

Social networking

Facebook, that's all I'm on.

Yeah, that's about it. I'm on Facebook all the time.

I'm on it ...

She's on it a lot.

Yeah, to stay in contact with friends when you're not with them, to see what everyone's doing.

We tag photos from nights out, memories.

Yeah, so you can all keep in contact together and know what everyone's doing.

The point of these websites is you can go on there, you can add your friends, add your family, you can share as much or as little information as you want to.

One of the main concerns of young people using social networking sites is that they often share a lot of personal information with a large number of people. And that personal information might be their photo, it might be their phone number, it might even be exactly where they are at any given time.

TOP TIPS Talk to your child about who they spend their time with online.

If you don't know the person, don't accept the friend request.

It's worth parents remembering that anyone can set up a social networking profile, which means that the thirteen-year-old girl that your child has accepted as a friend could indeed be an adult male. It's important that they only have people on their profile who they know in the real world.

TOP TIPS Talk to your child about what pictures are suitable to be put online.

As children are sort of going through puberty, exploring their sexuality, sometimes we have known that they've put up a slightly risqué shot on their social networking site, which they wouldn't want their grandparents to see, or indeed their parents to see. I think that's a really good litmus test for parents to remind their children - would you want to share this picture around the dinner table? If you don't, don't put it up online.

We had very long and serious talks before she even went near Facebook. I told her the pros and cons and the dangers of it, so she's very clear on that. And if anything ever comes up she's not happy with, she comes straight to me and tells me.

TOP TIPS Talk to your child about keeping their personal information private.

When they're using these sites, they've got to remember that a lot of their information is open to anybody.

Change their privacy settings to make sure that their sites lock down so that only their personal information is shared with people that they really do know.

There's a lot of information that they're sharing that they might not realise puts them in danger, but it does.

TOP TIPS Take some time to understand how these sites work...talk to your child about how to keep their information secure.

Because your password can often be quite obvious, sometimes children put it down as their date of birth or their name, other people can guess it and that can lead to their site being hacked.

Well, I always get fraped - it's just where they get your status and they put a really stupid status in, and it's so embarrassing.

How do they get on it?

Just leaving it up, or on your phone - leaving your phone around the table.

Often on mobile phones, social networking sites are open, so if someone takes your mobile phone as a joke, or indeed steals it, they might have access to your site.

TOP TIPS Help your child to understand how they should behave online.

It's really important that children understand that just because they can't see someone face to face that actually that behaviour does have an impact. And it's important that they do understand there is a consequence to that behaviour as well.

TOP TIPS Help your child understand why they should not meet people they met online.

It's important that parents remind their child not to meet up with someone who they've only met online without talking to them first. Actually, if a child meets a friend in the online environment and wants to connect with them, if they take an adult with them, then they're going to be a lot safer than if not.

How can I check what my child is doing online?

Put the computer in a family room so that it becomes a family activity and children don't have as much opportunity to be secretive when using these sites. Having said that, because children now have mobile phones, they can actually use these applications anywhere, and that's why it's really important that actually there is an open dialogue with their parents and that they really understand themselves what the risks are and how they can stay in control of those.

A really key thing for parents to know is that they're not alone, that there are practical things that they can do to support their child in being safe on these social networking sites.

Talk to your child about who they make friends with online, how to keep their personal information private, why they shouldn't meet people they've met online or advertise house parties.