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SCOTLAND**

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# Social Media

Guidance for Parents & Carers

Police Scotland Cybercrime

28.08.2023

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## Social Media Advice for Parents and Carers



Cybercrime Harm  
Prevention Unit  
Police Scotland

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## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Social Media</b> .....	3
1.1	What is Social Media? .....	3
1.2	Why is Social Media so prevalent in young people`s lives?.....	3
1.3	Why is there so much Social Media use by young people?.....	4
1.4	Can parents and carers influence online behaviours? .....	5
1.5	The teenage brain and Social Media .....	5
1.6	Parental controls.....	6
1.7	Advice from Social Media platforms.....	7
1.8	Understanding your digital footprint .....	8
<b>2</b>	<b>Negative and Positive Impacts of Social Networking</b> .....	9
2.1	Legal age for accessing Social Media .....	9
2.2	Social Networking.....	9
2.2.1	Depression .....	10
2.2.2	Anxiety .....	10
2.2.3	Sleep deprivation. ....	10
2.2.4	Envy.....	11
2.2.5	Communication issues. ....	12
2.2.6	Promotes creativity. ....	12
2.2.7	Fosters purposeful mindfulness.....	12
2.2.8	Connecting with peers with similar interests.....	13
2.2.9	Promote awareness.....	13
2.2.10	Promotes critical thinking. ....	13
<b>3</b>	<b>Social Media Platforms Useful Information</b> .....	13
3.1	Main Social Media Apps.....	13
3.1.1	GroupMe .....	13
3.1.2	Kik Messenger .....	14
3.1.3	WhatsApp .....	14
3.1.4	Discord .....	14
3.1.5	Instagram .....	15
3.1.6	Tik Tok .....	15
3.1.7	Tumblr .....	16
3.1.8	X .....	16
3.1.9	Houseparty .....	16

3.1.10	Live.me .....	17
3.1.11	YouNow .....	17
3.1.12	Snapchat .....	18
3.1.13	Whisper .....	18
3.1.14	Monkey .....	19
3.1.15	MeetMe .....	19
3.1.16	Omegle .....	19
3.1.17	Yubo .....	20
3.1.18	Amino .....	20
3.1.19	Zepeto .....	20
3.1.20	Roblox .....	21
3.1.21	Be Real .....	22
3.1.22	Wizz .....	22
3.1.23	Vent .....	23
<b>4</b>	<b>Guidance .....</b>	<b>23</b>
4.1	Cyber Bullying.....	23
4.2	Sharing Images.....	24
4.3	Understand the risks children may need to deal with.....	25
4.4	Practical tips to help minimise the risks your child might face .....	26
4.5	Keep talking and stay involved .....	26
4.6	Fake news .....	27
<b>5</b>	<b>Resources .....</b>	<b>27</b>
5.1	Introduction.....	27

# 1 Social Media

## 1.1 What is Social Media?

Social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks. Users usually access social media services through web-based apps on desktops or download services that offer social media functionality to their mobile devices.



## 1.2 Why is Social Media so prevalent in young people's lives?

Social media is now an important part of many people's lives. In fact, a study suggests that half of the children who are aged between eight and seventeen years have social networking profiles like Facebook, Instagram etc. Not only the young people, but people of all ages, and all professions are using social networking sites as a means of communication.

Social media plays a dominant role in our day to day life. It creates a wide range of impact on people when it is shared on social media.

To stay in touch with your friends is important to all and social media has attempted to use its influence in doing this positively. Instant messaging, images, status updates, image-sharing, video-sharing are few of the major elements that play a role in the recognition of social media.

Almost all teenagers in the UK have a strong Internet presence and extensively share personal content and opinions online.

### **1.3 Why is there so much Social Media use by young people?**



The answer lies largely in the change in lifestyle where increasing numbers of single working parent and dual-working parent households and after school programs that eat into play and socialisation time of the kids.

The lack of time for face-to-face socialisation is compounded by practical issues such as the

pandemic, and parental restrictions that stem from fears of predators, drug dealers and gangs.

Changes in society along with the advent of Internet and its various applications, have resulted in the emergence of an unrestricted social life in a virtual setting. As parents we scrutinise who our children interact with in the real world but what controls do we have in the virtual world?

The increased presence of youth online has raised serious concerns about the safety of Internet and social media use. Difficulty in self-regulation, lack of awareness of repercussions of privacy compromise and susceptibility to peer pressure are listed as reasons for teenagers' cavalier attitude towards online risks such as sexting, cyberbullying and exposure to inappropriate content as they navigate social media. On the other hand, there has also been criticism that surrounds the safety of extensive digital (in particular Internet/social networking) use by youth.

The risks of Internet and social media to teenagers is just as real as the risks in society. Cyberbullying, in the forms of name-calling and gossiping, spreading rumours, making threats or otherwise sending malicious messages through emails, message boards and social media, has augmented offline bullying and estimates of the incidence of cyber bullying range from 23 to 72% in various studies.

Exposure to age-inappropriate content is another serious risk because it causes much damage to an age-group that is already prone to sexual uncertainty and uncommitted and possibly unsafe sexual exploration. Dangerous communities that support self-harm activities, such as anorexia, drug use, and such other disruptive concepts are also serious pitfalls of unsupervised Internet usage among teens.

#### **1.4 Can parents and carers influence online behaviours?**

Young people already emotionally imbalanced or prone to disruptive behaviour are obviously more vulnerable online and are more likely to commit to unsafe or irresponsible actions in the virtual world. However, there are some risks that are common to all young people and such risks are largely built on the attitude and behaviour of the youth themselves, rather than them being victims of an unfair attack.

