



A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

SOCIAL MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to 'A Parent's Guide To: Social Media.'

This guide aims to help you comprehend the negative effects of inappropriate social media usage among young people. Inside, you will discover a collection of insightful infographics from 'The National College' that you can reference whenever necessary. Additionally, there will be a section dedicated to guides for specific social media platforms.

You'll find practical tips and strategies designed to empower you to have meaningful conversations with your children about their online activities. Our goal is to equip you with the knowledge and tools needed to foster a safe and supportive digital environment for your family. As you navigate through these pages, remember that understanding and communication are key to helping young people develop healthy relationships with social media.

Let's embark on this journey together, ensuring a balanced and informed approach to the digital world.

NATIONAL COLLEGE GUIDES

In this initial section, you will discover general guides designed to assist you in supporting your child in navigating the online world. Covering topics such as group chats, online gaming, and screen addiction, this section aims to inform you and your family about these important issues. You will find practical tips and strategies to foster healthy digital habits, ensuring a safe and enriching online experience for your child. These guides are crafted to empower you with knowledge about privacy settings, managing screen time, and recognising signs of digital overload. By understanding the nuances of these topics, you can confidently support your child in making informed choices and developing a balanced relationship with technology. Whether your child is a budding gamer or an avid social media user, these resources are here to help you guide them through the digital landscape with care and confidence.



ASPIRE

Integrity
Resilience
Endeavour
Professionalism
Self-actualisation
Adaptability
Aspiration

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

"Inappropriate" means different things to different people. What's acceptable for one age group, for example, may be unsuitable for a slightly younger audience. Online, young people can chance upon inappropriate content in various ways – from pop-up ads to TikTok videos. The increasingly young age at which children become active in the digital world heightens the risk of them innocently running into something that they find upsetting or frightening. Trusted adults need to be able to help children be aware of what to do if they're exposed to age-inappropriate content.

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

SOCIAL MEDIA

Age-inappropriate content is easily accessible through many social media platforms. TikTok, for instance, is hugely popular with young people but is arguably best known for clips featuring sexualised dancing or profanity. Some social media users also express hate speech or promote eating disorders and self-harm, which could cause lasting damage to a child's emotional and mental health.

GAMING

Gaming is an enjoyable source of entertainment, but many popular titles can expose children to inappropriate material such as violence, horror, gambling or sexually explicit content. Playing games unsuitable for their age risks normalising to children what they are seeing. Some games also include in-game chat, where other (usually older) online players often use language that you probably wouldn't want your child to hear or repeat.

STREAMING

The range of video streaming services available online means that users can find almost anything they want to watch on demand. Children are therefore at risk of viewing TV shows and movies which contain nudity, drug and alcohol abuse, explicit language and extreme violence. Unfortunately, these streaming platforms can't always determine that it's not an adult who's watching.

ADVERTS

Online adverts frequently include age-inappropriate content: usually gambling and nudity or partial nudity, although adverts for alcohol or e-cigarettes are also common. Some search engines also feature adverts that are responsive to your search history; so if you've recently looked up a new horror movie, shopped for lingerie or ordered alcohol online, then the ads appearing on screen could reflect this the next time your child borrows your device.

18 Advice for Parents & Carers

TALK IT THROUGH

Embarrassment or fear of getting into trouble can make it difficult for children to talk openly about age-inappropriate content they've watched. Remind your child they can always come to you if they're troubled by something they've seen online, without worrying about consequences. Before offering advice, discuss what they saw, how they felt and how they came to find the content in question.

CAN WE HAVE A CHAT?

CONNECT, DON'T CORRECT

If your child's been particularly distressed by exposure to content that wasn't suitable for their age, it's important to offer guidance to prevent them from repeating the same mistake – but it's equally vital to help them deal with the emotions that the situation has raised. You could tell them about any similar experiences you might have had at their age, and how you dealt with it.

BLOCK, REPORT, CONTROL

After discussing the problem, you and your child can take action together. This could include blocking any inappropriate sites and reporting any content which violates a platform's rules. To further safeguard your child online, set up parental controls on internet-enabled devices that they use. This will significantly reduce the chances of your child being exposed to age-inappropriate content in future.



GET SPECIALIST HELP

Age-inappropriate content can potentially have a negative impact on a child's mental health, which is sometimes displayed through changes in their behaviour. If the problem becomes more severe, you might consider reaching out to a mental health professional or an expert in this field who can provide you and your child with the proper support.



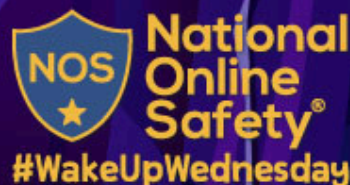
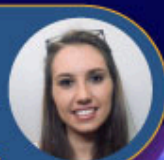
STAY CALM

Even though it is obviously difficult to stay rational in a situation where your child has been put at risk, it's essential to think before you react. Your child may well have hesitated to open up to you about watching inappropriate content for fear of the consequences, so being calm and supportive will reinforce the notion that it would be easy to talk to you about similar issues in the future.



Meet Our Expert

Cayley Jorgensen is a Registered Counsellor with The Health Professions Council of South Africa, and she runs a private practice offering counselling to children, teenagers and families. Her main focus is creating awareness and educating the community on the mental health pressures of today's world, as well as resources and techniques to understand and cope better.



Sources: <https://www.education.gov.au/documents/about/programs/bullystoppers/1/minor-inappropriate.pdf> | <https://www.sa.gov.au/education/training-professionals/professional-learning-program-teaching-inappropriate-content-factheet> | <https://www.welshgality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/children-media-twee-year-7.pdf>

What you need to know about... GAMING STREAMERS & INFLUENCERS



Part of our Gaming & Gambling Series

NOS

Gaming & Gambling



Brought to you by

NOS National Online Safety

www.nationalonlinesafety.com

What are they?

'Gaming Streamers & Influencers'

Streamers are people who stream themselves gaming, drawing, making things etc. for people to watch on the internet. Usually this will be done live, and others are able to chat with them in real time while they do so. Influencers are social media stars who hold influence over the people that follow them, like a kind of trend-setter or taste-maker, who companies often pay to promote their products. A streamer could also be considered an influencer in their chosen area.

JADAGAMING

LIVE

Know the Risks

Adult Content

Many streamers use platforms such as Twitch or YouTube to broadcast themselves. YouTube for example, is only for ages 13+ (YouTube Kids is for under 13s) and may contain a lot of other adult content. Streamers themselves, may be unsuitable for younger audiences with the kind of content they make, and with many opting to stream live, anything can – and does – happen.

Authenticity Risk

A lot of streamers will have some kind of sponsorship deal in place with a company trying to sell their products to an audience. When the audience is mostly younger viewers, they may not realise that streamers are getting paid to promote a product and may not necessarily have their best interests in mind.

Bullying and hate

While some streamers do employ moderators to try and combat hateful comments or bullying in their comments sections, they can still be very hectic. Hateful language is quite common, and people looking to groom children or engage in online bullying behaviour, could frequent the live chats.

Subscriptions

Streamers also make money through subscriptions on websites like Twitch, where fans will donate them a small amount as little or as often as they like. Called 'bits', they can be bought in bundles of varying prices which can be gifted to streamers via 'cheers'. Children could buy these 'bits' in large amounts without realising what they're doing, leaving a big bill behind.

Safety Tips

Discuss what's real online

Be sure to teach kids the difference between what's real and honest, or fake and untrustworthy online. Photoshopping fake images and videos and bragging about themselves online is unfortunately quite commonplace so it is difficult to tell what is real or fake. People with large followings can be promoting unhealthy or unattainable lifestyles to children to boost their own online influence.

Use filters

There are filters that can be put in place to block out a lot of adult content on streaming sites. Just make sure you have access to children's accounts so you can set the parameters and keep track of what they're seeing yourself. Usually, parental controls will be located in the settings portion of an account's menu.

Check age settings

Both YouTube and Twitch state that they are not suitable for children under 13 years old, but other sites might be different. YouTube Kids, for example, is for ages 13 and under, and offers much of the same kid-friendly content that YouTube does without the risk of running into something improper.

Affiliate links

Keep an eye out for affiliate links in social media posts and tags like #ad. UK influencers have to follow the CAP Code for advertising standards, but many don't. It can be hard to tell who is working through legitimate channels because it's almost impossible to regulate. Many streamers encourage fans to buy merchandise through online shops and stores.

