



Parent guide to Social Media

The aim of this guide is to provide Parents and Guardians with the information to help children navigate the often dangerous online world of Social Media safely and responsibly.

Below you will find a general guide to navigate Social Media with your child as well as a summary of some of the more popular platforms and the dangers/risks inherent in some of them which you may not have been aware of. The advice is the same for all of them, every online platform has inherent risks/dangers but some more than others.

Remember, open communication and a supportive approach are key to guiding your child's Social Media usage. By staying engaged, informed, and fostering a trusting relationship, you can help them navigate the online world safely and responsibly.



General advice

1. **Educate yourself:** Take the time to understand the various Social Media platforms your child is using or interested in. Familiarise yourself with their features, privacy settings, and potential risks. Stay updated on the latest trends and developments in the Social Media landscape.
2. **Communicate openly:** Establish open lines of communication with your child about Social Media. Encourage them to share their experiences, concerns, or any issues they encounter online. Make them feel comfortable discussing their online activities without fear of judgement or punishment.
3. **Set age-appropriate guidelines:** Many Social Media platforms have age restrictions for a reason. Respect those guidelines and consider your child's maturity level when deciding if they are ready to use a particular platform. Set clear rules and expectations regarding their Social Media use, including the amount of time spent, content sharing, and interactions with others.
4. **Teach responsible behaviour:** Emphasise the importance of responsible online behaviour, such as being respectful, kind, and mindful of others' privacy. Educate your child about the potential consequences of sharing personal information, engaging in cyberbullying, or posting inappropriate content. Encourage them to think before they post and consider the long-term implications of their online actions.
5. **Privacy and security:** Help your child understand the significance of privacy settings and how to manage them effectively. Teach them to be cautious about accepting friend requests or engaging with strangers online. Discuss the importance of keeping personal information private and avoiding sharing their location or sensitive details publicly.
6. **Monitor and supervise:** While it's important to respect your child's privacy, it's equally crucial to monitor their Social Media activities to ensure their safety. Be aware of the platforms they are using, their friends, and the content they are consuming or sharing. Consider using parental control tools or monitoring apps if necessary, but always communicate your intentions with your child.
7. **Be a positive role model:** Children often learn by observing their parents' behaviour. Set a good example by practising responsible Social Media use yourself. Avoid excessive phone use during family time and demonstrate healthy digital habits. Encourage offline activities, face-to-face interactions, and hobbies that promote a balanced lifestyle.

Social Media platforms you need to be aware of.



Snapchat

Snapchat can present several dangers for kids if not used responsibly or without proper supervision. Here are some potential risks associated with Snapchat:

1. **Exposure to inappropriate content:** Snapchat allows users to send photos and videos that disappear after a short period. This feature can be misused by some users to send explicit or inappropriate content, which can be distressing and harmful to children.
2. **Sexting and cyberbullying:** The self-destructing nature of Snapchat messages may encourage some users, including kids, to engage in sexting (sending sexually explicit content). Additionally, Snapchat can be a platform for cyberbullying, as messages can be easily shared without leaving a trace.
3. **Privacy concerns:** Snapchat encourages users to share personal information, such as their location, through features like Snap Map. This can compromise a child's privacy and make them vulnerable to potential predators or stalkers.
4. **Unintended recipients:** Snapchat allows users to send messages to specific individuals or create public Stories that can be viewed by their friends. However, there is always a risk of mistakenly sending content to the wrong person or sharing it with a wider audience than intended, which can lead to embarrassment or harm.
5. **False sense of security:** The temporary nature of Snapchat messages can give users, including kids, a false sense of security, leading them to believe that their actions won't have consequences. This can lead to reckless behaviour or sharing of personal information without considering the potential risks.
6. **Addiction and mental health issues:** Excessive use of Snapchat or becoming overly concerned about maintaining a certain online image can contribute to addiction and negatively impact a child's mental health. Constant comparison to others, fear of missing out (FOMO), or experiencing cyberbullying can lead to stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

To mitigate these dangers, it's important for parents and guardians to monitor their children's online activities, educate them about internet safety, establish clear guidelines for app usage, and maintain open lines of communication to address any concerns or issues that may arise.



Discord

Discord is an online communication platform that allows users to create and join communities called servers. It offers voice, video, and text chat features, making it popular for gaming, Socialising, and various interest groups. Users can join public or private servers, engage in conversations, share Media, and participate in activities like gaming or streaming.

