

e-Safety for Parents

Edition 4 - Oct 2013

It stands to reason that as children get older they will want to start talking to their friends, and perhaps meet new people whilst online.

In the past few years social networking has exploded; there are now hundreds, thousands maybe, of different ways in which we can interact and communicate on the internet, but social networks are nothing new.

Since the very first days there have always been ways of networking, whether it was through bulletin boards or online forums, but what is clear is that social networking is not going to go away, and younger children will want to use these networks as much as everyone else.

What are these social networks, what is popular with children and young people, what do they get up to and are there any concerns?

Mention social networks and your first thought is probably Facebook; but there are lots more - Twitter, Instagram, Kik, Snapchat, Ask.FM, Tumblr, Vine and Skype are just a small selection of the more popular apps.

Let's be honest, most of us like to talk with others, and that's what social networking is all about - being social. How amazing is it that we can now talk so freely and easily with people from other countries with diverse cultures, connect with other like-minded professionals, collaborate across the seas on educational projects?

Different social networks allow for a variety of information sharing, for example apps such as Instagram and Snapchat allow for sharing of photographs, Twitter allows you to send an update, make a comment or ask a question in 140 characters, Vine allows for a few seconds

of video, and Facebook just wants to do everything for everyone. All of these SN's rely on you having "friends" or "followers". In other words these are people that follow you so that they can read your updates and perhaps have a discussion or share items of interest.

This is a myth; many social networks such as Facebook derive from the U.S. where there is a law called COPPA (Children's Online Privacy and Protection Act). It is against this law to collect personal information from children under the age of 13 to use for targeted advertising.



Because many social networks such as Facebook are unable to prevent this, they simply make it policy that under-13's cannot have a profile. Of course, all a child has to do is put in a false date of birth in order to be able to sign up, there is no verification process.

That is a decision for you as the parent. Remember that many social networks will have an age policy, so the first thing to do is to find out what the lower age limit is in the terms and conditions. I don't recommend allowing an under-age user to have a social networking account, but if you do, learn how to use it, learn how to use the security and privacy settings. See the next page for some more tips.

You don't have to. Remember that e-safety is all about behaviour and risk, not about the technology. For the most part the risks on one site or app are exactly the same as the risks on others. It's not about what is used, but how it is used.

Sometimes children will put themselves at risk as a consequence of not knowing, sometimes as a consequence of not caring.

It is the education that is important and in order for your children to be educated you must educate yourself.

Put it this way - imagine yourself in a big crowd of people, this is your social network. You won't know all the people there; they may be friends of friends, friends of your family, companies trying to get some information from you to sell you things. Within a large crowd of people there are going to be some unsavoury characters, but ask yourself this - what do we teach our children in the real world? Resilience, what to do if they get into danger, who to talk to if they have a concern. We teach them to be streetwise; to know that there are risks in the real world and give them the advice and guidance they need. It is no different in the online world.

As parents we have a very clear-cut base level of knowledge when it comes to keeping our children safe, it is almost instinct. Those very messages are the same in the online world with a few differences. For example in the real world you can see who you are talking to; this isn't necessarily the case in the online world, for example somebody may have set up a false profile and not be who they say they are. M



CEOP is the Child Exploitation and Online Protection centre, a hugely important part of the National Crime Agency. They have recently made a very worrying report regarding children as young as 8 being used as sex slaves, and consequently self-harming or committing suicide as a consequence.

See www.parentsonlinesafety.com for a link to the information and to download a factsheet.

Users of Facebook between the ages had, until recently, pretty strict security settings by default.

Recently Facebook relaxed these settings by allowing users between the ages of 13-17 to now set their posts to public just like their older counterparts.

See www.parentsonlinesafety.com for a link to further information.

You may wish to get rid of an old profile on a social network or website that you no longer use. A relatively new website has appeared that gives you instructions on how to do this, and also gives an indication of how difficult it is to do for each social network and website.

A powerful search engine, as powerful but without all the intrusive ads and collecting of personal information.

DuckDuckGo is just such a website and is a much safer option for your children to use.