Action & Support

Name check streamers

If your child has begun showing an interest in a streamer or influencer, check their names on Google. Some popular streamers have been discovered flouting industry regulations and using their young audiences to enhance their personal wealth through scams whilst others may swear on streams or promote drinking, substance abuse or links to gambling sites they operate to their young audiences.

Talk to your child

Initiate an open dialogue with your child about the kind of content they're consuming online. Ask about their favourite streamers and whether they like their personalities or the games they play and the community they have. Also remind them about what they should and shouldn't be sharing about themselves online and that just because social media stars do it, it can also be damaging.

Block and report

If you suspect a streamer might be taking advantage of their audience, or worse grooming children in any way, and have irrefutable evidence, do not hesitate to block and report them. First, block your child from being able to view their content and alert other parents to your concerns. Go immediately to the police or local authorities with the evidence of what you've seen.

Our Expert Mark Foster



Mark Foster has worked in the gaming industry for 5 years as a writer, editor and presenter. He is the current gaming editor of two of the biggest gaming news sites in the world, UNILAD Gaming and GAMINGbible. Starting gaming from a young age with his siblings, he has a passion for understanding how games and tech work, but more importantly, how to make them safe and fun.

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

GROUP CHATS

On messaging apps, social media and online games, group chats are among the most popular ways that young people engage with their peers online. Involving three or more individuals, these groups allow users to send messages, images and videos to everyone in one place. While they can be great for connecting with others, there are several risks posed by these tools.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

BULLYING

Teens are often trying to find their place in their social group. Unfortunately, group chats can sometimes lend themselves to unkind comments being shared freely, putting people down to make their peers laugh – often creating a vicious circle that encourages others to join in. Being bullied so publicly – in front of friends and acquaintances – can also amplify the hurt, embarrassment and anxiety that the victim feels.

EXCLUSION AND ISOLATION

This common issue with group chats can happen in several ways: for instance, starting a new group, but deliberately excluding a certain child. Likewise, the chat may take place on an app which one person doesn't have access to, meaning they can't be involved. A child can also feel isolated when a group chat is used to discuss events that exclude them – for example, sharing photos from a day out that they didn't attend.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some discussions in group chats may include inappropriate words, swearing and unsuitable images or videos. These could be viewed by a child if they are part of that group, whether they actively engage in it or not. Some apps have features that cause messages to disappear after they're viewed, so children may be unable to report something they've seen, as it can only be viewed once or for a short time.

SHARING GROUP CONTENT

Group chats can feel more private and protected, allowing children to share inside jokes and video calls with a smaller group of friends. It's important to remember that while the chat's content is private between those in the group, individual users can easily share material with others outside of the group, or screenshot what's been posted. The risk of something a child intended as private becoming public is higher if there are strangers in the chat.

UNKNOWN MEMBERS

Within larger group chats, it's more likely for children to communicate with people they don't know. These strangers may be friends of the host, but not necessarily friendly towards everyone present. It's wise for young people to avoid sharing personal details and remember that they have no control over what others do with the material they send into the chat.

NOTIFICATIONS AND FOMO

A drawback of large group chats is the sheer number of notifications they tend to generate. Every time someone sends a message, each member's device will be 'pinged' with an alert. This could result in hundreds of notifications a day. This is often highly distracting, and young people's fear of missing out (FOMO) can cause increased screen time as they try to keep up with the conversation.

Advice for Parents & Carers

CONSIDER OTHERS' FEELINGS

Group chats can become an arena for young people to compete for social status. This could cause them to do or say things on impulse which could upset others. Help children consider how people might feel if they behave in this way. If the child does upset someone, encourage them to reach out, show empathy and apologise for their mistake.

PRACTISE SAFE SHARING

In any online communication, it's vital for young people to be aware of what they're sharing and who might potentially see it. Ensure children understand the importance of not revealing identifiable details like their address, their school, or photos that they wouldn't like to be seen widely. Remind them that once something is shared in a group, they can't be certain where it might end up and how it might be used.

GIVE SUPPORT, NOT JUDGEMENT

Group chats are an excellent way for children to connect and feel like they belong. However, remind them that they can confide in you if they feel bullied or excluded, instead of responding to the person who's upset them. Validate their feelings and empower them by discussing how they'd like to handle the situation. You can also encourage children to speak up if they witness others being picked on.

AVOID INVITING STRANGERS

Sadly, many individuals online hide their identity to gain a child's trust and serve their own ends – for example, to gather information on them, to exchange inappropriate content or to coax them into doing things they aren't comfortable with. Ensure the child understands why they shouldn't add people they don't know to a group chat – and why they should never accept a group chat invitation from a stranger.

BLOCK, REPORT AND LEAVE

If a child is in a chat where inappropriate content is being shared, advise them to block whoever sent the material, report that person to the host app or platform and exit the group. If any of this content could put a minor at risk, contact the police. Emphasise that it's OK for children to simply leave any group chat that makes them feel uncomfortable.

SILENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Having a device bombarded with notifications from a group chat can be an irritating distraction – especially if it's happening late in the evening. Explain to children that they can still be part of the group chat while disabling notifications – and that it would be healthier for them to do so, avoiding a situation where they could feel pressured to respond.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



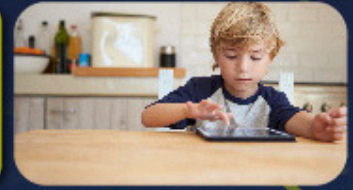
#WakeUpWednesday

The National College

Sources: https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_13/lets-talk-about/socialising-online/group-chats/ | <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/chat-apps/>



Online Grooming is when someone befriends and builds an emotional relationship with a child and communicates with them through the internet with the intent to commit a sexual offence. This type of victimisation can take place across any platform; from social media and messaging apps to online gaming and live streaming. Often it involves young people being tricked, forced or pressured into doing something they wouldn't normally do (coercion) and often the groomer's goal is to meet the victim in a controlled setting to sexually or physically abuse them. In some cases children may be abducted or have long-lasting psychological damage.



What parents need to know about

ONLINE GROOMING



CHILDREN ARE MOST VULNERABLE

Unsurprisingly children are often most at risk as they are easy to target and unlikely to question the person who is engaging in conversation with them. Groomers will use psychological tricks and methods to try and isolate them from their families and friends and will often choose to target more vulnerable children who may be easier to manipulate. Predators will stalk apps and websites that are popular with young people and will use a 'scattergun' approach to find victims, contacting hundreds online to increase their chances of success.



LIVE STREAMING CONCERNS

Predators may use live video to target children in real-time using tricks, dares or built-in gifts to manipulate them. Grooming often takes the form of a game where children receive 'likes' or even money for performing sexual acts. Social media channels, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, all have live streaming capabilities, but there are many apps which children can use to live stream, including Omegle, Live.me, BIGO Live, YouNow and many more.



ANYONE CAN BE A PREDATOR

The internet has made the ability to interact with strangers online easy. Many sites and apps are reliant on individual users entering their own information when signing up. However individuals can remain anonymous if they choose to enter inaccurate information and many online predator cases are due to groomers using impersonation techniques. However, often the greater threat comes from adults who 'hide in plain sight', choosing to befriend young children without hiding their real identity.



CAN BE DIFFICULT TO DETECT

Unfortunately, most children find the 'grooming' process (before any meeting) an enjoyable one as the predator will compliment, encourage, and flatter them to gain their trust, friendship and curiosity - a 'wolf in sheep's clothing' scenario. This often means children fail to disclose or report what is happening. If the groomer is also previously known to the child, their family and their friends, then this can make detection even harder.



FROM OPEN TO CLOSED MESSAGING

Online predators may contact their victims using any number of ways including social media, forums, chat rooms, gaming communities or live streaming apps. Sometimes there is little need to develop a 'friendship / rapport stage', as the victim has already shared personal information online and is communicating openly with others. Children may also be prepared to add other online users they don't know so well to gain 'online credibility' through increasing their friends list. Predators will often seize this opportunity to slowly build a relationship and then move their conversation with the child to a more secure and private area, such as through direct messaging.

EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENTS

Online predators will use emotive language and aim to form close, trusted bonds with their victims through showering them with compliments and making them feel good about themselves. Often victims will refer to them as their 'boyfriends' or 'girlfriends' and it can be difficult to convince some young people that they have been groomed, often leading to lasting psychological effects.



