



Social Media



Young people are quick to join online communities, but they need parental awareness, advice and some supervision.

What is social networking?

A social network is an online community, often with a common interest. The most common social networking site is Facebook (www.facebook.com) with over 1 billion users worldwide. It allows users to share comments, chat, and post photos in a contained environment with the user in control.

Many popular sites are described as ‘social networking’ but are really best described under other categories. Examples of sites that have social aspects but are not strictly ‘social networking’ include:

- Twitter—a micro blogging site
- YouTube—a video sharing site
- Tumblr—a blogging site
- MSN—an instant messaging program
- Skype—a voice over internet protocol (VOIP) service
- Instagram—a photo sharing application
- Online games with social networking components, such as Club Penguin



What are the risks of social networking?

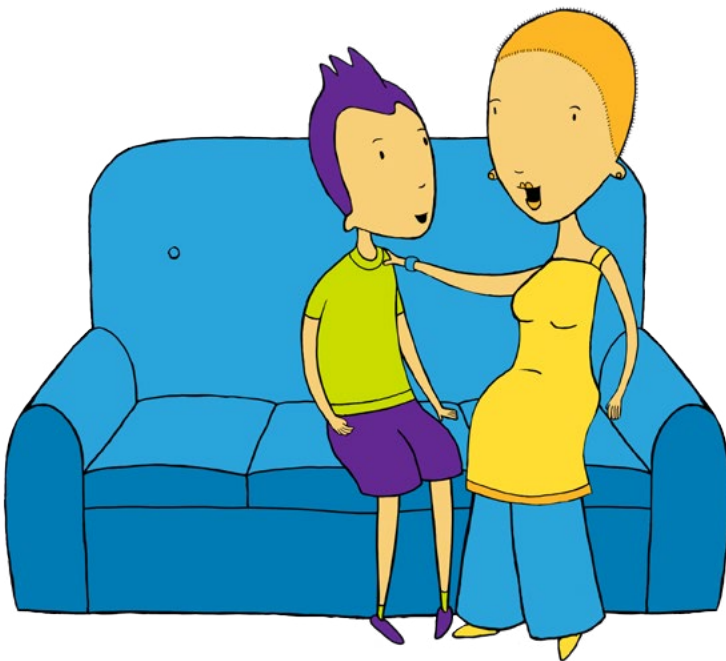
Social networking can be a lot of fun, but can carry risks, especially for children and young people. Many social networking sites have age restrictions (usually 13 years) and it is important for parents to understand the site’s Terms and Conditions of Use. You don’t pick and choose which rules you obey in the real world, don’t do it online either. There is a valid and legal reason for online rules. Don’t allow children to access prohibited accounts regardless of what you may think. Don’t provide excuses for your children. Talk about the rules and why they are important rather than working out a way to circumvent them.

Social networking sites require a large amount of time invested in them, not only to set up, but also to continually check to see that the security/privacy settings are at their highest level. This is particularly important when the account holder is a child. The internet is not a controlled place. Don’t let children wander aimlessly online.

Many social networking sites work on ‘real name’ culture, which means that being truthful in the setting up of an account makes the account safer. You are far better being truthful and then using the security settings to protect your privacy, rather than setting up a fake account, or lying about certain

information such as age. Facebook for example has a range of important safety settings as the 'default' when the account holder is 13—17 years. Many parents are misguided and tell their children to set up the account with an older age for 'safety'. This is NOT a guarantee of safety, sets a poor example and puts the child outside the secure part of the site. Remember it is harder to continually ban access after your child has attained the legal age requirement. You are far better to set up an account with your child together, with clear rules and guidelines, rather than have them set one up at a friend's house behind your back.

Social networking is certainly not all bad, although the media can focus on negative aspects. Embrace social technology with your child and ensure that you have an account on all sites your child does.



What are some ways to assist children and young people in social networking?

Please remember that to assist your child to be safe on social networking sites you must:

- Ensure that they comply with the age restrictions (DO NOT let them on Facebook under 13 years of age)
- Ensure that they understand how the privacy and security settings work
- Ensure that they can change their passwords and they know how to report a problem
- Ensure that they understand the house 'rules' about where they can go, who they talk to and what they post
- Ensure that they know where to go if they have an online issue
- Set up an account yourself and be your child's friend (this is not going to ensure safety but is part of what is expected of you as a parent)
- Know your child's password
- Have house rules about what your child can post and when they can add new 'friends' (must ask you first).