1. **Inappropriate content:** Discord allows users to create and join various communities, including public and private servers. Some of these servers may contain explicit or inappropriate content that is not suitable for children. Without proper supervision, kids can be exposed to harmful or adult-oriented material.
2. **Cyberbullying and harassment:** Like any online platform, Discord can be a breeding ground for cyberbullying. Kids may face harassment, trolling, or targeted bullying from other users. Discord's real-time nature and the ability to send private messages can amplify these negative experiences.
3. **Privacy concerns:** Discord requires users to create an account and share personal information. Kids may unknowingly reveal sensitive details about themselves, such as their age, location, or real name, which can make them vulnerable to online predators or identity theft.
4. **Stranger danger:** Discord allows users to communicate and interact with individuals they don't know personally. While there are many positive interactions, there is also a risk of encountering strangers with malicious intent who may try to exploit or manipulate children.
5. **Inappropriate relationships:** Due to the anonymous nature of Discord, kids may engage in conversations with individuals pretending to be someone else. This can lead to inappropriate relationships, grooming, or exploitation by predators.
6. **Addiction and mental health issues:** Excessive use of Discord can lead to addiction and negatively impact a child's mental health. It can contribute to feelings of Social isolation, anxiety, or depression, especially if they are exposed to negative interactions or addictive behaviours within the platform.

To mitigate these dangers, it's crucial for parents to be aware of their child's Discord usage and take necessary precautions:

- Set clear rules and guidelines for using Discord, including age restrictions and time limits.
- Talk to your child about online safety, privacy, and responsible behaviour.
- Monitor their interactions and the servers they join, and encourage them to report any concerning or inappropriate content or behaviour.
- Utilise Discord's privacy settings to limit who can contact your child and what information is visible to others.
- Encourage your child to only join verified and reputable servers, and educate them about the potential risks of engaging with strangers.



TikTok, a popular short-video app, has gained immense popularity among young users. While TikTok offers creative expression and entertainment, it's important for parents and guardians to be aware of the potential dangers it poses for kids. Below are some of the risks associated with TikTok and emphasises the significance of safeguarding children in the online realm.

1. **Inappropriate Content:** TikTok hosts an extensive range of content, and not all of it is suitable for children. Despite efforts to moderate and filter content, inappropriate videos may still slip through the cracks. Kids may come across explicit language, sexual content, violence, or dangerous challenges that can have a negative influence on their impressionable minds.
2. **Privacy Concerns:** TikTok requires users to provide personal information during the account creation process. This data, combined with user behaviour and preferences, can be used for targeted advertising. Additionally, young users might unknowingly disclose sensitive information or participate in challenges that compromise their privacy or safety.
3. **Cyberbullying and Online Harassment:** The anonymity provided by TikTok's platform can embolden cyberbullies and online trolls. Children may be subjected to hurtful comments, ridicule, or even harassment from peers or strangers. The impact of cyberbullying can be devastating, leading to emotional distress, low self-esteem, and even depression.
4. **Predators and Strangers:** TikTok's vast user base means that children may come into contact with strangers, including adults with malicious intent. Predators can exploit the platform to groom and manipulate young users, potentially leading to dangerous situations. Encouraging open communication with children about online safety and the importance of not engaging with strangers is vital.
5. **Addiction and Mental Health Concerns:** The addictive nature of TikTok, with its endless scrolling and quick video consumption, can lead to excessive screen time and neglect of other crucial activities. Spending excessive hours on the app may contribute to poor sleep patterns, reduced physical activity, and hindered academic performance. Furthermore, the constant comparison and pursuit of validation through likes and followers can impact children's self-esteem and mental well-being.

While TikTok can be a source of entertainment and creative expression for children, it's essential for parents and guardians to be aware of its potential dangers. Open communication, active parental monitoring, and setting clear boundaries around app usage are crucial steps in protecting children in the digital world.

Educating kids about online safety, promoting critical thinking, and encouraging responsible Social Media use will empower them to navigate platforms like TikTok responsibly and safely. By prioritising their well-being, we can ensure that children derive the benefits of technology while minimising its potential risks.



Telegram

Telegram is a messaging app that offers various features and functionalities, and while it can be a useful tool for communication, there are potential dangers associated with its use by children. Here are some of the dangers of Telegram for kids:

1. **Inappropriate content:** Telegram allows users to create public or private groups where content of all types can be shared. This includes adult content, violence, hate speech, and other inappropriate material that may not be suitable for children. Kids may stumble upon such content accidentally or be exposed to it by others.
2. **Cyberbullying:** As with any online platform, Telegram can be used as a tool for cyberbullying. Children may face harassment, threats, or be subjected to mean-spirited comments and behaviour from their peers or strangers. This can have a significant negative impact on their mental and emotional well-being.
3. **Privacy risks:** While Telegram offers encryption for messages, it's essential for children to understand the importance of privacy and be cautious about sharing personal information. Children might unknowingly provide sensitive information to strangers or be targeted by individuals with malicious intentions.
4. **Contact with strangers:** Telegram allows users to connect with people they don't know personally. Children may encounter strangers who could attempt to exploit or manipulate them. It's crucial for kids to understand the risks involved in interacting with unknown individuals and be cautious about accepting friend requests or engaging in conversations with strangers.
5. **Exposure to scams and malicious content:** Just like any other online platform, Telegram can be a breeding ground for scams and malicious content. Children might come across fraudulent schemes, phishing attempts, or links that lead to malware-infected websites. They may lack the experience to identify and avoid such threats, making them vulnerable to exploitation.
6. **Addiction and excessive screen time:** Telegram, like many Social Media platforms, can be addictive. Kids may spend excessive amounts of time messaging, participating in group chats, or browsing content on the app, leading to neglect of other important activities like studying, physical exercise, or Social interactions in the real world.