Safety Tips for Parents & Carers



IT'S GOOD TO TALK

It's unlikely that you can stop your child using the internet, nor can you constantly monitor their online activities, but you can talk to your child on a regular basis about what they do online. By talking openly with them about online relationships, they can quickly ascertain the kind of behaviour which is appropriate or inappropriate. Ask them whether they have any online friends or if they play online games with people they haven't met. This could then open up conversations about the subject of grooming.



CHECK PRIVACY SETTINGS

In order to give your child a safer online experience, it is important to check privacy settings or parental controls on the networks, devices, apps, and websites they use. Disable location sharing if you can. If you use location-sharing apps to check where your child is, remember that these could always be used by strangers to follow your child without their knowledge. Ensure that you check options so that location information is never shared with anyone except those they have permission to share with.



MONITOR SOCIAL MEDIA & LIVE-STREAMING USE

It's important to be aware of what your child is sharing on social media and with whom. Create your own profile and become 'friends' with them or follow them so that you can monitor their activity. Similarly, always check on them if they are live streaming and implement privacy controls. Choose a generic screen name and profile picture that hides their identity. You may also feel more comfortable being present each time they live stream.



STICK TO 'TRUE FRIENDS'

Make it clear to your child that they should not accept friend requests from people they don't know and to verify friend requests with people who they do know. Encourage them to only interact and engage with 'true friends' i.e. those friends who don't ask personal questions such as close family and friends. Remind them to never agree to chat privately with a stranger or someone they don't really know and to never divulge personal information, such as mobile phone numbers, addresses, passwords or the name of their school.

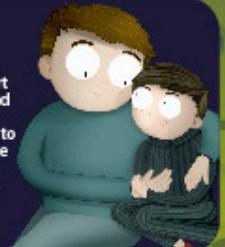


DISCUSS HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Talk to your child about what a healthy relationship looks like and how to detect someone who might not be who they claim to be. Explain that groomers will pay your child compliments and engage in conversations about personal information, such as hobbies and relationships. They may admire how well they play an online game or how they look in a photo. Groomers will also try and isolate a child from people close to them, such as parents and friends, in order to make their relationship feel special and unique.

BE SUPPORTIVE

Show your child that you will support them and make sure they understand that they can come to you with any concerns they may have. They need to know they can talk to you if someone does something they are uncomfortable with, whether that is inappropriate comments, images, requests or sexual comments.



Meet our expert

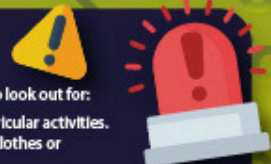
Jonathan Taylor is an online safety expert and former Covert Internet Investigator for the Metropolitan Police. He is a specialist in online grooming and exploitation and has worked extensively with both UK and International schools in delivering training and guidance around the latest online dangers, social media apps and platforms.



LOOK OUT FOR WARNING SIGNS

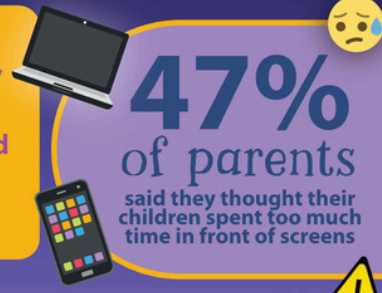
Child safety experts have identified key grooming patterns and advise parents to look out for:

- Secretive online behaviour.
- Late night internet or smartphone usage.
- Meeting new friends in unusual places.
- Becoming clingy, develop sleeping or eating problems or even bedwetting.
- Lack of interest in extra-curricular activities.
- Having new items, such as clothes or phones, unexplainably.
- Seem withdrawn, anxious, depressed or aggressive.
- Having older boyfriends or girlfriends.





It can be challenging for parents and carers to know whether children are spending too much time on their devices. Furthermore, it's even more of a challenge to know whether a child is addicted to the internet and social media. As technology is becoming more pervasive, children and young people are experiencing tech-related dependencies. Do we as parents and carers have the knowledge to identify and support children and young people who may be developing an addiction to their devices?



What parents need to know about SCREEN ADDICTION



HEALTH & WELLBEING

Children as young as 13 are attending 'smartphone rehab' following growing concerns over screen time. There are now help centers in the UK which deal with screen addiction for children and adults showing the seriousness of device addiction. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially recognised gaming addiction as a modern disease. The condition was confirmed as part of their International Classification of Diseases (ICD) which serves as an international standard for diagnosing and treating health conditions.

LACK OF SLEEP

7 out of 10 children said they had missed out on sleep because of their online habits and 60% said they had neglected school work as a result. It is important that children get the sleep they need in order to focus the next day.

LOSS OF INTEREST IN OTHER THINGS

Your child may become less interested in anything that does not include their device. You may notice that your child is missing school time and generally being less engaged with other activities in the home. It is important to discuss this with your child as soon as you notice a behaviour change.



CONFIDENCE, SUPPORT & ADVICE

The Children's Commissioner report 'Life in Likes', explored how children aged 8-11 are using social media today. It showed that children are using their devices to speak to their online friends about their problems and seek acceptance and support, removing face to face interactions.

APPS CAN BE ADDICTIVE

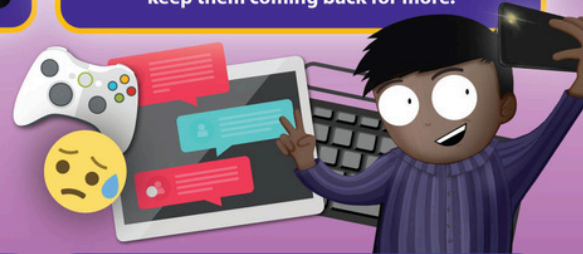
Apps have been designed with 'psychological tricks' to constantly keep grabbing your attention. One example of this is on the app Snapchat, where you can gain 'streaks' when interacting with your friends. If you don't respond, you lose the streak. This addictive nature of apps aims to engage children and keep them coming back for more.



National Online Safety®



Top Tips for Parents



LIMIT SCREEN TIME

In today's digital age, technology is an important part of a child's development so completely banning them from their device will mean they are missing out on a lot, including conversations and communication with their friends. Rather than banning them from using their devices, we suggest setting a screen time limit. Work out what you think is a suitable and healthy amount of time for your child to be on their device per week. Remember that your child may need to use devices for their school homework so only set screen limits on recreational time on their device. Once you have established this, have the conversation with them to discuss why you are implementing a screen limit. There will be others in your child's friendship group who will not have screen limits set and will be sending messages when they do not have access to their phones.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Children model their behavior on their peers, so if their parents are constantly on their device, they will see this as acceptable. Try limiting your own screen time and follow the same rules you have set for them. If you have asked your child to not use their device at the table, make sure you don't. Try setting house rules that the whole family abide by.

REMOVE DEVICES FROM THEIR BEDROOM

Setting a rule about removing devices from bedrooms will help your child to get the sleep they need and be more focussed the next day at school. 20% of teenagers said that they wake up to check their social network accounts on their devices. Even by having a device switched off in their bedroom, they may be tempted to check for notifications.

LESS TIME MEANS LESS EXPOSURE

There are many risks associated with devices, such as cyberbullying, grooming, sexting, viewing inappropriate content etc. Less time spent on a screen means that a child will be less exposed to these risks.

MOBILE-FREE MEAL TIMES

Have you tried to settle your child by giving them a tablet at the dinner table or restaurant? This may seem like a quick fix to calm them down but in reality, it is encouraging them to use their device as a distraction from conversation and dealing with their emotions. We suggest removing all technology from the dinner table and having conversations with your family about how their day has been.

ENCOURAGE ALTERNATE ACTIVITIES

It may seem like an obvious solution, but encouraging children to play with their friends, read a book, or playing outdoors will help them realise they can have fun without their device. Playing football, trampolining, camping, going for a walk or swimming are all healthy replacements for screen time. Try to join them in their Outdoor activities to show your support.

STATISTICS

52% of children aged 3-4 go online for nearly 9hrs a week

82% of children aged 5-7 go online for nearly 9.5hrs a week

93% of children aged 8-11 go online for nearly 13.5hrs a week

99% of children aged 12-15 go online for nearly 20.5hrs a week

Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2018

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SHARING PHOTOS ONLINE

School is often a time chock-full of milestones for your child, and you may well be eager to share their accomplishments with the world. In today's digital age, sharing images of such precious moments on social media is commonplace, and – while that's a lovely thing to do – it does come with some risks attached. Our guide can help parents and carers to consider the potential dangers and make informed choices about safely sharing photos of their children online.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

INVASIONS OF PRIVACY

Even with the right settings in place, absolutely nothing online is 100% private. Anyone who can view your photos could take screenshots and potentially share them elsewhere. Privacy settings are still important, though, so it's always wise to ensure your social media accounts have them set up; just bear in mind that you can't completely control what happens to anything once it's gone online.

