



# ONLINE SAFETY

In recent weeks, there has been much in the news about online safety in the UK, new regulations for tech firms with the aim of keeping children safe, and the tragic outcomes of when things do go wrong and social media becomes harmful.

As the summer holidays approach, keeping our pupils safe online is very high on the list of worries for the pastoral team, and I am sure that it is for parents too. Children do everything online, from learning to socialising, gaming to shopping. For teens, learning how to recognise the risks and protect themselves is a life skill they will need for years to come.

The first step to keeping teens safe

online is to know what children are actually doing online. Rather than banning it, engage with it. Even if they have told you what apps they are on, it can easily go over your head if you are not in the know. Here is a run-down of the main online platforms that teens are using at the moment.

## **The most popular apps with teens right now**

1. Instagram
2. TikTok
3. YouTube
4. Snapchat
5. Twitter
6. Whatsapp
7. Multiplayer video games



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## INSTAGRAM

Instagram is the most popular app with teens today. It's an app where you can simply post a picture (or several) with a caption, and this then gets viewed by other users who follow your account.

You have the choice to have a private or a public account. If you have a public account, then if your photo caption contains words with a hashtag in front of it (i.e. #picoftheday), then it will get shared with users who follow that hashtag.

**Pros:** Great for discovering inspiring ideas and content.

**Cons:** Can promote unrealistic ideas of what is real or normal.

## TIKTOK

A musical app where you upload a 15-second video – normally miming the words to a song – and then merge it with music to create a short music video.

**Pros:** A fun way for kids to be creative with music and videos.

**Cons:** There's little in the way of screening for different age-groups, so they might see provocative or inappropriate videos.

## YOUTUBE

YouTube is popular amongst all age groups. With teens, make-up tutorial videos, video game demonstrations, singing and music videos all have huge popularity. Some users who have thousands of followers, including children and teens, get paid (sometimes enough to live on) by companies for reviewing their products in their videos.

**Pros:** A great source of free educational and entertaining videos.

**Cons:** Like with Instagram, influencers can encourage an unrealistic view of normality.

## SNAPCHAT

Snapchat lets you take a photo or short video – with the option of many fun face-recognition filters – to your friends. The video/photo then deletes itself straight after being viewed.

**Pros:** It makes video and picture sharing easy and means content doesn't fill up memory on everyone's phones.

**Cons:** If any content is bullying or inappropriate, it can delete itself before the recipient gets the chance to report it.

## X (FORMERLY KNOWN AS TWITTER)

The message posting site that has changed the world since it was founded in 2006. It is really popular with teens too, and they often use it to share memes, jokes and opinions of whatever is going on in their day. Like Instagram, if you have a public account you can share your posts more widely by using hashtags, and you can choose to keep your posts private too.

**Pros:** Gives everyone a chance to share their news and opinions, and find out what others are saying too.

**Cons:** Kids are exposed to a full range of content (good and bad) and since it is public, their posts may receive comments from strangers.

## WHATSAPP

Used by billions across the world, it is one of the most popular ways to instant message – both one-to-one and in groups. You need someone's phone number or email address to be able to message them, and messages are “end-to-end encrypted”, which means they are (basically) unhackable.

**Pros:** Makes messaging quick and easy, and works on both Apple and Android devices.

**Cons:** Group chats can sometimes turn toxic and lead to bullying, and they are addictive.

## MULTIPLAYER VIDEO GAMES - XBOX, PLAYSTATION, MINECRAFT, FORTNITE ETC...

Popular with lots of teens and adults, video-games that are linked to the internet let you play with people from anywhere else in the world.

**Pros:** State-of-the-art gaming which is really fun and can be creative and educational. Instant message and audio chat options make them very social.

**Cons:** It's possible to play with and chat with complete strangers.

### What are the main risks?

**With teens, once you're aware of the dangers, the most effective way to protect them is to educate them in practising safe behaviours themselves.**

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## SHARING PERSONAL INFORMATION

- Whatever platform your child is on, they should know never to share personal information about themselves publicly. That includes their whole name, address, phone number, email address, bank account details and what school they go to.
- Any accounts they have on post-sharing sites/apps (Instagram, Twitter, TikTok) should be set to private, so no-one they don't know can see what they share.
- The only private accounts they follow should be those of friends and family (they'll probably follow celebrities too), and they shouldn't let themselves be followed by anyone they don't know.
- Even then, private accounts and personal messages can still sometimes be seen by the wrong people. A good rule of thumb is to never share anything online that they wouldn't be happy to publish on the front page of a newspaper.

## SOCIALISING ONLINE STAYING SAFE AND AVOIDING CYBERBULLYING

- When it comes to communicating with people online, the first rule should be to have the same standards that they have for speaking to people face-to-face. That includes both what they say to others, and how they let themselves be treated too.
- Remind them that any strangers

they do communicate with online could easily not be who they say they are. You probably don't want to scare them to death, but if you feel they're not taking on what you're saying, then the news is full of horror stories where things have gone wrong that should warn them of the risks out there.