Research has shown that there is a positive correlation between parents' level of privacy concern and that of their teenaged children. Thus, parents can influence their children's attitudes and behaviour through advice and perhaps monitoring the use of social media by teenagers.

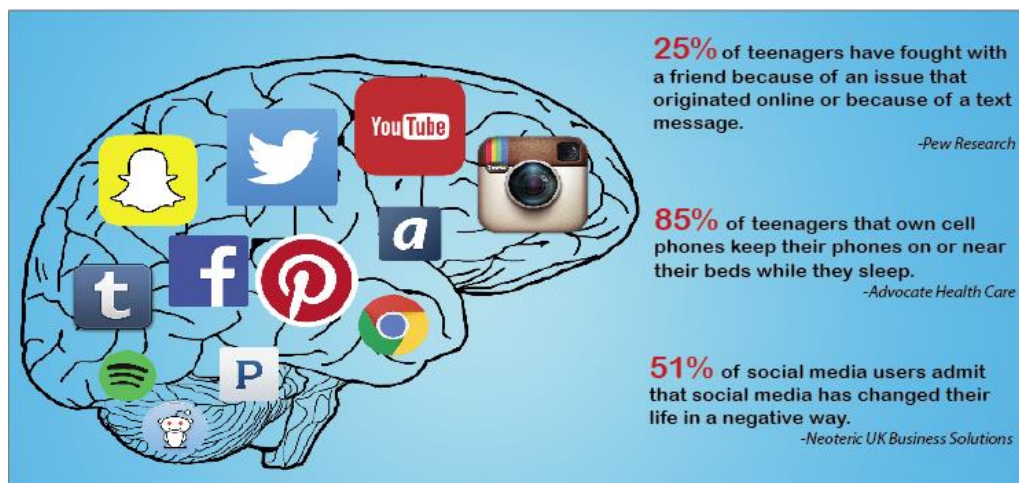
However, the latter could be a double-edged sword, as teenagers, naturally inclined to rebel against parental insurgence into their private space, may practice deception, which may override any parental measure to increase safety. For example, adolescents may use pseudonyms and false identifying information like age and location to protect themselves, on the advice of their parents. Ironically, the same technique could also be adopted by them to insulate themselves from the eyes of parents.

#### **1.5 The teenage brain and Social Media**

For teens social media can become almost addictive. In a study by researchers at a brain mapping centre, they found that certain regions of teen brains became activated by "likes" on social media, sometimes causing them to want to use social media more.

During the study, researchers used an MRI scanner to image the brains of 32 teenagers as they used a fictitious social media app resembling Instagram. The teenagers were shown more than 140 images where "likes" were believed to be from their peers. However, the likes were actually assigned by the research team.

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As a result, the brain scans revealed that in addition to a number of regions, the nucleus accumbens, part of the brain's reward circuitry, was especially active when they saw a large number of likes on their own photos. According to researchers, this area of the brain is the same region that responds when we see pictures of people we love or when we win money.

Researchers say that this reward region of the brain is particularly sensitive during the teen years, which could explain why teens are so drawn to social media.

In another part of the study, researchers could see a correlation between social media and peer influence. Participants in the study were shown both neutral photos and risky photos. What they found is that the type of image had no impact on the number of likes given by teens in the study.

Instead, they were likely to hit "like" on the popular photos regardless of what they showed. Researchers believe this behaviour shows that peers can have both a positive and negative influence on others while using social media.

### 1.6 Parental controls



Parental controls put you in control of what content your child can see. Combined with privacy settings these can help you protect your children from the things they shouldn't see or experience online.

Internet Matters have [guides](#) for step-by-step instructions to set controls on popular entertainment services & search engines.

Internet Matters also have step by step [guides](#) to help you set up the right controls and privacy settings on the networks, gadgets, apps, and sites they use to give them a safer online experience.



## 1.7 Advice from Social Media platforms

The following guidance is provided by each of the major social media platforms. Click to read detailed information.

[Facebook: basic privacy settings and tools](#)

[X: how to protect and unprotect your Tweets](#)

[YouTube: privacy and safety](#)

[Instagram: privacy settings and information](#)

[LinkedIn: account and privacy settings overview](#)

[Snapchat: privacy settings](#)

### **Use two-factor authentication (2FA) to protect your accounts**

Two-factor authentication (often shortened to 2FA) provides a way of 'double checking' that you really **are** the person you are claiming to be when you're using online services, such as social media, banking or email. Even if a criminal (or someone simply looking to cause mischief) knows your password, they won't be able to access any of your accounts that are protected using 2FA.

The website [Turnon2fa](#) contains up-to-date instructions on how to set up 2FA across popular online services such as **Instagram**, **Snapchat**, **Twitter** and **Facebook**.

For more information on why you should use 2FA wherever you can, read the [NCSC's official guidance on two-factor authentication](#).

## 1.8 Understanding your digital footprint



It's worth exercising some caution when using social media. Not everyone using social media is necessarily who they say they are. Take a moment to check if you **know** the person, and if the friend/link/follow is genuine.

Less obviously, you should think about your digital footprint, which is a term used to describe the entirety of information that you post online, including photos and status updates. Criminals can use this publicly available information to steal your identity, or use it to make phishing messages more convincing.

Think about **what** you're posting, and **who** has access to it. Have you configured the privacy options so that it's only accessible to the people you want to see it?

