

Fact sheet



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Social networking and meeting people

i This fact sheet includes information for parents and carers about social networking and meeting people.

What is social networking?

The internet and connected devices **allow people to meet and connect online**, this can be through social media. Social media includes websites and apps that allow users to create and share content and participate in social networking.

How does it work?

With most people having a connected device, meeting people online is common through social networking platforms. **Young people might use social networking apps to build and maintain relationships**, showcase their creativity, look for content of interest and connect with likeminded people.

Many platforms have the ability to share pictures, messages and videos and make comments or 'tag' friends in content.



Social media platforms come with a range of privacy settings, from 'friends only' or 'private' or can be open to the public.

There are also apps designed to meet new and unknown people and become 'friends'.

What are the challenges?

If your child is using social media they may have 'friends' or 'followers' on their accounts they have only met and spoken to online. Unfortunately **it can be easy for someone to lie about their online identity** and it can be difficult to prove someone is who they say they are.

Online child sex offenders are manipulative and capable of grooming a young person into believing they are someone else, including an online 'friend'.

Law enforcement is continuously seeing cases involving online child sexual exploitation with **offenders posing as children in their interactions**, with the intention of obtaining child sexual exploitation material or meeting in person.

Many social networking apps also have a location options, which can allow for others to connect based on a particular location. This can present **privacy challenges particularly if personal information such as a home location or address is being shared** with other users.



Tips for staying safe

- Encourage your child to **use critical thinking skills** as to whether a person online is who they say they are; an unknown user will only provide the information they want you to know.
- Question new friend or follower requests, or unknown users who make contact. **Suspicious accounts normally have generic pictures**, little to no followers/friends, and haven't been active for very long.
- Be aware of fake celebrity accounts. **Legitimate accounts will often have a blue tick** to show verification.
- If something goes wrong, or an interaction makes your child feel uncomfortable or unsafe, **know how to block and report**.
- Young people should **never agree to meet** someone in person they have only ever known through a particular app game or site.

Getting help

Online child sexual exploitation, including **grooming** and **extortion**, can be reported to **your local police**.

If a child is in immediate danger, call your local police emergency number.

If you become aware of explicit content that has been posted online, including child sexual abuse material, report the site to **your local police**.

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