REVEALING PERSONAL DETAILS

Small details in photos can often reveal personal information. Backgrounds can give clues to where you live, for example, while school logos on uniforms, sports kits, or bags could help someone identify which school your child attends. With interactive maps and reverse image searches commonplace online, information like this could easily be misused by an individual with malicious intentions.

MISUSE OF IMAGES

Once something's been shared online, it's almost impossible to get it deleted. Photos can show up in search engine results and be downloaded, manipulated, and shared without consent. There's the potential for someone's images to be used for advertising purposes (which in many cases, isn't illegal) or even more inappropriate reasons, such as cyber-bullying or serious forms of exploitation.

ONLINE GROOMING

Pictures that convey details about your child's interests, activities, or daily routines could arm an online predator with the kind of information they can deploy to gain a child's trust. They might use this knowledge to pretend to be the same age as the child or to have a shared hobby. Essentially, the more a predator knows about a young person, the easier it is for them to invent some 'common ground'.

PRESSURE TO PLEASE

When their parents or carers share notable moments and accomplishments in a child's life on social media, some children may begin to feel an expectation to *always* meet certain standards, to achieve things, or to behave in ways that are "worth sharing". Knowing that other people (even friends and family) can see these posts on social media might also add to the pressure they're feeling internally.

IMPACT ON DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

Every photo of a child posted online contributes to their digital footprint. Young people's lives have never been so closely and publicly documented as they are now, and this permanent online presence could affect a child's future opportunities or the choices they make as they grow up – in addition to influencing how they see themselves and, consequently, their emotional wellbeing.

Advice for Parents & Carers

REVIEW SETTINGS REGULARLY

Make sure your social media's secure in terms of who can view your content or see your location (only family and trusted friends, for example). Privacy settings aren't totally foolproof, but they *do* make it tougher for strangers to access your pics. Reviewing your settings regularly is also a good starting point for conversations with your child about managing their own social accounts when they're older.

CONSIDER OTHER CHILDREN

When taking a group photo, make sure you get parents' or carers' permission to share it on social media. There may be an important safeguarding reason for them not wanting their child's photo posted publicly online, or it might simply not tally with their personal beliefs or cultural background. A quick conversation in advance, just to make sure, is usually hugely appreciated.

CHECK YOUR PHOTOS

Photos of your child shouldn't provide any clues to where they live or go to school: even a house number, street name, or car number plate could be a giveaway. Cover up or blur out school logos, too. If you *really* want to share a particular pic, you could post a watermarked or low-res version, which can help to discourage misuse as those images are less appealing to download or reproduce.

THINK AHEAD

Try to consider the longer-term implications of what you post. Would you be happy with that photo being online in 10 years' time? Would your child still be OK with the image when they're older? Once your child is mature enough, you could ask for their consent before posting: it respects their privacy, fosters trust and understanding, and helps them to start thinking about their own online life.

Meet Our Expert

Gabriella Russo is a safeguarding consultant with more than 30 years' experience working with children, families, and adults in education, local authority, and mental health settings, both in the UK and internationally. She has developed online safety training for local authorities and foster care agencies across Britain and is the online safety expert for FosterWiki.



What Parents & Carers Need to Know about SOCIAL MEDIA & MENTAL HEALTH

An estimated one-third of children have a social media account, so it's important that trusted adults know what content young people are consuming, what they're posting and the interactions they're having. On social media, it can be easy to go down 'rabbit holes' that aren't beneficial to our wellbeing. As platforms grapple with managing such 'legal but harmful' content, lives are being impacted – sometimes to tragic effect. We might be daunted by the scale of the tech giants and their content which so entrains young people, but we can still help children to be aware of their mental wellness: recognising when something isn't OK ... and knowing what to do about content that upsets them.

1. UNDERSTAND THE ALGORITHM

Algorithms rank content by user interest: someone who regularly interacts with sports news, say, will see the latest results at the top of their feed. Likewise, if a user browses content that can cause harm, that's what will be recommended to them in future. Someone who's had a bad day and looks for posts which reflect their mood will find similar content being suggested to them more and more.

2. AVOID THE MAIN FEEDS

Avoiding the default feeds on social media platforms limits the amount of recommended content that's shown. Users can opt to only scroll through the accounts they follow, use restricted modes, or highlight posts that they don't want to see more of. Explore the platform safety settings to see how you can take control of what your child's phone shows them when they open the app.

3. DISCUSS WHAT THEY'VE SEEN

Chatting about what your child's seen online keeps you aware of the content they're interacting with. Don't assume that platforms are screening out inappropriate material, or even that your child would recognise content as being harmful. Discuss who they follow, what posts they like and what comes up in their feeds: if alarm bells ring, it could be time for a more in-depth talk or to seek support.

4. LEARN HOW TO HIDE CONTENT

If your child stumbles across unsuitable content on social media, there's the option to hide that post as well as indicating you'd prefer any similar material not to be suggested in future. On some platforms, you might also be able to block posts that contain specific words, which is an excellent way to start taking control of what your child sees online.

5. SET DAILY LIMITS

Phones and most apps can tell you how much they're being used. Spending too long online can mean a child misses out on other activities that are important to all-round wellbeing. You could set some family rules – for everyone to follow – around device use, such as screen time limits and tech-free spaces: involving your child in creating this agreement makes them more likely to stick to it.

6. MONITOR THEIR ACTIVITY

Keeping a discreet eye on how your child is using social media can help ensure they're not entering potentially dangerous situations. As they grow up, of course, children need space to exercise their independence – but you can still occasionally ask to see what they're looking at. Be transparent about your own social media use and try not to sound judgemental about your child's.

7. TURN OFF PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Even for adults, it's tempting to check an email or message as soon as the alert sound pings. Push notifications encourage people to open their apps and spend time on their device, so turning them off will help your child to practise mindful use of tech. Most of us have other things that we need to focus on as a priority – and those notifications will still be there later, when we have more time.

8. USE DEVICES TOGETHER

Giving children internet-enabled devices and complete freedom to explore platforms on their own can result in exposure to hugely damaging content. You could consider making a particular area at home a designated space to use phones, tablets and so on – making it much easier to monitor what content your child is viewing and (if necessary) steer them away from any potentially harmful paths.

9. ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mental health professionals often highlight the importance of exercise, quality time with loved ones, a balanced diet and restful sleep for our mental wellbeing. Spending hours on social media can cause us to sacrifice other activities that our brains need to feel well – so encouraging your child to put down their phone and enjoy something that doesn't involve a screen can be immensely beneficial.

10. TALK ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Most platforms default children's accounts to private, so only people they've accepted as friends can see their posts. This reduces the risk of bullying or unkind comments, but – just like offline life – the digital world can still make children feel as if they need to act or look a certain way to fit in. Talk to your child about peer pressure, and listen to any concerns so you can provide the support they need.

Meet Our Expert

Shazia Sarwar-Aziz is executive headteacher at a specialist primary school and, as an emotional therapy coach, works with school leaders to focus on the SEND, mental health and wellbeing agenda. A passionate advocate for vulnerable learners, Shazia is a Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching and the author of *The Rainbow Within*, a book which supports children with SEMH needs.



Sources: <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-62048205>
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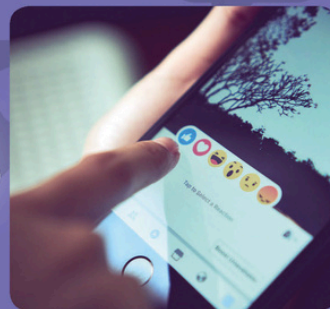
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'Likes' are a simple way for users to show that they like a post on social media. This could be anything from photos and videos to status updates and comments. The feature is widely used on several social media platforms and is extremely popular on Instagram and Facebook. It is often used by children to measure the success of their social media post and gauge opinion. However, it can also bring a number of social pressures, particularly if users start to question their own levels of popularity.

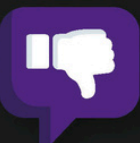


What parents need to know about SOCIAL PRESSURES LINKED TO 'LIKES'



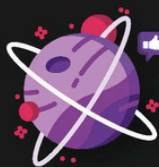
DAMAGING TO SELF-ESTEEM

Your child may use likes to measure their own self-worth, with more likes instilling a greater level of confidence and acceptance amongst their friends and peers. However, children who only receive a small number may in turn feel a sense of rejection or isolation and could potentially suffer from low self-esteem issues, impacting them in other aspects of their life such as at school or in social settings.