Consider what your followers and friends **need** to know, and what detail is unnecessary (but could be useful for criminals).

Have an idea about what your friends, colleagues or other contacts say about **you** online.

The Information Commissioners Office (ICO) is the UK's independent body set up to uphold information rights. ICO state that it's your right to be informed about how organisations are using your data, even if it happens behind the scenes. This includes understanding how people use your data to target you with social media adverts.ICO have created a number of [resources](#) to help you understand your rights with regards to your online data.

ICO have further [guidance](#) on social media privacy settings and factsheets on some of the most popular social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn and Google) to assist you in taking control over how your personal information is used.

LSE (London School of Economics) have developed toolkits for [young people](#) and also for [parents](#) to help them talk to children about their data and privacy online, including data protection, the digital economy and a range of privacy issues.

## 2 Negative and Positive Impacts of Social Networking

### 2.1 Legal age for accessing Social Media

The reason most social media services use an age limit of 13 or over is in part because of a law in the USA. The COPPA law or Children's Online Privacy Protection Act states that any organisations or people operating online services (including social media services) are not allowed to collect the personal information of anyone under the age of 13 without parental permission.



### 2.2 Social Networking

Undoubtedly, social networking plays a vital role in broadening teen social connections and helping them learn valuable technical skills. But what impact is all of this social networking having on young teen minds? Most reports indicate that the impact can be significant.

Not only are teens' developing brains vulnerable to so much time online, but because they often have difficulty self-regulating their screen time, their risks can increase with the more time they spend. Additionally, they are more susceptible to peer pressure, cyberbullying and sexting—all activities involving digital communication—making navigating the online social world treacherous at times.

There are a number of health issues that may develop as a result of too much time online.

### **2.2.1 Depression**



Researchers are just beginning to establish a link between depression and social media. While they have not actually discovered a cause-and-effect relationship between social media and depression, they have discovered that social media use can be associated with an intensification of the symptoms of depression, including a decrease in social activity and an increase in loneliness.

Several additional studies have shown that the prolonged use of social media may be related to the signs and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, especially in children.

### **2.2.2 Anxiety**

Teens often feel emotionally invested in their social media accounts. Not only do they feel pressure to respond quickly online, but they also feel pressure to have perfect photos and well-written posts, all of which can cause a great deal of anxiety. In fact, some studies have found that the larger a teen's social circle online the more anxiety they feel about keeping up with everything online.

It takes a lot of time and effort to keep up with the unspoken rules and culture of each social media platform. As a result, this puts additional pressure on teens, which can cause feelings of anxiety.

Additionally, if teens commit a faux pas online, this also can be an extreme source of anxiety. Many teens, especially girls, are prone to worry about what others might think of them and how they will respond when they see them next. Then factor in cyberbullying, sextortion, and other cruel online behaviours and you can see why social media can be a toxic source of anxiety for many teens.

### **2.2.3 Sleep deprivation.**

Sometimes teens spend so many hours on social media that they begin to lose valuable sleep. Consequently, this sleep loss can lead to moodiness, a drop in grades, lack of physical activity, and overeating, as well as exacerbate existing issues.



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In fact, research shows a strong link between increased screen time and the development of ADHD-related symptoms, such as difficulty with focusing, emotional regulation, poor attention, hyperactivity, and getting enough sleep.

Additionally, one British study published in the *Journal of Youth Studies* surveyed 900 teens between the ages of 12 and 15 about their social media use and its impact on sleep. What they found was that one-fifth of the teens said they "almost always" wake up during the night and log in to social media.

The study also revealed that girls were significantly more likely than boys to wake up and check social media on their phones. In addition to reporting feeling tired all the time, they also reported being less happy on average than teens whose sleep was not disturbed by social media.

### 2.2.4 Envy.

Jealousy and envy—while normal emotions—can wreak havoc on teen brains if they dwell on comparing themselves to their peers. They may fixate on what someone else has or experienced, that they themselves have not. Due to the way accounts are curated, it can appear to the reader that other people lead more exciting lives than they do, which only feeds feelings of inadequacy.

Unfortunately, what teens often do not realize is that people tend to only post their "highlight reel" on social media and often keep the mundane or difficult experiences off the Internet. As a result, another person's life may look perfect online, but offline they have struggles just like anyone else.

Still, it is easy for a teen to play the comparison game and start thinking that everyone is happier or better off than they are. As a result, this can feed into depression, loneliness, anger, and a variety of other issues.

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### **2.2.5 Communication issues.**



While social media is a great way to keep in touch with friends and family, it also is not the same as face-to-face communication. For instance, a teen cannot see a person's facial expressions or hear their tone of voice online.

As a result, it is very easy for misunderstandings to occur, especially when people try to be funny or sarcastic online.

Many teens spend so much time online checking statuses and likes that they may forget to interact with the people right in front of them. For this reason, friendships and dating relationships can suffer when social media takes centre stage in a person's life. As a result, teens risk having relationships that are not deep or authentic.

Teens who place a priority on social media will often focus on the pictures they take that show how much fun they are having rather than actually focusing on having fun. The end result is that their relationships and life satisfaction may suffer.

### **2.2.6 Promotes creativity.**



Kids who have a passion for photography, art, video production, music or writing can use applications like blogs, YouTube and Instagram to express themselves. Social media can be a great source of creativity, with kids posting poems, posing interesting questions or sharing funny or cool videos.

