

Social networking - the what, the why - and how to talk to your kids about it

Social networking

Chat and social networking are great ways to stay in touch and find new friends. However, there are some risks meeting people online – especially if you don't know them in real life.

Talk to your kids about safe social networking:

- Limit your friend list: don't 'friend' random people.
- Protect your privacy: don't share your password and set your profile to private.
- Your personal details are valuable: don't share them.
- Protect your reputation: keep it clean and ask yourself, would you want others to see what you upload?
- Be careful who you trust: a person can pretend to be someone they're not.
- Don't use a webcam with people you do not know.
- Think before you post, chat, upload or download.

Remind them that all social networking sites have their own version of 'default' privacy and security settings. It's important they know how the sites work and how to change the settings to protect their personal information.

Talk about the following potential risks of using social networking sites...

- Anonymity – it can be easier to say and do things online that you might not do offline.
- Sharing too much information – for example, photos from a party might be okay for close friends to see but can become an issue if shared more widely.
- Not protecting your personal information – account details and where you're located can be used inappropriately by others to find you or access your online accounts. It's important to understand the risks associated with giving out information about yourself online and know how to manage both your privacy and online friends.
- Treating online friends as real friends – it's easy for people to lie online, including those who are seeking children and young people for more than a social relationship. Make sure you're careful about how well you really know your online 'friends'.