebook update their privacy settings and in the process automatically revert everyone's settings to public again. If you are not keeping on top of this you could believe that your settings are private when they're not.

Children are not always aware of the need for privacy settings. They don't feel they have anything to hide and are happy to let everyone see all their posts. But they must be made aware that what is posted on the internet stays on the internet. It creates a permanent digital footprint which will follow them around for the rest of their lives. Something that they think is funny, such as an inappropriate picture or threat may bring upon them a deluge of mean comments, get them excluded or even in trouble with the authorities.

The key is to teach your children to always *think* before they post, remembering to:

- Keep their passwords private
- Not share their school or home address
- Not communicate with people they don't know
- Not click on adverts or links which promise free items
- Use the rule 'if it seems too good to be true, it probably is'
- Set the privacy settings for each site carefully and keep up with the changes.



Be Aware

- Many social media accounts require a child to be over 13 to sign up. If your child is under 13 and really wants to be on social media don't let them lie about their age. Instead set up the account in your name so that you have ultimate control.
- Monitor your child's social media accounts. Until they are 18, or leave your house, what they do and post online is your responsibility. Make sure they know that if they do anything illegal you will be the one in trouble!
- Check social media platforms for secondary accounts that your child may have set up without your knowledge.
- Engage with school or other parents when faced with inappropriate social media behaviour from others. Even if the activity is taking place outside of school, school will still want to know as your child may not be the only one facing this issue.
- Report credible threats or suicide postings to law enforcement.
- Know who your child is friending and liking.

Engage Online

- If you use social media become friends with your children – but be careful about what you post. Set a good example.
- Be wary of how much you engage with your children online and what you say about them. You don't want them to think you're stalking their every move!
- Refrain from posting to or about them publicly.
- Discuss what they post in person, but don't grill them about every post. Pick your battles.
- Don't friend your child's teachers, boss or co-workers.
- Never make online chat a substitute for face-to-face engagement.

General Guidance for Parents

There are many reasons why children do not get together face-to-face and interact with their friends in the 'real' world in the same way or as much as we did when we were young. There are fewer spaces available for children to 'hang' out and parents are often worried about their safety from traffic and strangers, for example. The end result is that most children prefer to 'hang out' online. Whilst there are many advantages to this situation there are also some drawbacks which many children are not aware of because they don't know differently.

- The potential for large numbers of 'friends' is much greater than in the real world.
- There is the potential for those 'friends' to not be who they say they are.
- Children are not always aware of who else is 'listening in' or involved in their conversations.
- Anything posted online is there forever and can be seen by potential colleges, employers and new friends at any time in the future.
- Silly and foolish behaviour can be recorded for posterity with ever-present camera phones and has the potential to be seen by millions of people.
- Inappropriate comments are recorded for all time.

Many of us feel thankful that we were able to make the mistakes of our youth without the threat of a worldwide audience. Unfortunately this is something our children do have to face and they must quickly become aware of how to deal with it and manage the risks.



Conversations and Boundaries.

It is important from the start that your children feel able to discuss their online experience with you. They will be much safer if they feel they can come to you with issues and queries instead of trying to hide their online activity. They also need to know your rules and see that you follow these rules yourself in your own online interactions.

- Chat regularly with your children about how they use social media. You do not have to follow or be friends with your child although this can be a good way to keep in touch.
- Remind your children that anything they post online, on any social media platform, is there forever. Even when they delete it or it disappears, for example on Snapchat, it will still be in the web somewhere and can be retrieved. What they say online can, and probably will, be used against them.
- Often we tell children 'if you wouldn't say it to their face, don't say it online'. In fact they need to be even more cautious than this because what you would say to someone's face can be reacted to and dealt with there and then. Body language, tone and gesture all soften and add nuances to spoken conversations which just aren't there online.
- If in doubt – DON'T type it!
- Encourage them to share any instances where they are uncertain, feel bullied or believe that someone is acting inappropriately. Discuss ways to diffuse and de-escalate these situations rather than turn them into online rants and arguments.
- Stress that bullying is never acceptable – face-to-face or online.

- If your child is making inappropriate, hurtful or bullying comments take strong action and block their access to social media until you have got to the bottom of the root cause of the issue. Teasing is a normal and inevitable part of growing up and done with humour can help children develop a sense of appropriate rapport. This is often lost in online conversations, though, and one child's joke may be another child's bullying. It is important to stress this to both parties without demonizing either of them.
- If your child is being bullied, document the bullying, block the account and work with school or other authorities based on the severity and threats. Be aware of the circumstances. Is this teasing and joking that has got out of hand? Could the children deal with it themselves in a face-to-face conversation?
- Many issues would be much easier to deal with if children made sure that their online 'friends' were also their real-life 'friends'. This is not always possible, of course, and one of the benefits of Facebook, etc is the opportunity to connect with others with similar interests that you may never actually meet. But try to ensure that your child has a genuine reason for all his or her friends and is not just collecting numbers to try and prove a point.
- Remind your child to never respond to emails or messages from people they don't know in person.
- Make sure they never share passwords.
- Help them to set-up their privacy settings and keep your eye on updates which can revert privacy settings without warning.
- Encourage children to participate in real world activities and to engage with their friends in person.