### **2.2.7 Fosters purposeful mindfulness.**

Social networking can encourage your children to practice public speaking and presentation skills by creating video interviews, podcasts and SlideShare presentations on topics that interest them.

### 2.2.8 Connecting with peers with similar interests.

Social media can give kids the opportunity to meet peers who share their interests, which can boost their confidence in face-to-face interactions.



### 2.2.9 Promote awareness.

Social media allows for a deeper understanding of various cultures and world issues whilst providing resources for young people to research topics of interest.

### 2.2.10 Promotes critical thinking.



More educators are integrating social media into the classroom. Due to the pandemic home learning and interaction was promoted by schools

## 3 Social Media Platforms Useful Information

### 3.1 Main Social Media Apps

#### TEXTING APPS

##### 3.1.1 GroupMe



GroupMe is an app that doesn't charge fees or have limits for direct and group messages. Users also can send photos, videos, and calendar links.

#### What parents need to know?

- **It has adult themes.** The embedded GIFs and emojis have some adult themes, such as drinking and sex.

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- **Teens are always connected.** Without fees or limits, teens can share and text to their heart's content, which may mean they rarely put the phone down.



### 3.1.2 Kik Messenger

Kik Messenger is an app that lets kids text for free. It's fast and has no message limits, character limits, or fees if you only use the basic features. Because it's an app, the texts won't show up on your kid's phone's messaging service, and you're not charged for them (beyond standard data rates).

#### What parents need to know?

- **Stranger danger is an issue.** Kik allows communication with strangers who share their Kik usernames to find people to chat with.
- **It's loaded with covert marketing.** Kik specializes in "promoted chats" -- basically, conversations between brands and users. It also offers specially designed apps (accessible only through the main app), many of which offer products for sale.



### 3.1.3 WhatsApp

Whatsapp lets users send text messages, audio messages, videos, and photos to one or many people with no message limits or fees.

#### What parents need to know?

- **It's for users 16 and over.** Lots of younger teens seem to be using the app, but this age minimum has been set by WhatsApp.
- **It can be pushy.** After you sign up, it automatically connects you to all the people in your address book who also are using WhatsApp. It also encourages you to add friends who haven't signed up yet.



### 3.1.4 Discord

Discord started as a place for gamers to chat while playing video games but has become a bigger platform where users can use text, voice-chat, and video-chat to discuss a wide variety of topics.

#### What parents need to know?

- **There are public and private "servers"** or discussion groups. Teens can join public groups, ask to join private ones, or start their own. The safest option is for them to join a private group with people they know in real life.
- **Some groups are more moderated than others, some have warnings of inappropriate content, and some are hate-filled.** There are plenty of groups that are meant for adults only, and some are totally tame and well moderated. If your child is in one of the latter, the risk is much lower.



## PHOTO AND VIDEO-SHARING APPS AND SITES

### 3.1.5 Instagram

Instagram lets users snap, edit, and share photos and 15-second videos, either publicly or within a private network of followers. It unites the most popular features of social media sites: sharing, seeing, and commenting on photos. It also lets you apply fun filters and effects to your photos, making them look high-quality and artistic.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Teens are on the lookout for "likes."** Similar to the way they use Facebook, teens may measure the "success" of their photos -- even their self-worth -- by the number of likes or comments they receive. Posting a photo or video can be problematic if teens are posting to validate their popularity.
- **Public photos are the default.** Photos and videos shared on Instagram are public unless privacy settings are adjusted. Hashtags and location information can make photos even more visible to communities beyond a teen's followers if his or her account is public.
- **Kids can send private messages.** Instagram Direct is like texting with photos or videos and you can do it with up to 15 mutual friends. These pictures don't show up on their public feeds. Although there's nothing wrong with group chats, kids may be more likely to share inappropriate content with their inner circles.

### 3.1.6 Tik Tok

Tik Tok Real Short Videos is a performance- and video-sharing social network that mostly features teens lip-synching to famous songs but also includes some original song writing and singing. Users can build up a following among friends or share posts publicly.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Songs and videos contain lots of questionable content.** Because the platform features popular music and a mix of teen and adult users, swearing and sexual content are commonplace.
- **There are often creepy comments.** Though lots of comments are kind, videos often have comments about the performer's body or other sexual references, and since kids under 13 and adults use the app, it's especially creepy.
- **Gaining followers and fans feels important.** Teens want a public profile to get exposure and approval, and many are highly motivated to get more followers and likes for their videos.

## MICROBLOGGING APPS AND SITES

### 3.1.7 Tumblr

Tumblr is like a cross between a blog and Twitter: It's a streaming scrapbook of text, photos, and/or video and audio clips. Users create and follow short blogs, or "tumblogs," that can be seen by anyone online (if they're made public). Many teens have tumblogs for personal use: sharing photos, videos, musings, and things they find funny with their friends.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Pornographic material is easy to find.** This online hangout is hip and creative but sometimes raunchy. Pornographic images and videos and depictions of violence, self-harm, drug use, and offensive language are easily searchable.
- **Privacy can be guarded but only through an awkward workaround.** The first profile a member creates is public and viewable by anyone on the internet. Members who desire full privacy have to create a *second* profile, which they're able to password-protect.
- **Posts are often copied and shared.** Reblogging on Tumblr is similar to re-tweeting: A post is reblogged from one tumblog to another. Many teens like -- and, in fact, want -- their posts to be reblogged.