UNREAL VIEW OF THE WORLD

Your child may follow celebrities or other popular individuals on social media who receive millions of likes. Not everything on social media is a true reflection of the world and your child may feel pressured into behaving in a similar way in real life or posting similar material in order to feel popular and achieve a similar level of self-worth.



AN ADDICTIVE FEATURE

Like features encourage children to stay online for longer. In doing so, your child is likely to engage with app's for longer periods than they otherwise would have wanted, checking their phone more frequently, including at night when they should be asleep. This could contribute towards screen addiction which can cause sleep deprivation and consequently a lack of focus during the next day at school.



COMPETITIVE CULTURE

Children will often compare the number of likes they receive for their post against their friends or followers, possibly evoking emotions of jealousy or resentment. In a bid to increase their own status and receive more likes, this could lead to a competitive culture in which children try to better one another, potentially leading to them engaging in more and more riskier activities.



Safety Tips For Parents



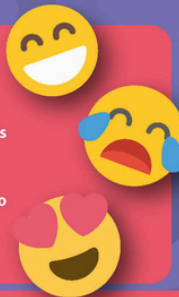
FOLLOW OR BEFRIEND YOUR CHILD ONLINE

Using the same social media sites as your child and connecting with them online will allow you to keep an eye on what their interests are and who may be influencing them. Following their likes will help you build a picture of what your child is being exposed to and what they find interesting.



MONITOR MENTAL HEALTH

If your child does post on social media, it is important to monitor their feelings and emotions, supporting them and encouraging them to talk to you about what they may be experiencing. Explain to them that not everything online is real and that life is not dictated by how many likes a post may or may not get.



ENCOURAGE HOBBIES OR OTHER ACTIVITIES

Try to help reduce your child's screen time and need for social media through encouraging them to do other things such as a sport or hobby or simply playing with friends outdoors. Supporting them to take up other activities that they enjoy can also help build self-esteem and increase their own confidence.



DISCUSS THE REAL WORLD

Talk to your child about online perceptions and about what they feel is and isn't important in their life. Try to establish an open and honest conversation and speak about what they feel is acceptable to post online and if they feel pressure to conform.



HELP TO BUILD YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

Try to help build your child's self-esteem through positivity and praise and listening to them if they are struggling with the way they look or feel. Talk to them about the positive aspect of their personality and help them understand that looks aren't everything. Try not to criticise or blame your child which could compound any negative thoughts they are already feeling.

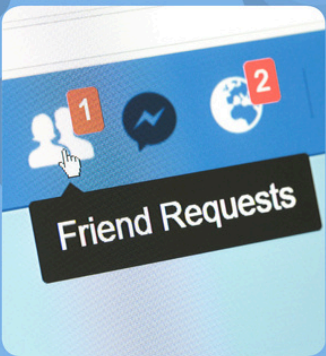
Meet our expert

Pete Badh is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has contributed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.





The whole concept of social media relies upon users having friends and/or followers. 'Friends' tend to be those with whom users will share their own personal profile. It's usually a mutual relationship with both parties able to engage and interact with everything their friends post online. 'Followers' on the other hand can typically be just one-way relationships and, dependent on the platform, only provide access to certain aspects of an individual's profile, such as a person's content feed. A common trait that often exists between the two however is the desire to gather as many friends or followers as possible.



What parents need to know about SOCIAL PRESSURES LINKED TO 'FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS'



POSSIBLE 'FRIEND ENVY'

Children may compare the number of friends or followers that they have with their own online friends and people they know. In some cases, this could lead to 'friend envy', particularly if they see this as a sign of popularity. This could lead to your child showing signs of jealousy and resorting to sending friend requests to people they don't know that well, or even strangers, in a desperate bid to increase their own status online.



OPEN DOOR POLICY

Another way that children can increase their following is by leaving their accounts open so that they can be easily found, and anybody can view their posts. This is in the hope that other users will like their posts and decide to follow them, therefore increasing their numbers. Once again, this can leave your child vulnerable to being followed by strangers or people who have dishonest intentions.



FEELINGS OF REJECTION

Just like increasing friends and followers can bring a sense of happiness and satisfaction, so the loss of friends and followers can cause children to suffer feelings of sadness and rejection. Depending on how invested your child is in their social media activities, this could influence their attitude and behaviour offline and potentially have a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.



COLLECTING 'FAKE' FRIENDS

Children who feel under pressure to increase their friend count or want to increase their following as quickly as possible can be vulnerable to collecting 'fake' friends. They may, for example, accept friend requests from people they don't know very well or from complete strangers, inadvertently leaving themselves open to online bullies, trolls or even the possibility of being groomed.



CONSTANT NEED TO PLEASE

As children start to gain more friends or an increasing number of followers, they might start to feel an added level of pressure to provide them with more interesting and likeable content. Almost as if they now have an audience waiting, this constant need to please may be an extra burden that pushes your child into oversharing personal information or posting material that is inappropriate or offensive, inaccurately portraying what they're actually like in the offline world.

Safety Tips For Parents

BE THEIR FRIEND OR FOLLOWER

The best way to know who your child is friends with online or who follows them is to be their friend or follower yourself. This will allow you to see who your child is engaging with most online or open up discussions about how they know certain people they've added to their network who you haven't heard them speak about before or you yourself don't know.

TURN ON PRIVACY CONTROLS

All social media platforms have their own privacy controls which can be used to help protect children online. For instance, removing the ability for strangers to comment on public posts or having a screening process for friend or follow requests is good practice which can help to ensure your child's experience online is a safer one.

TALK ABOUT STRANGERS

If privacy measures have been put in place, then usually your child will receive a notification if somebody tries to befriend them online. Talk to your child about making sure they don't open up their personal life to people they don't know and that if they are ever in any doubt, they should never accept a friend request from a stranger.

BEHAVE ONLINE AS THEY WOULD OFFLINE

Your child's behaviour online should always be treated as an extension of their behaviour offline. Discuss with your child the pitfalls of trying to be somebody they're not and that trying to please everybody will only make them unhappy. Tell them that they should be proud of who they are and that they should always behave in an appropriate and responsible way when posting content online.



TALK TO THEM ABOUT THE VALUE OF REAL FRIENDSHIP

Social media can often distort what true relationships and friendships should actually be like. It's important to teach your child the value of true friendships and that meeting and speaking to people face to face in the real world, offline, is often a better way to build a more trusting and confident relationship with someone rather than just speaking to them online.



DISCUSS WHAT BEING POPULAR ACTUALLY IS

A higher number of followers can be a measure of popularity but can also lack substance beyond just the number itself. Discuss with your child that popularity can come and go and that a large number of followers doesn't necessarily mean a large number of friends, particularly online where the real value in a relationship cannot be accurately determined.



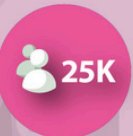
Meet our expert

Pete Badh is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has contributed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.





Social media influencers are people who have established credibility in a specific industry and have the power to influence other people's decisions. Most commonly associated with YouTube and Instagram, 'influencers' will usually have a large number of followers and be viewed as authentic by their audience. It is for this reason that many influencers are often paid by big companies to promote their products in the hope of persuading their followers to purchase those goods.



What parents need to know about SOCIAL PRESSURES LINKED TO 'INFLUENCERS'



AN UNREALISTIC PERCEPTION OF BODY IMAGE

Some of the most popular social media influencers often depict themselves as having the 'perfect body' and are paid to promote items such as health supplements or swimwear, which young people believe can help them achieve the same look. What is not always realised is that these images can be edited or filtered and aren't always a true-life representation. Your child may feel like this is what they need to look like and in some cases, become obsessed with their body image, which could contribute towards a lower self-esteem or even becoming depressed if they can't achieve the same look.



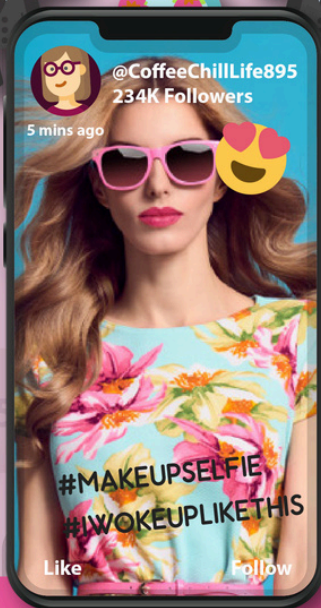
ENCOURAGING BAD HABITS

Although many social media influencers will get paid to advertise brands and their products, they will also post their own material online too, usually depicting their daily life or an activity for example. This may have both desirable and undesirable consequences, with influencers able to inspire both good habits, such as healthy eating, exercise or kindness. However it may also encourage children to adopt bad habits, such as drinking, smoking, swearing or even criminal behaviour, particularly if these are seen to be endorsed by the influencer.



