Social Media

Advice for parents

Social Media is becoming an increasingly important and enjoyable part of everyday life; however, it is important that the appropriate measures and restrictions are in place to ensure the safety of children.

As parents, we need to:

- Be diligent with your children's use of social media.

- Be aware of the age requirements for different social media platforms and sites, and whether the content is appropriate for our children.

- Talk to our children about the appropriate use of social media.

It is vital to talk to children about using social media; they should be able to speak to a trusted adult if they see something that concerns them.

We need to be assertive and proactive in keeping our young, potentially vulnerable, children safe; therefore, it is vital that all parents are aware of current (2017) regulations and guidance.

Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat all require account holders to be of a certain age; however, despite these regulations, they do not ask for proof of age, as an effective system to verify ages has not yet been developed.

This leaflet outlines the regulations for popular social media platforms, and provides guidance on what you can do to ensure your child is safe.

Snapchat

Snapchat is one of the most popular messaging apps that young people use. The minimum age is 13; the app will ask for a date of birth upon initial sign up and will not allow an account to be created if the user is under age.

Account holders can create a 'Story' which is an image taken by the individual and posted on the app, viewable for 24 hours to their friends (if settings are 'Friends Only') or everyone who has the individual on their contact list. Individuals may also contribute to a public narrative that will reveal their location to all snapchat users, as it places them at a particular event (e.g. a concert).

 'Snap Map' enables users to see where their friends are, providing they have chosen to share their location. Individuals will appear as icons on the map, and they will be able to see their friends' icons too. You can set 'Ghost Mode' in your child's settings to cause them to disappear from the map immediately.

All parents should know that there are risks to broadcasting personal information, such as location, to strangers, and there are ways for others to capture almost any digital content despite snaps disappearing once viewed. Screenshots can be taken, but this will notify the user if someone has taken a screenshot of their photo.

You should ensure that your child's privacy settings on Snapchat are set to 'My Friends' only – this will prevent others from seeing their snapchat content. Users can keep a private collection of Snaps in 'Memories', and these can be moved into 'My Eyes Only' – this is passcode-protected and cannot be accessed by anyone, including 'Team Snapchat', even if the user forgets their passcode.

Instagram

Instagram is a free photo and video sharing app on which people can upload photos or videos and share them with their followers or select group of friends. They can also view posts shared by others.

No one under the age of 13 should use Instagram, though there is no system for verifying age.

If your child's profile is set to public, anyone signed into the app can view their photos and videos.

Instagram (continued)

You should make sure that their profile is set to private; anyone who wishes to view their posts would have to send them a follower request that can either be approved or ignored.

There isn't a guarantee that your child won't be seen on Instagram or any other photo-sharing service as people will often post photographs of each other too. Posts can show up anywhere and be shared beyond Instagram, e.g. on Facebook.

Instagram allows for post-mastectomy and breastfeeding photos to be posted, providing they are compliant with Instagram's policies. Inappropriate content is not tolerated and any content you or your child deems unsuitable can be reported.

Facebook

Facebook suggests that parents should talk about safe sharing once their child has created an account. No one under the age of 13 should use Facebook; however, it does not have a system in place to verify ages. If you discover your younger child has an account you should inform them of safety issues.

The platform allows you to create a profile with photos and information about where you live, where you have studied or worked, and your likes or dislikes. It also enables you to write statuses, see and share other people's posts, and add friends. You have the choice to ignore friend requests from people you don't know; having no mutual friends is usually an indicator that they might be a stranger.

It is also recommended that you emphasise the importance of staying safe with your children as soon as they are on Facebook. Talking to them about technology will ensure you are involved and they feel comfortable talking about it to you.

Ensuring your child's profile is set to 'Friends Only' will prevent strangers from viewing their profile content. Go over the privacy settings and show your children how to activate the highest level of security, emphasising that Facebook is a place for friends not strangers.

If you are not on Facebook, you can ask your child to teach you about it! This provides an opportunity for you to discuss safety, privacy and security.

Reporting unsuitable content

Instagram – the Instagram Help Centre provides information on reporting hacked accounts, impersonation accounts, underage children, hate accounts, intellectual property, exposed private information, self-injury, abuse and spam, and exploitation. Each section takes individuals through simple steps to report or prevent potential situations.

(**https://help.instagram.com**)

Facebook – also provides a 'Report Something' section in its help center. The list of offences is similar to those given by Instagram; however, it also contains information on how to report games and apps – something that does not apply to Instagram. (**https://en-gb.facebook.com/help**)

Snapchat – individuals can contact Snapchat's Safety team to report any abuse by navigating to 'Support'. Snapchat urges that if you believe someone is at risk of harm, the police should be contacted immediately.