### 3.1.8 X

X (Twitter) is a microblogging tool that allows users to post brief, 280-character messages -- called "tweets" -- and follow other users' activities. It's not only for adults; teens like using it to share tidbits and keep up with news and celebrities.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Public tweets are the norm for teens.** Though you can choose to keep your tweets private, most teens report having public accounts. Talk to your kids about what they post and how a post can spread far and fast.
- **Updates appear immediately.** Even though you can remove tweets, your followers can still read what you wrote until it's gone. This can get kids in trouble if they say something in the heat of the moment.

## LIVE-STREAMING VIDEO APPS

### 3.1.9 Houseparty

Houseparty Group Video Chat is a way for groups of teens to connect via live video. Two to eight people can be in a chat together at the same time. If someone who's not a direct friend joins a chat, teens get an alert in case they want to leave the chat. You can also "lock" a chat so no one else can join.

#### What parents need to know?

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- **Users can take screenshots during a chat.** Teens like to think that what happens in a chat stays in a chat, but that's not necessarily the case. It's easy for someone to take a screenshot while in a chat and share it with whomever they want.
- **There's no moderator.** Part of the fun of live video is that anything can happen, but that can also be a problem. Unlike static posts that developers may review, live video chats are spontaneous, so it's impossible to predict what kids will see, especially if they're in chats with people they don't know well.



### 3.1.10 Live.me

Live.me Live Video Streaming allows kids to watch others and broadcast themselves live, earn currency from fans, and interact live with users without any control over who views their streams.

#### What parents need to know?

- **It's associated with Tik Tok - including musical.ly.** Because of the parent app's popularity, this streamer is very popular, and many kids who use one app use the other, too.
- **Kids can easily see inappropriate content.** During our review, we saw broadcasters cursing and using racial slurs, scantily clad broadcasters, young teens answering sexually charged questions, and more.
- **Predatory comments are a concern.** Because anyone can communicate with broadcasters, there is the potential for viewers to request sexual pictures or performances or to contact them through other social means and send private images or messages.



### 3.1.11 YouNow

YouNow Broadcast, Chat, and Watch Live Video is an app that lets kids stream and watch live broadcasts. As they watch, they can comment or buy gold bars to give to other users. Ultimately, the goal is to get lots of viewers, start trending, and grow your fan base.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Kids might make poor decisions to gain popularity.** Because it's live video, kids can do or say anything and can respond to requests from viewers -- in real time. Though there seems to be moderation around iffy content (kids complain about having accounts suspended "for nothing"), there's plenty of swearing and occasional sharing of personal information with anonymous viewers.
- **Teens can share personal information, sometimes by accident.** Teens often broadcast from their bedrooms, which often have personal information visible, and they sometimes will share a phone number or an email address with viewers, not knowing who's really watching.

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Teens even broadcast themselves sleeping, which illustrates the urge to share all aspects of life, even intimate moments, publicly -- and potentially with strangers.

### SELF-DESTRUCTING/SECRET APPS



#### 3.1.12 Snapchat

Snapchat is a messaging app that lets users put a time limit on the pictures and videos they send before they disappear. Most teens use the app to share goofy or embarrassing photos without the risk of them going public. However, there are lots of opportunities to use it in other ways.

#### What parents need to know?

- **It's a myth that Snapchats go away forever.** Data is data: Whenever an image is sent, it never truly goes away. (For example, the person on the receiving end can take a screenshot of the image before it disappears.) Snapchats can even be recovered. After a major hack in December 2013 and a settlement with the FTC, Snapchat has clarified its privacy policy, but teens should stay wary.
- **It can make sexting seem OK.** The seemingly risk-free messaging might encourage users to share pictures containing sexy images.
- **There's a lot of questionable "clickbait" content.** Snapchat's Discover feature offers a grab-bag of articles, videos, and quizzes from magazine publishers, TV networks, and online sources mostly about pop culture, celebrities, and relationships (a typical headline: "THIS is What Sex Does To Your Brain").



#### 3.1.13 Whisper

Whisper is a social "confessional" app that allows users to post whatever's on their minds, paired with an image. With all the emotions running through teens, anonymous outlets give them the freedom to share their feelings without fear of judgment.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Whispers are often sexual in nature.** Some users use the app to try to hook up with people nearby, while others post "confessions" of desire. Lots of eye-catching, nearly nude pics accompany these shared secrets.
- **Content can be dark.** People normally don't confess sunshine and rainbows; common Whisper topics include insecurity, depression, substance abuse, and various lies told to employers and teachers.
- **Although it's anonymous to start, it may not stay that way.** The app encourages users to exchange personal information in the "Meet Up" section.

## CHATTING, MEETING, AND DATING APPS AND SITES

### 3.1.14 Monkey

If you remember Chatroulette, where users could be randomly matched with strangers for a video chat, this is the modern version. Using Snapchat to connect, users have 10 seconds to live video-chat with strangers.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Lots of teens are using it.** Because of the connection with Snapchat, plenty of teens are always available for a quick chat -- which often leads to connecting via Snapchat and continuing the conversation through that platform.
- **Teens can accept or reject a chat.** Before beginning a chat, users receive the stranger's age, gender, and location and can choose whether to be matched or not.

### 3.1.15 MeetMe

Chat and Meet New People. The name says it all. Although not marketed as a dating app, MeetMe does have a "Match" feature whereby users can "secretly admire" others, and its large user base means fast-paced communication and guaranteed attention.

#### What parents need to know?

- **It's an open network.** Users can chat with whoever's online, as well as search locally, opening the door to potential trouble.
- **Lots of details are required.** First and last name, age, and post code are requested at registration, or you can log in using a Facebook account. The app also asks permission to use location services on your teens' mobile devices, meaning they can find the closest matches wherever they go.

