



Social Networking



A social network is an online community, often with a common interest.

What is social networking?

Social networking sites allow users to share comments and post photos in a contained environment with the user in control. The most common site is Facebook.

Many other popular sites have social aspects but are not strictly 'social networking' for example:

- **Instagram:** a photo sharing application
- **Twitter:** a micro blogging site
- **YouTube:** a video sharing site
- **Tumblr:** a blogging site
- **MSN:** an instant messaging program
- **Skype:** a voice over internet protocol (VOIP) service
- Online games such as **Club Penguin**



What are the risks of social networking?

Social networking can be a lot of fun, but can carry risks, especially for children and young people. Many social networking sites have age restrictions (usually 13 years) and it is important for parents to understand the site's **Terms and Conditions of Use**. You don't pick and choose which rules you obey in the real world, don't do it online either. There is a valid and legal reason for online rules. Children should not be permitted to access prohibited accounts. Talk about the rules and why they are important rather than working out a way to circumvent them.

Social networking sites require a large amount of time invested in them, not only to set up, but also to continually check to see that the security/privacy settings are at their highest level. This is particularly important when the account holder is a child.

Many social networking sites work on '**real name**' culture, which means that being truthful in the setting up of an account makes the account safer. You are far better being truthful and then using the security settings to protect your privacy, rather than setting up a fake account, or lying about certain information such as age. Facebook for example has a range of important safety settings as the 'default' when the account holder is 13 - 17 years.

Social Media

Many parents are misguided and tell their children to set up the account with an older age for 'safety'. This is NOT a guarantee of safety, sets a poor example and puts the child outside the secure part of the site. You are far better to set up an account with your child together, with clear rules and guidelines, rather than have them set one up at a friend's house behind your back.

Social networking is certainly not all bad, although the media can focus on negative aspects. Embrace social technology with your child and ensure that you have an account on all sites your child does.

What are some ways to assist children and young people in social networking?

Please remember that to assist your child to be safe on social networking sites you must:

- Ensure that they comply with the age restrictions (DO NOT let them on Facebook under 13 years of age)
- Ensure that they understand how the privacy and security settings work
- Ensure that they can change their passwords and they know how to report a problem
- Ensure that they know where to go if they have an online issue
- Set up an account yourself and be your child's friend (this is not going to ensure safety but is part of what is expected of you as a parent)
- Know your child's password
- Have house rules about what your child can post and when they can add new 'friends' (must ask you first) and ensure they know and understand them.

Where can I find out more about specific social media sites?

Many social networking sites create their own help guides. These guides provide tips and advice specifically for parents. You can download these guides from the site's Help or Support section, for example:

- **Parent's Guide to Instagram**
(https://fbcdn-dragon-a.akamaihd.net/hphotos-ak-xap1/t39.2365-6/10574680_582159911917452_1678490151_n.pdf)
- **Help Your Teens Play it Safe - Facebook**
(<https://www.facebook.com/safety/groups/parents/>)
- **Control Your Experience - Twitter**
(<https://support.twitter.com/articles/470968-families>)
- **Parent's Guide to Tumblr**
(<http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/parents-guide>)
- **Other Social Networking Websites**
Is the social networking site your child is using not listed here? No problem, simply Google 'Parent's Guide to <Insert Social Networking Site>'.