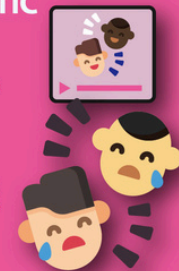
AUTHENTICITY OF ENDORSEMENTS

Social media influencers hold a lot of persuasion with their audience and are often looked up to by younger followers. Many children will see them as credible, authentic and trust what they see online. However, some influencers may not always believe in the product they are promoting and therefore can mislead their followers, abusing their level of confidence in them. Your child may therefore find themselves looking up to people who are disingenuous or who feign interest in activities that they themselves do not actually care about.



BECOMING UNREALISTIC ROLE MODELS

As children become more and more involved on social media and identify who their favourite people are to follow, they may come to see social media influencers as role models, particularly if they are attracted by the lifestyle they see online. This could lead them into developing potentially unrealistic expectations of life and in some cases, using their role models as an escape from reality, particularly if they feel like they're own life isn't very fulfilling.



THE NEED TO HAVE EVERYTHING

Many social media influencers will take photos or videos of themselves wearing the latest fashion or jewellery which companies want them to promote. They may also be provided with the latest gadgets to promote or, if they are children, toys to play with in order to persuade their followers to purchase them. Many children will be keen to buy these items in order to keep up with the latest trends however if they get left behind, they could be made to feel inadequate or inferior by other children who do have them.



Safety Tips for Parents



FOLLOW WHO THEY FOLLOW

A good way to see first-hand who may be influencing your child is to create your own social media account and follow the same people they do. This will give you a strong indication of what is shaping how your child behaves, what they like and what they are taking an interest in.



TALK ABOUT ROLE MODELS

Role models can play an important part of your child's life, particularly outside of the home. Talk to your child about who they look up to and why. Remind them that not everybody online is who they seem to be and if you do have concerns that your child is being negatively influenced, work with them in finding more positive alternatives.

BUILD THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

It's important that your child is aware of how unrealistic perceptions of life can be depicted on social media and that it is easy to be deceived. Discuss with your child how images can be heavily edited, cropped or manipulated to create artificial scenarios and that often the lifestyle that people display on social media isn't always realistic or in fact the truth.



DISCUSS REALISTIC VS UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

If you notice your child has suddenly taken a strong interest in the way they look, or you find they are a lot more body conscious, then it's a good idea to speak to them about why they feel that way. If they seem unhappy, try to build their self-esteem by talking to them and listening to their concerns, helping to build their confidence through praise and positivity. Remind them that looks aren't everything and not everything they see online is actually a true depiction of real life.



ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENT THINKING

Social media influencers can be quite powerful individuals who hold a lot of persuasive power so it's important to encourage your child to think independently about everything they see and engage with online. Talk to them about the dangers of blindly following others and in keeping an open mind when viewing content. Teach them to always question people's motives online, especially when they see individuals are promoting a brand or product which they are likely to have been paid to advertise but may not necessarily personally endorse.



Meet our expert

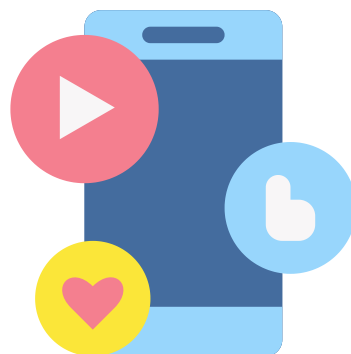
Pete Badh is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has contributed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.



SOCIAL MEDIA & APPS

In this section, we will explore the social media platforms and applications your child may be using. Adults often miss out on the apps favoured by younger generations, so these guides aim to educate you about the tools your child interacts with. Understanding these platforms is essential for sparking meaningful conversations about online safety and responsible use.

It's important to consider the content shared on these platforms, as they can foster creativity but also pose risks related to privacy and exposure to inappropriate material. By familiarising yourself with these features, you can help guide your child in making informed decisions. Additionally, addressing the impact of social media on self-esteem and body image is crucial. Open dialogue and staying informed will empower you to support your child as they navigate the digital world safely.



What Parents & Educators Need to Know about TIKTOK

AGE RESTRICTION

13+

(Certain features are restricted to over-18s only)

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Adults tend to associate online videos with YouTube – but among teens, TikTok is king. The app provides a stream of short clips tailored to users' interests, based on what they've already watched. Around half of British children use TikTok, and while much of the content is benign, Ofcom considers it the app where youngsters "were most likely to encounter a potential harm".

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

While TikTok's Following feed only displays videos from familiar creators, For You is a collection based on a user's previously watched clips. Most of these videos will probably be inoffensive, but the app *could* potentially show something unsuitable. If children then engage with this content, more like it will follow. TikTok's guidelines prohibit the sharing of illegal or inappropriate content, but the huge number of uploads means that a small amount inevitably slips through.

BODY IMAGE AND DANGEROUS CHALLENGES

According to Ofcom, most online harms for teens are body image related for girls (promoting unhealthy eating, body shaming and so on) and dangerous stunts for boys. Both are prevalent on TikTok. One extreme example of the latter was the 'blackout' trend, which encouraged users to hold their breath until they passed out from a lack of oxygen. This led to two families filing lawsuits against TikTok over the tragic deaths of their children.

IN-APP SPENDING

TikTok is free, but users have the option to buy TikTok coins, which can be used to purchase gifts for content creators. Coin bundles range from £9.99 to an eye-watering £99; while that may not sound appealing, the app still generated £7.9 billion in user spending in 2023. TikTok's policy is that under-18s can't make in-app purchases, but it's possible to bypass this with a fake birth date.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS

With more than 1.5 billion users globally, the potential for contact with strangers on TikTok is high – especially as accounts created by over-16s (or young people using a fake date of birth) are set to public by default. This means that not only is someone's profile visible to everyone else on the app, it also suggests their videos to others and enables anyone to download or comment on them.

MISINFORMATION AND RADICALISATION

Although the short videos on TikTok tend to be more frivolous than the longer ones on YouTube, clips can still influence impressionable minds in a negative way. Not only is there plenty of dangerous misinformation on TikTok, but Ofcom reports that nearly a third of 12 to 15-year-olds use TikTok as a news source – so you should be wary of misogynistic, racist or conspiracy-themed material shaping how they see the world.

ADDICTIVE DESIGN

With its constant stream of eye-catching videos, TikTok can be addictive to young brains. In 2024, UK children spent an average of 127 minutes per day on the app: that's twice as much as in 2020. Excessive use can interfere with young people's sleep patterns – often leading to irritability – and distract them from other, healthier activities. The instantly skippable nature of bite-size videos may also impact children's ability to maintain focus.

Advice for Parents & Educators

ENABLE FAMILY PAIRING

Family Pairing allows parents to link their TikTok account to their child's, and control settings remotely. Parents can then turn on Restricted Mode (reducing the chances of a child seeing inappropriate content), set screen-time limits, make accounts private and manage whether their child can send messages – and if they can, to whom. Children can't alter these settings without parental approval.

DISCUSS THE DANGERS

If a child wants to use TikTok and you're happy for them to do so, it's good practice to discuss the potential risks. Ensure that they don't share any identifying personal information, and that they know to talk to a trusted adult if they're worried by interactions on the app. With more teens using TikTok for news, it's also worth talking about misinformation and propaganda, and how to identify it.

BLOCK IN-APP SPENDING

If a child is using an iPhone or Android device to access TikTok, you can alter their settings to prevent them from making in-app purchases. We'd recommend enabling this feature, as it can be quite easy for a young person to spend a significant amount of real money buying TikTok coins to unlock more features of the app – sometimes without even realising.

READ THE SIGNS

If you're concerned that a child is spending too much time on TikTok, or that they've been emotionally affected by something they've seen, it's important to know how to spot the signs. Increased irritability and a lack of concentration are potential red flags, as is failing to complete homework or skipping meals. Remember, the parental controls are there for a reason, and it's never too late to introduce limits.

Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist who has written for the likes of Wired, TechRadar, Tom's Guide, The Evening Standard and The New Statesman.