### 3.1.16 Omegle

Omegle is a chat site that puts two strangers together in their choice of a text chat or a video chat. Being anonymous can be very attractive to teens, and Omegle provides a no-fuss way to make connections. Its "interest boxes" also let users filter potential chat partners by shared interests.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Users get paired up with strangers.** That's the whole premise of the app. And there's no registration required.
- **This is *not* a site for kids and teens.** Omegle is filled with people searching for sexual chat. Some prefer to do so live. Others offer links to porn sites.
- **Language is a big issue.** Since the chats are anonymous, they're often much more explicit than those with identifiable users might be.

### 3.1.17 Yubo

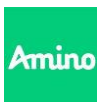


(formerly Yellow - Make new friends) is an app that is often called the "Tinder for teens" because users swipe right or left to accept or reject the profiles of other users. If two people swipe right on each other, they can chat and hook up via Snapchat or Instagram.

#### What parents need to know?

- **It's easy to lie about your age.** Even if you try to enter a birth date that indicates you're under 13, the app defaults to an acceptable age so you can create an account anyway.
- **You have to share your location and other personal information.** For the app to work, you need to let it "geotag" you. Also, there are no private profiles, so the only option is to allow anyone to find you.
- **It encourages contact with strangers.** As with Tinder, the whole point is to meet people. The difference with Yellow is that the endgame is sometimes just exchanging social media handles to connect there. Even if there's no offline contact, however, without age verification, teens are connecting with people they don't know who may be much older.

### 3.1.18 Amino

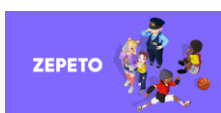


Communities, Chat, Forums, and Groups is an interest-based app that lets users find people who are into the same things. Teens can join groups -- or create them -- and then post within the group, follow other users, and chat with them via text, voice, or video.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Contact with strangers is part of the experience.** While it's great for kids to be able to feel a sense of belonging and kinship with others, the mix of kids and adults blended with all varieties of chat makes it risky. Also, unless a kid is in a closed group, everything they post is public, and other users can search for them. Make sure your kid's location is not included in their profile.
- **Mature content and bullying is common.** Since each community makes its own rules, profanity, sexual references, and violent content are a part of some forums. A lot of what your kid sees, who they meet, and what people post is determined by the groups they decide to join, as some are very tame and some are definitely not for kids.
- **It's not made with kids in mind.** Because this app wasn't created for kids, it doesn't have the same safeguards or privacy standards as apps that are made for kids.

### 3.1.19 Zepeto



The **Zepeto app** is a platform for a creative studio. The users can create their avatars with selfie pictures and make a virtual world to interact with others. The friends can share a common room and have fun activities by creating avatars with displayed items available in

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this environment. They can connect the pictures with others on the platform and purchase accessories to improve their experience. It is a platform where the kids use their creative thinking while designing the avatar of their favourite images.

### What parents need to know?

- **Contact with strangers is part of the experience.** This app is available for everyone, and so young people should be careful who they interact with because adults can misuse this platform for various reasons including designing a child-like avatar and interact with young people on the App with very little safeguarding measures.
- **Mature content and bullying is common.** There is no valid age verification prior to joining the app. While making avatars, the young people take their pictures and customize them according to their creativity. In this process, the kids and teens reveal their faces on this public platform which can leave them vulnerable to abuse. There does not appear to be a reliable security system to safeguard private information related to users.
- **It's not made with kids in mind.** The **Zepeto app** tracks the location of the user's gadget, and there is a possibility to hack the kid's device easily. When you install this app, the Zepeto asks for the location access, and when your kid authenticates it, then automatically, the app starts to track the location details.



### 3.1.20 Roblox

Roblox is a gaming platform where multiple players interact and play together online. The site has a collection of games aimed at 8-18 year olds, however players of all ages can use the site. Roblox is currently available on PC, phone, tablet and Xbox One. Every game on Roblox is created by users, and there are a wide variety to choose from. These can vary from delivering pizzas, to roaming a kingdom as a medieval knight, to even starring in a fashion show. The platform features

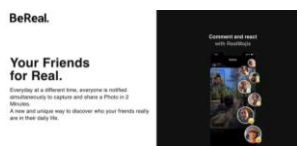
### What parents need to know?

- **Contact with strangers is part of the experience.** Whilst the games are aimed at 8-18 year olds, there are no age restrictions. This means both adults and young people can play and communicate with each other on the platform. All games are multiplayer and include a written chat feature, which is visible to players within each individual game. Users can also make and receive friend requests during gameplay and this means that they can chat to each other outside of the game.
- **Mature content.** The Roblox Studio is a section where players use their imagination and skills to create their own games and share these with others. The ability to create and play games can be very appealing to young people who like to create the content they see online. However, because content is user-generated it can mean that some games might not be appropriate for young children.
- **Use the inbuilt parental guidance settings:** Make sure your child knows how to find and use the report and block functions. Use the [Roblox how to make a report page](#) to learn how to do this.

Set up the parental controls that are right for your family. You can also disable chat, set up the Parent PIN and use the Account Restrictions within Roblox. [Click here](#) for more

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information on how to use the Safety features. There are additional safety features for under-13s, so it's worth checking your child's account is registered with the correct age. Players under the age of 13 have a <13 symbol next to their username on the game at all times, however this is not displayed to other players.