- They should never meet up in person with anyone they've met online.
- Have an ongoing conversation about mental health, and how certain things they see or experience on the internet make them feel. This can help you guide them to recognise when something's inappropriate, and to protect themselves as a result.

## HARMFUL CONTENT

The internet is full of stuff that teens and children should not see. From fake news, to images that promote a negative body image, to pornography to negative ideologies, it is no wonder that parents worry. While you can control what they can see at home to an extent with the settings in your wifi account, it is still easy for them to come across harmful content at some point. The most effective way to help them here is to educate them in tackling the dangers themselves.

- Encourage them to take a critical approach to any information they see or read online. Where is it published? What are the expertise of the author? What is the motive of the author?
- Show them how to report content and comments they find offensive, and how to


block and report inappropriate or abusive users.

- Remind them that they should come and talk to you if anything does upset them, or if they're not sure how to respond to something, so you can work out what to do together.

## SHARING NUDES AND SEMI-NUDES

From time to time, children find themselves in a position where they are tempted to share an incredible personal picture of themselves, either partially dressed or completely naked. They may send to a girlfriend/boyfriend in a seemingly healthy relationship (we might know this as "sexting" or "sending dick pics"), or be pressured into doing so by someone they are in a relationship with, or be threatened into sending ("sextortion"). Whatever the context, nothing good ever comes of sharing pictures in this way and a child could find themselves in a position of distributing child pornography. This particular area may seem completely alien to most parents; we did not grow up with the pressures of current technology and there is no gate keeper – remember that when we were young we had to take the film to be developed!

**If things go wrong, the National Crime Agency suggest the following:**

- Use **Report Remove**, the Internet Watch Foundation and Childline's tool, to report images that have been shared or might be shared online.
- Use **Take it Down**, a tool provided by the National 

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Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, to help them remove or stop the online sharing of images across participating online platforms.

- Report directly to the platform or app that the incident has occurred on. See **Internet Matters** for advice on where to report online issues on major social media platforms.

## WHAT ARE INFLUENCERS AND WHY ARE TEENS SO OBSESSED WITH THEM?

It is a word that has become a job title in the past few years. In a recent survey, more kids in the UK said they wanted to be influencers than doctors! An influencer is someone with an account on an online platform (like the ones mentioned above) who has thousands or even millions of followers. They tend to recommend products to buy (often with sponsorship from the company) and promote their lifestyle.

Ask your teen what influencers they pay attention to, and about the sort of content they share. Talking to your teen about how they're using the web like this is a great chance to help them understand what's healthy and what might be having a negative impact.

## TEEN BODY IMAGE & MENTAL HEALTH ONLINE

A big problem for teens online is content that encourages negative body image. Most famously for girls but for boys too, influencers

who post pictures of what they eat, detailed posts about dieting and photos of their bodies to accompany them can all feed into teens feeling self-conscious, with a warped idea of what's normal and healthy.

Ask your teen about the sorts of images they are seeing online, and how they make them feel. Even if they are not totally frank about their feelings, it is important to tell them how people are not always honest about what they say their lifestyle is (i.e. someone who posts a picture of a huge ice cream sundae along with a photo of them looking super skinny might not have eaten the whole thing, and they might not be eating healthily either).

If your teen can limit how much attention they give to lifestyle and diet-related content, their mental health is likely to benefit. Reinforcing positive messages and habits at home can also help to override any negative stuff they have been seeing on the internet.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

[#Ask The Awkward - A Guide for Parents](#)

[How to Keep Children Safe Online](#)

[NSPCC Keeping Children Safe Online](#)

[The Screen Time Diet: helping your teen find balance with their tech](#)

[National Crime Agency Information](#)

## INSTIL GOOD HABITS FOR THE FUTURE

- Beware of addiction to the mobile phone. Many people have become conditioned to react to the technology; a vibration or “ping” can have people reaching for their pockets. We expect mobile phones to be invisible during the school day and will act when this is not maintained.
- Ensure that children get enough sleep. Leave the phone downstairs – it is not needed in the bedroom. This may cause friction with some teens, but it is worth maintaining the line. Teens are expert procrastinators and the phone is the perfect tool for that. Our boarding houses have a device hand in before bedtime to maintain a positive relationship with the technology and healthy patterns of behaviour.
- Raise concerns when they first happen. If things do start to go awry, talk to other parents of the children involved or talk to us. We can help. Children make mistakes and we need to work together on a positive education.
- If things do go very wrong, we may have to work with external agencies such as the Police or Social Care. It is important to work together on prevention than having to react to a disaster.