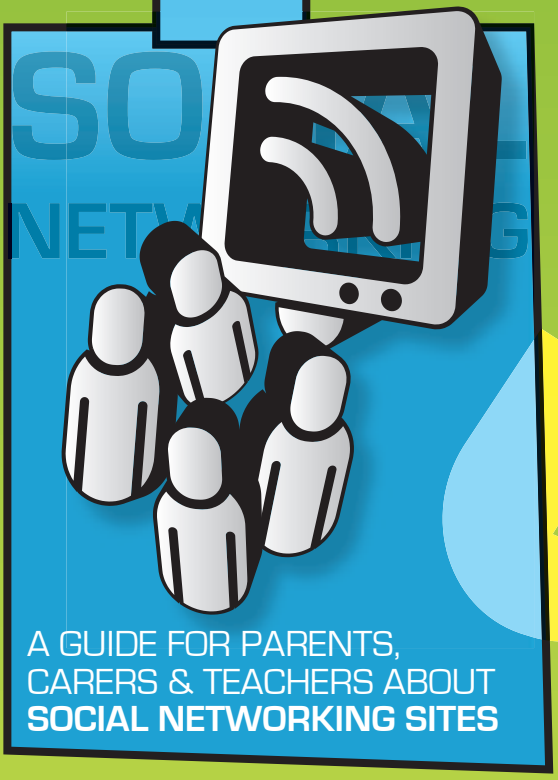
# YOUNG PEOPLE AND **SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, CARERS & TEACHERS ABOUT **SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

Childnet International

Social networking sites such as **Facebook**, **MySpace** and **Twitter**, are very popular with children, even those as young as 8 and 9. These types of sites allow children to be incredibly creative online, keep in touch with their friends and express themselves using a whole range of different media and applications such as video, photos, music, and chat.

However, it's important to recognise that while these are fun and offer great possibilities for children, there are potential risks including **cyberbullying**, **contact by adults with a sexual interest in children** and **the misuse of personal information**.

**As a parent, carer or teacher it's really important to familiarise yourself with social networking services. Most sites stipulate a minimum user age of 13 or 14, although some interactive sites are designed specifically for younger children. By understanding these sites you can help to support your children in choosing an appropriate site and using it in a safe and constructive way.**

Social networking sites, alongside sites which enable users to put up their own pictures, text and videos (known as user-generated content) such as YouTube, blogging sites, and interactive games sites for example are part of a social and technological revolution that is known as Web 2.0. Web 2.0 is characterised by the ease with which anyone can produce and publish their own content and link with others.

Young people especially love this new environment because they can have a powerful voice to express their identity and opinions and many are using it to good effect. For example, some musicians and bands have launched themselves entirely on the strength of this new stage. And all this is for free and with just one password – is it any wonder why young people love it?



# PRIVATE OR PUBLIC SOCIAL LIFE?

Increasingly children and young people are able to access and use these applications on the go through mobile and gaming devices, where they are away from supervision, enabling the instant publishing of pictures.

What sometimes appears as a private space for a child can become public very quickly and this blur between public and private expression can potentially put a child at risk in two main ways:

## CONTENT:

Children creating or posting inappropriate, offensive or even illegal content in their or others' Web pages could get them into trouble with their school, friends, and even the police, depending on the nature of the material. Content posted to the Web can be copied, altered and reposted by anyone and it's very difficult to 'take back' what may be later regretted. This can damage reputations as well as future prospects.

## CONTACT:

Children can also put too much personal information in these sites, exposing their information to adults with a sexual interest in children. Posting or chatting about personal details might enable someone to identify and contact your child online or in person. There is also the more likely risk of cyberbullying with young people intentionally harming another person online.

It is not easy talking to a young person about their social networking online or offline. Young people often think of these sites as their private domain, in much the same way as they would a personal diary and address book.

However because of the public nature of this environment and because young people have been hurt by inappropriate behaviour in these spaces, it is important that they understand the risks and are able to safeguard themselves with the help and support of others.

## Here are **5 Ps** for parents to consider about social networking sites.

### 1. POSITIVE:

Stay positive about social networking sites – try to strike a balance between educating children and young people to behave safely and trusting them to get on with it.

### 2. PRIVACY:

Most social network providers make available tools for user protection, including privacy tools and it is important to make sure that children know how to use these tools. It's important to discuss the value of privacy with children. Encourage your child to keep their passwords private and work with them to check the privacy settings on their account which limit how much of their information can be seen by others – for example, encourage your child to change their settings to private so that only people they allow can see what they post and comment on their space, rather than public which leaves their site open to be viewed by anyone. And encourage them to add friends they know in the real world, remembering that friends they have only met online are still strangers.

### 3. PHOTOS:

It's natural that children will want to include a photo on their site or profile, but help them think about the implications of posting photos and what is suitable. It is important to think about the type of picture and the kind of attention it might attract, the information it could divulge and who could see it. Suggest that your child ask permission of other people in the images that they post. Also, be aware that photos can be easily copied, changed, shared, used elsewhere, and can potentially stay online forever. One question to ask your child is "would you want a relative or future employer to see this photo?"

### 4. POSTINGS:

The ability to interact with this media and comment on other people's sites is part of what makes these sites so attractive. However, make sure you help your child to think before they post. Set some ground rules about what is and isn't OK to say in a blog or profile. This relates to what the child says about others as much as about themselves. What starts off as a joke or gossip can quickly escalate to cause real pain which cannot be taken back.

### 5. POLICE:

It's really important that you encourage your child to tell you about inappropriate or illegal activity they may come across. If they are being harassed by another user, keep the evidence and report that person's screen name to the SN provider which should act on violations to its terms of service. If you suspect your child is or has been the subject of an inappropriate sexual contact or approach by another person, it's vital that you help them keep a copy of the evidence and report it to the police via the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre website: **www.ceop.gov.uk/reportabuse**.