### 3.1.21 Be Real

This app is aimed at social media users interested in sharing authentic moments from their day without using any filters. The concept is simple: no matter where you are or what you are doing - within 2 minutes of receiving a notification, you have to take an honest, unfiltered picture of yourself once a day and then post it online for your friends to see.

#### What parents need to know?

- **Photos cannot be edited** and filters cannot be added. Users only have two minutes to submit their photo, users can only post once per day. Anyone who wishes to comment on a photo must be friends with the user, which reduces the likelihood of strangers commenting on photos. Users cannot contact others privately. Any comments are public for all to see
- **Pictures are unmoderated:** this means that if your child is scrolling through the Discovery feed, they may come across an item someone posted that features inappropriate content. Additionally, RealMojis could feature the same kind of content. It's important that users report this kind of content if seen for review.
- **No parental controls:** because of the nature of this app, there are minimal privacy controls and no parental controls.
- **Photos use the front and back camera:** although the user might point at one thing to photograph, the camera will also take a picture of the user themselves. It's important for young people to be aware of their surroundings to avoid posting anything they don't want online. Users could be inadvertently revealing physical location/ private details. The immediacy/ urgency to post discourages checking what's in the photo.
- **It's easy to connect with strangers:** some young people may send or receive friend requests from strangers through the Discovery tab if they are sharing with everyone. Once another user is on the 'Friends' list, they are able to comment on photos. They may also receive notifications about your posts. However, users can delete others from this list very easily.

### 3.1.22 Wizz

Wizz is primarily a friend-finding chat app, allowing a pair of individuals or groups to talk and exchange gifs, pictures, and videos

#### What parents need to know?

- The use of strong language is frequent and, while the app's guidelines prohibit sexual or violent content, some questionable topics can slip into the chats. Some users' bio images are also sexually suggestive. Wizz uses an age verification system to put users of a



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similar age in the same feed, but it doesn't work reliably. Children and adults frequently appear in the same space and can be connected if they accept each others' friend requests. While Wizz is a perfectly acceptable, albeit no frills, social networking platform for adults looking to connect with each other, it definitely doesn't feel like a safe virtual space for younger users.

### 3.1.23 Vent



Vent describes itself as an app to express your feelings and connect with people who care. You can post anonymously, though the app does require an email address (it's not displayed publicly), and you can choose to post your real name.

Vent has a slick interface and an inviting pitch, the app's website reads. "Voice your opinion to our supportive community without the worry of being insulted or disrespected, de-friended or upsetting people you know."

#### What parents need to know?

- Unfortunately some of the comments made in response to a post are not actively moderated and can be hurtful with little regress for removal or deletion.

## 4 Guidance

### 4.1 Cyber Bullying



Cyber Bullying is the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature

Cyberbullying is bullying with the use of digital technologies. It can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is repeated behaviour, aimed at scaring,

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angering or shaming those who are targeted. Examples include: spreading lies about or posting embarrassing photos of someone on social media

sending hurtful messages or threats via messaging platforms impersonating someone and sending mean messages to others on their behalf. Face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying can often happen alongside each other. But cyberbullying leaves a digital footprint – a record that can prove useful and provide evidence to help stop the abuse.

For more information and tips please visit [respectme | Scotland's anti-bullying service](https://www.respectme.scot.nhs.uk/) [respectme](https://www.respectme.scot.nhs.uk/)

### 4.2 Sharing Images

Sharing photos and videos online can be a great way to express yourself. Lots of people like to share selfies with friends - to show them what they're up to, express how they feel, or just to have a laugh.

Some young people post naked or semi-naked (nude) images of themselves too. This might be because:

- They want to send one to a boyfriend/girlfriend
- They feel like they should send one to a boyfriend/girlfriend
- They want to flirt with someone they like
- They want to make their friends laugh
- They are being pressured to send one by someone else

Whatever the reason, there are always risks involved in sharing naked pictures, particularly if someone isn't sending it because they want to. Once an image has been shared, there's a chance that it could be shared with more people.

If you have already shared something you're worried about, it's never too late to get help.

**No one** has the right to pressure someone else into sharing a nude image.

**Everyone** has the right to say 'no' if someone asks them to do something they're not comfortable with.

Someone who respects and cares about you should never pressure you to do something you don't want to do, or make you feel bad for saying no.

There are a few different ways that you can say 'no' - choose whichever way you're most comfortable with. Here are some suggestions for what you could say in different situations:

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- **Someone you're in a relationship with:** Let them know you're not comfortable. If they respect and care about you, they should understand.
- **Someone you know and like, but are not in a relationship with:** You may feel more comfortable say no in a funny way, Zipit app has helped lots of young people to respond to nude image requests.
- **Someone you don't know:** Ignore, block and report, so they can't continue to contact you

For more information visit [Thinkuknow - home](#)

### 4.3 Understand the risks children may need to deal with

What they might see or do:

Seeing or sharing of violent, sexual and pornographic content

Inaccurate or false information and extreme views

Promotion of harmful behaviours including self-harm, anorexia and suicide

Over-sharing of personal information

Actively or unintentionally getting involved in bullying or hurtful behaviour

Who they might meet:

People who might bully, intimidate or frighten

People posing behind fake profiles for:

Mischief-making

Sexual grooming and stalking

Blackmail and extortion

Identity theft and hacking

How this could affect them:

Fear of missing out leading to excessive use or exaggeration



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Getting upset by things they have seen and being uncertain about what to do

Engaging, or being pressured into engaging in more risky behaviour either by accident or by design

Developing unrealistic, and perhaps depressing ideals of body image and gender

Becoming subject to peer pressure or interactions that are intense or too difficult to handle

Creating an online reputation that may create problems for them in the future

### 4.4 Practical tips to help minimise the risks your child might face

It's good practice for apps and websites to have safety advice and well-designed safety features which can make a real difference to how safe your child will be when using them. Work through safety and privacy features on the apps that your child is using, or might use. Make sure they understand the point of these and how to use them.

