



Social Media Fact Sheet

Staying safe online when using social media

Social media is a website or app that enables users to communicate and engage with others online. Users can share information such as posts, pictures, or videos, and users can respond through varying levels of engagement such as comments, reactions, or 'likes'.

Why age restrictions matter

Most social media platforms have **minimum age requirements (usually 13+)** to help protect children from risks such as:

- Contact with strangers
- Exposure to inappropriate content
- Online grooming or exploitation
- Pressure to share personal or sexual content

These limits are based on **safety, privacy, and data protection laws**.

Best practices for parents and carers

There are a range of privacy features and parental controls you can set up on social media accounts. These often include preventing unwanted contact from strangers and limiting the exposure of posts. Consider what restrictions work best for your family, ensure age restrictions are adhered to, develop understanding within the household of safer internet use and consider how privacy features could be lifted as time goes on.

Have a conversation

Social media gives a lot of freedom towards how children and young people express themselves. It's important to discuss the risks associated with engaging with strangers online, giving out too much personal information, sharing content that may be harmful or posting content that can damage someone's reputation. Discussing these areas can help them navigate social media in a way that allows them to experience the benefits whilst also being aware of the potential risks.

Know what apps your children is using, learn how they work and stay involved in their digital life.

Be available to talk

Children and young people can encounter issues online that may cause upset or panic. Ensure that you or someone you trust is available to talk to them no matter what issue they may be having. Try to help them resolve the problem without causing more worry and know where to go for further support if the situation calls for it e.g. correct reporting channels and helplines such as Childline etc. Allowing family members to feel confident to come forward for support can help prevent problems from growing.



Prioritise wellbeing

Social media can offer many benefits towards children and young people throughout their development but it can sometimes bring negative effects that may result in poor mental health if not managed correctly. Ensure rules and boundaries are in place at home to make sure family members are able to step away from social media and enjoy family time offline. Maintain a healthy offline/ online balance and know when to put devices down.

Stay alert to warning signs such as secrecy about online activities and changes in mood.

Be aware of unknown contacts or new friends.

Extra steps to support safety

- Keep devices in shared family spaces where possible
- Regularly review apps, contacts, and privacy settings
- Check for:
 - New or unknown accounts
 - Changes in behaviour
- Model positive online behaviour yourself