# SMART RULES

**Childnet** has produced 5 key SMART rules which remind young people to be SMART online.
It can be helpful to go through these tips with your children.

**S** — **SAFE:** Keep safe by being careful not to give out personal information – such as your full name, e-mail address, passwords, phone number, home address, photos or school name – either to people you are chatting with online or by posting it online where other people can see it.

**M** — **MEETING:** Meeting someone you have only been in touch with online can be dangerous. Only do so with your parents' or carers' permission and even then only when they can be present.

**A** — **ACCEPTING:** Accepting e-mails, Instant Messenger (IM) messages, or opening files, pictures or texts from people you don't know or trust can lead to problems – they may contain viruses or nasty messages!

**R** — **RELIABLE:** Information you find on the internet may not be true, or someone online may be lying about who they are.

**T** — **TELL:** Tell your parent, carer or a trusted adult if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or worried, or if you or someone you know is being bullied online.

Parents and carers will be aware of some of the major social networking and other interactive sites including **Facebook**, **Club Penguin**, **MySpace**, **Bebo** and **Habbo Hotel**, and there are a lot of similar services that children and young people enjoy using. Many of these services have good privacy and security settings, and parents should be aware of the tools provided by these sites to help protect users.

Social networking providers in the UK worked in partnership with Government, children's charities and others to produce good practice guidelines for those providing social networks and other interactive services. These guidelines were published by the Home Office Taskforce on Child Protection on the Internet in April 2008. This page summarises the key points.

While the guidance is designed for industry, this information, set out as questions below, can also help parents and carers to be aware of what kinds of protection can be expected and help them to identify such a service for their children to use.

## KEY QUESTIONS

**QUESTION:**
What can I expect from a responsible service provider?

**ANSWER:**
It is good practice for a social network provider to provide clear easy to find information and advice for all users on staying safe, the safety tools and features available on the service and how to report abuse. There should also be clear rules regarding what can be posted to a service and what should not be posted, alongside reminders about the implications of posting personal information. Users should be reminded that they are not anonymous when using social networking services. Service providers set out rules for use of their service in their terms and conditions and there are consequences for breaching or breaking these. It is important to remember what is illegal offline is also illegal online.

**QUESTION:**
What can I do if someone is making my child uncomfortable on a social networking site?

**ANSWER:**
Service providers should provide prominent and easily accessible safety tools for self protection including ways to report individuals, tools to block and remove people from contact lists, tools to pre-moderate (ie check and approve) comments before they are posted on your profile and tools to remove unwanted comments, as well as information on how to delete an account.

**QUESTION:**
Can my child limit who accesses their profile?

**ANSWER:**
It is possible to set profiles to private, which restricts access only to those who have been granted permission to see it. This is different to a public profile which can be seen by anyone. Service providers should clearly explain what privacy settings are available on their service and support users in how to use and adjust them. Responsible service providers have committed to ensuring that profiles for users who register as under 18 should automatically be set to private and some even set all users' settings to private by default, although it is important for users to check their settings. It is therefore important that children should register with their real age so that they are included in the protections made available by default to their age group. Responsible service providers do work to remove the profiles of underage users.

**QUESTION:**
Can anyone search for and find my profile?

**ANSWER:**
Private profiles for those aged 18 or under should not be able to be found in a search. Service providers should explain to their users how profiles can be searched by others and what protections can be deployed to prevent searching on particular profiles.

**QUESTION:**
How can I report inappropriate behaviour by another user and what happens when I make a report?

**ANSWER:**
If someone is breaking the rules then you should report them to the social network provider. Responsible social network providers should have clear, prominent and accessible places to make a report as well as having robust procedures for dealing with reports, removing unwanted information and deleting accounts. The reporting procedure should be aided by clear instructions on how to make a report as well as prominent links to other means of reporting and relevant organisations such as the police and child helplines. Providers should respond promptly to reports from users, and some will acknowledge each report with a confirmation that it has been received alongside an indication of the timescale in which the complaint will be managed.

**QUESTION:**
Will my child be able to view age restricted content?

**ANSWER:**
Services aimed at adults should not be accessible by users registered as under 18. Advertising on social networking services should be age-appropriate for the likely audience.

The full guidance document can be found at:
**www.digizen.org/downloads/CYBERBULLYING.pdf**

# FURTHER RESOURCES

**>> www.childnet.com**
The **Childnet International** website gives internet safety advice and links for young people, parents, teachers and other organisations.

**>> www.digizen.org/socialnetworking**
A 2008 report by Childnet providing teachers with a comprehensive guide to social networking services.

**>> www.childnet.com/music**
**Childnet**'s leaflet on Young People, Music and the Internet has concise information to help parents, carers and teachers get up to speed about online music and the legal issues raised when copyrighted music is used on social networking sites.

**>> www.connectsafely.org**
A US-based resource site and interactive forum where parents, teens, educators, and experts can discuss safety on the fixed and mobile social Web.

**>> www.ceop.gov.uk**
The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre's website houses a range of information on how to stay safe online. It includes a unique facility that enables parents and young people to make reports of actual or attempted abuse online.

**>> www.inhope.org**
This site gives details of national child pornography hotlines in countries around the world.

Childnet International

This guide for parents has been written by the children's charity Childnet International and with input from Net-Family-News.org and SafeKids.com. The views in this document are solely that of Childnet.

**Childnet** is a non-profit organisation working in partnership with others to help make the internet a great and safe place for children. Registered as a charity in the UK (No 1080173) See **www.childnet.com** for full details.

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