To mitigate these dangers, it's important for parents and guardians to monitor their children's online activities, educate them about internet safety, establish clear guidelines for app usage, and maintain open lines of communication to address any concerns or issues that may arise.



Reddit

Reddit is an online platform that hosts a diverse range of communities and discussions on various topics. It consists of individual forums called "subreddits," where users can share links, post text, and engage in conversations.

Each subreddit focuses on a specific theme or subject, allowing users to find communities that align with their interests.

Users on Reddit can upvote or downvote posts and comments, determining their visibility and popularity within a subreddit. This system helps to curate content and prioritise the most relevant and engaging discussions.

Reddit offers a wide array of content, ranging from educational and informative discussions to entertainment, news, and hobbies. Users can participate in conversations, share their experiences and opinions, and interact with others who share similar interests.

It's important to note that Reddit is a public platform where anyone can create an account and engage in discussions. While there are rules and guidelines in place, it's still possible to encounter inappropriate content, offensive comments, or even individuals with malicious intent.

For parents, it's essential to understand Reddit's features, community guidelines, and potential risks. By being familiar with the platform, parents can better support and guide their children in using Reddit responsibly, ensuring their safety and promoting positive online experiences.



Twitch

Twitch is a popular online streaming platform primarily focused on live video game broadcasts.

It allows users to watch live gameplay, chat with streamers and other viewers, and engage in communities centred around gaming and other interests.

On Twitch, streamers broadcast themselves playing video games, hosting talk shows, or showcasing other creative content like art, music, or cooking. Viewers can follow their favourite streamers, participate in live chats, and support them through subscriptions or donations.

While gaming is the main focus of Twitch, it also features channels dedicated to other activities such as music, sports, and real-life "IRL" streaming. Twitch provides a variety of content and communities to suit different interests.

As a parent, it's important to be aware that Twitch allows user-generated content, which means that not all streams or interactions may be suitable for children. Some streamers may use language or engage in discussions that are not appropriate for younger audiences. It's advisable to supervise your child's use of Twitch, set appropriate viewing guidelines, and have open conversations about responsible online behaviour.

Additionally, Twitch has moderation tools and community guidelines in place to promote a safe and inclusive environment. Parents should familiarise themselves with these guidelines and encourage their children to report any inappropriate content or behaviour they come across.

By understanding the nature of Twitch and being actively involved in your child's use of the platform, you can help ensure their safety and guide them in making responsible choices while enjoying the content and communities on Twitch.



WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a popular messaging application that allows users to send text messages, make voice and video calls, share Media files, and participate in group chats. It is available on smartphones and also has a web version for use on computers. WhatsApp uses an internet connection to send messages, making it a cost-effective and convenient communication tool. The app offers end-to-end encryption, ensuring that messages and calls remain private and secure. With a user-friendly interface and a wide range of features, WhatsApp has become a widely used platform for personal and business communication across the globe.



Instagram

Instagram is a Social Media platform that revolves around sharing photos and videos. Users can create an account, upload their visual content, and engage with others through likes, comments, and direct messages. The app allows users to apply filters, edit images, and add captions or hashtags to their posts. Instagram offers various features such as Stories, where users can share temporary content that disappears after 24 hours, and IGTV, a platform for longer-form videos. It also provides the option to follow accounts and discover new content based on personal interests through the Explore tab. With its emphasis on visual storytelling, Instagram has become a popular platform for individuals, influencers, businesses, and brands to showcase their creativity, connect with others, and build an online presence.



Twitter

Twitter is a Social Media platform known for its short-form messaging and real-time updates. Users can create an account and post messages, called tweets, containing up to 280 characters. Tweets can include text, images, videos, and links, allowing users to share their thoughts, opinions, news, and engage in conversations. Users can follow other accounts to see their tweets on their timeline and interact with them through likes, retweets, and replies. Twitter also utilises hashtags to categorise and discover content related to specific topics or events. With its fast-paced nature, Twitter has become a popular platform for breaking news, discussions, networking, and sharing concise and timely information with a wide audience.



Facebook

Facebook is a popular Social networking platform that allows users to connect, share content, and interact with friends. It offers features like posting updates, photos, and videos, joining groups, and messaging. However, users should be mindful of privacy settings and potential risks like misinformation and online harassment. Overall, Facebook provides a means for staying connected and informed while requiring caution and awareness of its features.

Online Safety information resources for Parents



<https://nationalonlinesafety.com/guides>



<https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers>

NSPCC

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>



<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-parents-and-carers-to-keep-children-safe-online>



<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/online-safety-guide/>