Don't be put off by believing your child knows more than you: the tools are actually quite easy to manage.

Ask them to show you which social media apps they use and what they like about them. Talk about how they use them and what makes them so engaging

Explain how you can use privacy settings to make sure only approved friends can see posts & images

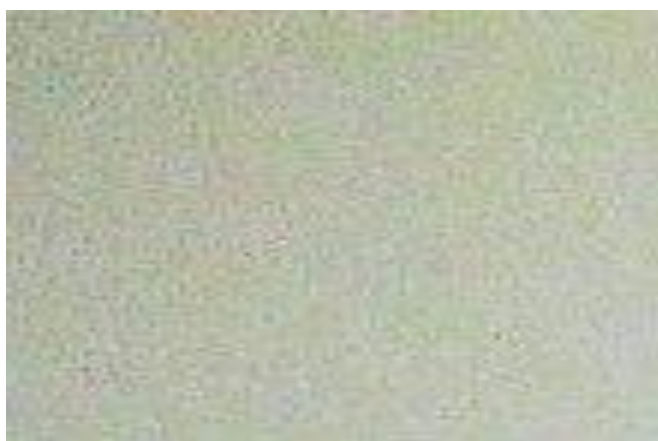
Check if any of their apps have 'geo-location' enabled, sharing their location unintentionally

Show them how to report offensive comments or block people who upset them

Check 'tagging' settings so that when others are posting or sharing photos online, your child's identity is not revealed. Also, get people's consent before sharing photos

Encourage your child to come and talk to you if they see anything that upsets them

### 4.5 Keep talking and stay involved



In a mobile age, children can't be completely protected, even by the best privacy controls; another child may use different settings. So it's important to keep talking to your child about the implications of social media. Getting a sense of what they think is a useful place to start; you may be surprised by how much thought they may have given to the issues.

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Encourage your child to think carefully about the way they, and others behave online, and how they might deal with difficult situations.

People may not always be who they say they are online: how can this create problems?

Why is it unwise to meet anyone in the real world that you've only ever met online?

Even if you think your messages are private, remember that words and images can always be captured and broadcast.

People present themselves differently online - do they really look like that? Are they always having that good a time?

Be aware that screens, and especially being anonymous, can lead people to say things they wouldn't say to someone's face.

What does being a good friend and a likeable person online look like?

There can be pressure to be part of a particular group online or to be seen to be following a certain set of ideas

How can you take a step back and make your own decisions?

### 4.6 Fake news

The term fake news alludes to reports, images, and videos that are shared to purposefully spread misinformation i.e. information that is factually incorrect. These news items may appear authentic at first and attempt to attract attention, shock, or shape opinions. Fake news can be created by individuals or groups who are acting in their own interests or those of third parties. The creation of misinformation is usually motivated by personal, political, or economic agendas.

Fake news reaches more people and spreads more quickly than the truth, meaning millions of people may have been fooled by fake news.

It is vital to help people to develop skills to recognise fake news. We recommend exploring this topic on the [www.projectreal.co.uk](http://www.projectreal.co.uk) website. Here you will find resources on the following; Fake News, Fake Photos, Fake People, Fake Stories (Conspiracies), Fake Videos.

## 5 Resources

### 5.1 Introduction

## OFFICIAL

- **Think you Know**: An education programme for advice about staying safe when you're on a phone, tablet or computer. [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)
- **Home Activity Packs**: Download home activity packs with simple 15-minute activities for your child to support their online safety at a time when they will be spending more time online at home. [www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/Support-tools/home-activity-worksheets)
- **Internet Matters**: Get expert support and practical tips to help children benefit from connected technology and the internet safely and smartly. [www.internetmatters.org](http://www.internetmatters.org)
- **Project Evolve**: Resources to equip children and young people for digital life. [www.projectevolve.co.uk](http://www.projectevolve.co.uk)
- **UK Safer Internet Centre**: Promote the safe and responsible use of technology for young people and provide online safety tips, advice and resources to help children and young people stay safe online. [www.saferinternet.org.uk](http://www.saferinternet.org.uk)
- **Childline**: Childline is a free and confidential service for children and young people. You can phone them on 0800 11 11 or you can visit their website [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- **NSPCC**: If you are an adult and worried about a child you can call the 24-hour NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000 or visit their website. [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)
- **ParentLine Scotland**: Call 08000282233 or email: [parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk](mailto:parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk) Parent Line's opening hours are from 9am-10pm (Mon-Fri) and 12 noon-8pm at weekends.
- **Crimestoppers**: Call 0800 555 111 or visit their website [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)
- **Fearless**: Fearless is a service that allows you to pass on information about crime 100% anonymously. This means you don't have to give us any personal details
- **Police Scotland**: Call 101 for advice and support (or call 999 if you think a child is in immediate danger). [www.scotland.police.uk](http://www.scotland.police.uk)
- **Internet Watch Foundation**: Report remove nude images shared online.
- **ProjectReal** : Recognise fake news online