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Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/tiktok-2025>

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

SNAPCHAT

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

SNAP STREAK
97
DAYS

Snapchat is a messaging app which allows users to send images, videos and texts to others. Its best-known feature is that anything sent 'disappears' 24 hours after it's been viewed; however, users are known to take screenshots or use another device to obtain a photo of their screen. In 2023, Snapchat added a chatbot function called 'My AI'.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

My AI is Snapchat's new chatbot, which replies to questions in a human-like manner. However, the software is still in its infancy and has significant drawbacks, such as biased, incorrect or misleading responses. There have already been numerous reports of young users turning to AI for medical help and diagnoses, which could be inaccurate and therefore potentially dangerous.

PREDATORS AND SCAMS

Predators can exploit Snapchat's disappearing messages by, for example, telling a user they have naked photos of them and will post them unless they're paid. Snapchat's own research found that 65% of teenagers had experienced this – on this app or others. This likely isn't helped by 'SnapMaps' – a feature which highlights your exact position in real-time. This is meant to help friends keep track of each other, but could be used for more sinister reasons.

MY EYES ONLY

Snapchat has a hidden photo vault called 'My Eyes Only'. Teens can conceal sensitive photos and videos from parents and carers in this folder, which is protected by a PIN. You can check for this by clicking on the icon which looks like two playing cards. This takes you to the 'Memories' folder which stores photos, stories and the My Eyes Only folder.

SCREEN TIME ADDICTION

Snapchat prioritises user engagement, with features like streaks (messaging the same person every day to build up a high score). The app also has sections called 'Discover' and 'Spotlight', which show tailored content to each user. However, this could also be seen as an attempt to hook users into watching videos endlessly. Furthermore, constant notifications can lure people into using the app.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Some content on Snapchat simply isn't suitable for children. The hashtags used to group content are determined by the poster, so even an innocent search term could still yield age-inappropriate results. The app's 'disappearing messages' feature also makes it easy for young people to share explicit images on impulse – so sexting continues to be a risk associated with Snapchat.

ONLINE PRESSURES

Although many of Snapchat's filters are designed to entertain or amuse, the 'beautify' effects on photos can set unrealistic body image expectations – creating feelings of inadequacy in younger users. Snapchat now also has 'priority' notifications (which still get displayed even if a device is in 'do not disturb' mode), increasing the pressure on users to log back in and interact.

Advice for Parents & Educators

UTILISE PARENTAL CONTROLS

Snapchat's 'Family Centre' lets you view the details of the child's account – their friends list and who they've spoken to in the last week – and report any concerns. You must invite a child to the Family Centre for them to join. To keep the child's location hidden on the app, go into settings and turn on 'Ghost Mode' and 'Hide Live Location', and ensure they know not to share their location with anyone.

BLOCK AND REPORT

If a stranger *does* connect with a child on Snapchat and begins to make them feel uncomfortable through bullying, pressure to send explicit images or by sending sexual images to them, the child can tap the three dots on that person's profile and report or block them. There are options to state why they're reporting that user – such as annoying or malicious messages, spam or masquerading as someone else.

FAMILIARISE YOURSELF

Before you allow a child to download Snapchat, download it yourself and familiarise yourself with the app. Snapchat has produced a parents' guide to the app to help you understand how it works and any protections they have in place. A link for this can be found in the sources below.

ENCOURAGE OPEN DISCUSSIONS

Snapchat's risks can be easier to handle if you nurture an open dialogue. For example, discuss My AI's responses to questions and how reliable they are. Talk about scams and blackmail before letting children sign up. If they're lured into a scam, encourage them to tell you immediately. Talk openly and non-judgementally about sexting, emphasising its inherent risks. Furthermore, explain how popular 'challenges' on the platform can have harmful consequences.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

TELEGRAM

AGE RESTRICTION
17+

Telegram isn't new, but it's grown significantly in popularity over recent years, thanks to its secure nature and speedier performance than many of its competitors – including WhatsApp. While Telegram is an excellent app in terms of actual performance, like any messaging platform it brings its own challenges for parents when it comes to feeling confident about children being able to handle their own messaging conversations and contact with the outside world in general. Here's everything that trusted adults need to know about using Telegram safely.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

LACK OF AGE RESTRICTION

17+

Telegram has a 16+ age restriction on using the service, while someone is required to be over 17 to actually download the app. Once that's accomplished, however, there's no need to provide further identification. That means there's no guarantee that under 17s aren't using the app – and no way to confidently verify that any other user actually is who they say they are.

POSSIBLE CYBERBULLYING

If your child uses Telegram, they could well be in a group with friends and peers on the app. These groups are managed by admins who can remove the option to post replies – possibly leading to instances of cyberbullying in which the victim has no ability to respond. Messages can be forwarded from groups, too, which potentially opens up images and text being seen by people they weren't intended for.

UNMODERATED CONTENT

Because Telegram relies on users' self-moderation, it can sporadically become a hotbed for illegal or inappropriate content. In the past, the circulation of this material has led to its temporary removal from the App Store. In fairness, the same can be said of several messaging platforms, but Telegram's features (Secret Chats, for instance) certainly present more issues than the likes of WhatsApp.

PREMIUM COSTS

Telegram is free to use, but it also offers a premium membership (£4.99 per month or £35.99 a year) which increases download speeds, adds translation features, and increases channel and account limits. If your child has access to your Apple ID or Google Pay details, they may be able to sign up for the premium package without your knowledge.

UNAUTHORISED ACCESS

One of Telegram's major selling points is that it's accessible across multiple platforms. Once the app's been downloaded, users can log in from a phone, tablet or computer. This multi-device availability means increased opportunities for someone else to gain unauthorised access (if your child leaves a computer or tablet at school logged into their Telegram account, for instance).

SECRET CHATS

Telegram offers a feature called Secret Chats, which allows for messages which self-delete after a specified period of time. There are instances where this can be useful (journalists often use Telegram to protect their sources, for example), but for young people it can make it extremely difficult to prove that someone has been abusive or inappropriate towards them on the app.

Advice for Parents & Carers

PRIVACY CONTROLS

If your child wants to use Telegram, we'd strongly suggest using the app's built-in privacy settings to restrict who can see when they were last online, their profile photo, and their phone number. This can be set to 'everybody', 'my contacts' or 'nobody'; we'd recommend either the second or third options, depending on how locked down you want the platform to be.

DISCUSS SECURITY

It's important that your child understands the merits of strong passwords and logging out of devices when they're finished – and the benefits of protecting their personal data in general. This could range from relaxed chats and simple tips like "don't send your bank details" to how to set up passcodes for Telegram so your child's chats stay secure when they step away from their screen.

REPORT UNSAFE CONTENT

If your child receives private messages which include content that could be considered illegal, unsafe or upsetting, they can of course block the account responsible within the app itself. Be aware, however, that Telegram won't necessarily take any further action unless this offensive content involved a user-created channel, bot or sticker.

USE THE BLOCK FUNCTION

Users can block spam, abusive, or imposter accounts within the app. Blocking stops that account from messaging your child, or viewing their profile and activity. If the user in question is one of your child's peers or friendship circle, it may be worth bringing it to the attention of their school. Also bear in mind that your child can also voluntarily leave a Telegram group at any point if they wish.

PROTECT PAYMENT METHODS

Apple and Google's storefronts offer family sharing options, but it's also worth double-checking your settings to ensure that a password or two-factor authentication option is set up to prevent any unexpected purchases. If your child does pay for a premium Telegram subscription without your consent, Apple and Google have been known to issue refunds in some cases.

Meet Our Expert

Lloyd Coombes is Editor in Chief of gaming and esports site GGRecon and has worked in the gaming media for around four years. A regular visitor to the App Store to try out new tools, he's also a parent who understands the value of online safety. Writing mainly about tech and fitness, his articles have been published on influential sites including IGN and TechRadar.



PREMIUM ACCESS



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Source: <https://www.telegram.org/> | <https://www.engadget.com/telegram-explained-2022-183035068.html>

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

WHATSAPP

AGE RESTRICTION
13+

With more than two billion active users, WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service. Its end-to-end encryption only allows messages to be viewed by the sender and any recipients: not even WhatsApp itself can read them. The UK's Online Safety Bill proposes to end such encryption on private messaging, but for the time being, this controversial feature remains.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

EVOLVING SCAMS

WhatsApp's popularity makes it a lucrative hunting ground for scammers. Recent examples include posing as the target's child, requesting a money transfer because of a spurious 'emergency' – plus a scam where fraudsters trigger a verification message by attempting to log in to your account, then (posing as WhatsApp) call or text to ask you to repeat the code back to them, giving them access.

CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

To start a chat, someone only needs the mobile number of the WhatsApp user that they want to message. Therefore, if a child has ever given their number out to someone they don't know, that person could then contact them via WhatsApp. It's also possible that the child might be added to a group chat or community (by one of their friends, for example) containing other people that they don't know.

CHAT LOCK

In 2023, WhatsApp introduced a feature that lets users keep their chats in a separate 'locked chats' folder, saved behind their phone's passcode, fingerprint or face ID authentication. They subsequently developed an additional feature – 'Secret Code' – where users set a unique password for their locked chats. Unfortunately, this function creates the potential for young people to hide conversations and content they suspect their parents wouldn't approve of (such as age-inappropriate material).

COMMUNITIES AND GROUPS

A community is a collection of related groups on WhatsApp. They can consist of thousands of users. Communities can often be used by scammers to target large groups, hoping someone clicks on their link or responds to their requests. In communities and groups, there are multiple ongoing conversations, which results in pressure to respond. Members – even if they are not each other's contacts – will be able to see any messages sent into the group.

'VIEW ONCE' CONTENT

The ability to send images or messages that can only be viewed once has led to some WhatsApp users sharing inappropriate material or abusive texts, knowing that the recipient can't re-open them later to use as evidence of misconduct. People used to be able to screenshot this disappearing content – but a recently added WhatsApp feature now blocks this, citing protection of privacy.

FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp's connectivity and ease of use allows news to be shared rapidly – whether it's true or not. To combat the spread of misinformation, messages forwarded more than five times on the app now display a "Forwarded many times" label and a double arrow icon. This makes users aware that the message they've just received is far from an original ... and might not be entirely factual, either.

VISIBLE LOCATION

WhatsApp's 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, which can be helpful for friends meeting up or parents checking that their child is safe while out, for example. However, anyone in a user's contacts list or in a mutual group chat can also track their location – potentially letting strangers identify a child's home address or journeys that they make regularly.

Advice for Parents & Educators

EMPHASISE CAUTION

Encourage children to treat unexpected messages with caution: get them to consider whether it sounds like something a friend or relative would really send them. Make sure they know never to share personal details over WhatsApp, and to be wary of clicking on any links in messages. Setting up two-step verification adds a further layer of protection to their WhatsApp account.

ADJUST THE SETTINGS

It's wise to change a child's WhatsApp settings to specify which of their contacts can add them to group chats without needing approval. You can give permission to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except ...'. Additionally, if a child needs to use 'live location', emphasise that they should enable this function for only as long as they need – and then turn it off.

DISCUSS GROUP CHATS

Make children aware that there could be members of a group that they don't know well and that words can be misinterpreted. Encourage them to leave a good impression, to avoid joining in if conversations turn towards bullying, and to respond to such situations in an appropriate way. Make sure they know that it's OK to leave a group chat if it makes them uncomfortable – or for any reason, in fact.

THINK BEFORE SHARING

Help children understand why it's important to stop and think before posting or forwarding something on WhatsApp. It's easy – and all too common – for content that a user posts to be shared more widely, even publicly on social media. Encourage children to consider how an impulsive message or forwarding might damage their reputation or upset a friend who sent something to them in confidence.

CHAT ABOUT PRIVACY

Check in with the child about how they're using WhatsApp, making sure they know you only have their safety at heart. If you spot a 'Locked Chats' folder, you might want to talk about the sort of content they've stored in there, who they're talking to, and why they want to keep these chats hidden. Also, if children send any 'view once' content, it could be helpful to ask them why.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

YOUTUBE

Almost anyone with an internet connection knows YouTube. The Google-owned site lets anyone upload videos to be shared around the world, and as a result, it's an incredible resource with instant free access to material covering every conceivable topic. But with over 500 hours of video uploaded every minute, not all of it will be appropriate for young eyes.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

YouTube is free and can be accessed via numerous devices, even without creating a YouTube account. Some content is flagged as 'age-restricted' (requiring the user to be logged into an account with a verified age of 18), but children can still view some mildly inappropriate content. This can include profanity and violence, which some young users may find upsetting.

CONNECT WITH STRANGERS

YouTube recommends videos related to what the user has previously watched on their account, aiming to provide content that will interest them. This is intended to be helpful but it can also lead to binge-watching and screen addiction – especially if 'auto-play' is active. Users without an account are shown popular videos from the last 24 hours, which might not always be suitable for children.

RADICALISATION

YouTube's algorithm tends to promote content that's getting the most traffic – a lot of which can be quite extreme. This can be fine for harmless topics, but YouTube isn't regulated like television, and that means that conspiracy theories, fake news and hateful ideologies can occasionally surface to warp impressionable minds all too easily. Remember – the more they watch, the more they'll be recommended.

CONNECTING WITH STRANGERS

YouTube is a social media platform which allows people to interact with other (usually unknown) users. Account holders can leave comments on any video they have access to, as well as message other users directly. Connecting with strangers online can potentially lead to children being exposed to adult language, cyberbullying and – in the worst cases – online predators. If a child is creating content themselves, this can increase the likelihood of them becoming a target.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

YouTube is teeming with trends and challenges, some of which are fun to watch and join in with. Children often find these immensely entertaining and might want to try them out. Most challenges tend to be safe, but many others may cause physical or emotional harm. Children who watch or copy them, the painful 'salt and ice challenge' – where people use these two ingredients to burn their skin – is just one of many examples.

SNEAKY SCAMMERS

The comments sections of popular content creators regularly have scammers posing as that influencer, attempting to lure users into clicking on their phishing links. Scammers impersonate YouTubers by adopting their names and profile images, and often offer cash gifts or 'get rich quick' schemes. Children may not realise that these users aren't who they claim to be.

Advice for Parents & Educators

APPLY RESTRICTED MODE

For older children, Restricted Mode is an optional setting that prevents YouTube from showing inappropriate material (such as drug and alcohol abuse, graphic violence, and sexual content) to underage viewers. To prevent children from chancing across age-inappropriate content on the platform, we would recommend enabling Restricted Mode on each device that they use to access YouTube. It's worth also turning the auto-play feature off, to prevent YouTube's algorithm automatically recommending something inappropriate.



TRY GOOGLE FAMILY

Creating a Google Family account allows parents and carers to monitor what their child is watching, uploading, and sharing with other users. It will also display their recently watched videos, searches, and recommended videos. In general, a Google Family account gives a parent or carer oversight of how their child uses sites like YouTube and helps to ensure that they are only accessing appropriate content.

MONITOR ENGAGEMENT

YouTube is the online viewing platform of choice for billions of people, many of them under 18. Younger children will watch different content to older ones, of course. You may want to keep an eye on how children interact with this material – and, if applicable, with content creators – to understand what they're interested in. Remember that creators often share content outside of YouTube, so don't ignore their web presence elsewhere!

CONSIDER YOUTUBE KIDS

It's possible to sidestep most inappropriate content completely via Google's own YouTube Kids app for Android handsets and iPhone. This lets you filter content by 'preschool' (4 and under), 'younger' (ages 5 to 8) and 'older' (ages 9 to 12). This isn't a perfect substitute for personal supervision, as the app's filtering system is automated, and Google can't manually review all videos.

CHECK PRIVACY SETTINGS

YouTube gives users the option of uploading videos as 'private' or 'unlisted' – so they could be shared exclusively with family and friends, for example. Comments on videos can also be disabled and channels that a child is subscribed to can be hidden. If the child is only uploading videos set as 'private', they are far less likely to receive direct messages from strangers.

LIMIT SPENDING

Although YouTube is free, it does offer some in-app purchases. For example, users can rent and buy TV shows and movies to watch. If you'd like to avoid children purchasing content online, limit their access to online payment methods. Many parents have discovered the hard way that a child happily consuming a paid-for series quickly leads to an unexpected bill!

Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist who has written for the likes of Wired, TechRadar, Tom's Guide, The Evening Standard and The New Statesman.



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FURTHER SUPPORT



5 tips for talking to your teen about reducing their smartphone screen time

Tips and advice to help parents feel more confident and positive talking to their child about using their mobile phone

— BBC Bitesize / Feb 5



Social Media & Mental Health | Guide For Parents

If you are worried about your child or teenager using the internet, read our guide and resources on talking to your child about their use of social media.

— YounoMinds



Phones

Introduction

— UK Safer Internet Centre

