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Guide: Social Networking Advice for Parents

The best online safety strategy is to talk to your child.

The online world is very much part of young people's world today, they are "growing up digital", and technology is embedded in every aspect of their lives.

As parents your natural desire is to keep your children safe.

In every aspect of development, from learning to cross the road, ride a bike or swim, parents teach, guide and support their children. It is no different in the online world.

The best online safety strategy, regardless of the age of the user or the technology involved, is to talk with your children and to engage with their use of the Internet.

Remember, the chances of your child sharing their online experiences with you will be greatly reduced if they think that telling you about a problem will result in them being banned from using the Internet!

Social networking: key issues for parent

Some of the key issues to be aware of when using social networking services (chat, webcam or text based) are:

Being too young for the site and its content and conduct and online behaviours

- To comply with Facebook's Terms & Conditions of Use one must be 13 or over.
- Facebook call users of 13 – 18 years of age "Minors" and set a Minor's profile by default to share with "Friends Only".
- However, it is estimated that there are over 5 million Facebook users who are under 11 years of age so clearly young children are creating profiles and not giving their correct date of birth.
- They run the risk of seeing, reading and being involved in adult content and age-inappropriate behaviours.
- They run the risk of being contactable by adults not known to you, their parents.
  - ✓ *Encourage your children to only use age appropriate sites.*
  - ✓ *There are social networking sites for the under 13s which are moderated with content and conduct that is age appropriate.*
  - ✓ *You should encourage your children to only use age appropriate sites and to be truthful when registering on a social networking site.*

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Being unable to understand or apply the complicated privacy and security settings

Even if your child is over 13, like many an adult user, they may struggle to master the varied and complicated privacy and security settings on a site such as Facebook.

As well as the need to customise over 50 privacy settings you will need in particular to discuss with your child and perhaps help them to:

- ✓ Opt out of Photo Tagging
- ✓ Opt-out of Face Recognition
- ✓ Opt-out of Geo-Location and Location Check-In by others
- ✓ Customise each Games App so as not to make Public the child's (and your) private information.

Encourage your child to be careful when disclosing personal information.

Being conscious of when and where it is all right to reveal personal information is vital, it is especially important when using social networking sites.

A simple rule could be that your child should not give out any information or photos online that they wouldn't be prepared to give to a stranger on the street.

Revealing too much personal information

One of the greatest concerns associated with online technologies today is the issue of revealing too much personal information.

Risks include increased chances of online harassment or cyberbullying, inappropriate online contacts, increased chances of being located in the real world and your home being located, and identity theft.

Even adults have difficulty with "over-sharing" with the wife of the head of one of the UK Intelligence Services once posted the address of the family home and photos of the family on her Facebook page.

Is it any wonder then that "privacy" will have to be discussed frequently with your child?

Being careless with or disrespectful of the privacy of others:

Another key issue is the need to teach your child to respect the privacy of others. Your child has the right to privacy, and has the responsibility not to endanger the privacy of others when posting photos or chatting online.

They should also be mindful of what their online postings and interactions reveal about others.

Tagging others in photos without their permission or 'checking in' another child into a specific location at a specific time without their permission can invade their privacy.

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Each child needs to understand that is never acceptable to 'borrow' another person's identity online, to make a fake profile or use the password of another child to go online. Teaching your child about password security is very important.

"Be-Friending" strangers:

All too often, popularity is equated to the number of online 'friends' a person has.

Because of this, children and young people may feel pressured to accept, or indeed seek out, contacts that are not known to them in the real world.

You need to show your child how to apply the safety and privacy settings of their social networking site and remind them to review them, and their list of "friends", often.

Being unkind, hurtful or offensive to others:

The lack of adult supervision and feeling that they are anonymous has led some young people to cyberbully and harass others online.

Cyberbullying is the using of technology to deliberately hurt, upset, harass or embarrass others.

Additionally, online conversations, particularly in unmoderated services, can sometimes stray into topics that that are inappropriate or offensive to others.

Encourage respect for others. As in everyday life, there are informal ethical rules for how to behave when relating to other people on the Internet. These include being polite, using correct language and not harassing others.

Make your children aware that despite the perceptions to the contrary, online bullying is easier to detect and trace than offline bullying.

Also because of the code of practice adopted by Internet Service Providers and mobile phone operators, companies are obliged to involve the Gardaí when illegal activity is reported to them.

Contacting and being contacted by strangers

We hear a lot in the media about children and young people being contacted by strangers in chat-based services and, of course, this can and does happen.

The real danger comes if a child or young person decides to meet someone in person that they have only previously met online.

Online grooming has also been associated with online chat: this is the term used to describe the act of befriending and influencing a child with the intent of sexually abusing that child.

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Paedophiles have been known to use chat services, often posing as youngsters themselves, to initiate conversations with potential victims.

They use a range of techniques to gain the trust and confidence of the young person – sometimes over a period of months – to prepare the way to meeting in person.

As the trust grows, the paedophile may ask young people to send inappropriate images or perform sexual acts on webcam, using these as a tool for future blackmail as an additional way of gaining power over their victims.

Although grooming is a very real and alarming risk (and certainly one that attracts the most media attention) it is worth remembering that research shows that children are more likely to by abused by someone they already know (such as a family member, family friend, or someone in a position of trust), than by a stranger.

Social networking parenting tips

Dicuss the need for privacy and how to respect the privacy of others with your child.

Know your child's Internet use. To be able to guide your child with regard to Internet use, it is important to understand how children use the Internet and know what they like to do online.

Let your child show you which websites they like visiting and what they do there. Why not join the sites they like and become familiar with their use and functions?

Acquiring knowledge of the site's Privacy Policy and Terms & Conditions and an understanding of how to use its Reporting or Block functions will enable you to show them to your child.

Thankfully most children and young people today use these services in the same way older generations may have used the telephone – they are just used as tools for catching up, making plans and socialising, and are just a normal part of their day-to-day activities.

The Internet is here to stay and the more we use it the more familiar we will become with its safe use.

Useful Links:

https://www.preswex.ie/policies/code-of-behaviour/

https://www.preswex.ie/policies/anti-bullying-policy/

https://www.preswex.ie/policies/aup-internet-acceptable-user-policy/

https://www.preswex.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ipadacceptableusage.pdf

https://www.webwise.ie/

http://www.npc.ie/

https://www.childline.ie/