



The world of Social Media and the internet - parent guide

What is social media?

A lifeline to some and a minefield to others...

The good the bad and the ugly

Social media is as the name suggests social platforms created for messaging and interaction via smartphones, tablets and computers. These platforms are dedicated to community-based input, content-sharing and collaboration.

Facebook, Youtube, Snapchat and Instagram to name just a few - if your not on you don't exist is the mentality of a generation. What's your user id?

Face to face interaction is being lost and replaced with invisible friends and popularity being measured by the amount of likes a photo or comment gets. People are left living under the delusion that they have hundreds of friends when actually they may have none.

"Party illustration: 18th birthday with 150 Facebook pals coming if it wasn't for family sat in the room they would have been on their own."

We can't throw the baby out with the bathwater, there are so many fantastic features and opportunities to use and explore on the net. The variety of apps and software additions to help us in life are not to be sniffed at. But surely not at the expense of personal interaction and the development of life skills such as communication, partnership and intimacy. Our kids are being drawn into a fake world of celebrity, where the sun always shines and you wake every morning with full hair and makeup. No spots or belatedness, it's always perfect in the world of Instagram with filtered retouched images making everybody look a million dollars whilst you feel like the dogs dinner.



The elephant in the room that no one seems to say is that it's not a reality, it's an illusion at best leaving so many dissatisfied with a sense that I'm the only one missing out.

Warning:

This dissatisfaction of being the one missing out can so easily open the door to manipulation exploitation and lack of self worth.

The fruit so readily seen on the tree are: depression, isolation, eating disorders, abuse both physical and emotional.

What are the social media platforms your kids use, do you know?

Facebook once the vanguard app is now seen as the app for mums and dads, tech moves so quickly

Why do your kids use them?

Generational everybody does it, it's their gateway - in our day if you wanted to know if someone was going out you had to knock on the door most people didn't even have phones at home.

If your kid doesn't have the latest iPhone or Android by the time they are 11 it feels like abuse and they will tell you.

Lines of communication are being changed from face to face to snapshots of time, an image, a twitter comment or a posted video diary.

You can't stick your head in the sand:

It would be so easy to get lost in the why whilst missing the how. How to understand and get involved in this invisible world.

Pitfalls and dangers:

Relationships

The average 12-15 year old has 272 social network friends

Experience

60% of teens have been asked for a sexual image or video of themselves

Behaviour

19% of 12-15 year-olds prefer to watch YouTube than TV



Grooming - Sexing - Online Bullying

Grooming:

those involved go to great lengths to hide their true identity, through the use of false profiles and pictures, they will pretend to be the same age and so starts the deception.

They will often:

- Pretending to be someone they are not, for example saying they are the same age online
- Offering advice or understanding, a listening ear when no one understands me
- Buying gifts
- Giving the child attention they may crave
- Using their professional position or reputation
- Taking them on trips, outings or holidays

Remember grooming happens both off and online and can involve family, friends or neighbours, even people in authority like teachers, club leaders.

Signs a child is being groomed they may:

- Be very secretive, including about what they are doing online
- Have older boyfriends or girlfriends
- Go to unusual places to meet friends
- Have new things such as clothes or mobile phones that they can't or won't explain
- Have access to drugs and alcohol.

In older children, signs of grooming can easily be mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour, but you may notice unexplained changes in behaviour or personality, or inappropriate sexual behaviour for their age.

Grooming is no respecter of person grooming can happen to either sex. It is vital that our kids know and feel love, acceptance a sense of value and that they are listened to. Groomers are good at what they do, they will isolate an individual and through skilled words and manipulation draw the child into a very dark place. For their own vile ends.

Groomers may look for:

- Usernames or comments that are flirtatious or have a sexual meaning
- Public comments that suggest a child has low self-esteem or is vulnerable.
- Groomers don't always target a particular child. Sometimes they will send messages to hundreds of young people and wait to see who responds.
- Groomers no longer need to meet children in real life to abuse them. Increasingly, groomers are sexually exploiting their victims by persuading them to take part in online sexual activity.



Things you may notice:

If you're worried that a child is being abused, watch out for any unusual behaviour.

Withdrawn - suddenly behaves differently - anxious - clingy - depressed - aggressive - problems sleeping - eating disorders - wets the bed- soils clothes - takes risks - misses school changes in eating habits - obsessive behaviour - nightmares - drugs alcohol - self-harm thoughts about suicide

It's paramount you don't see things that are not there and jump to conclusions either!

Sexting

Sexting: Do you know what it is?

Defined as the sending of a sexual text, image or video

We all know just how complicated and confusing relationships can be as adults never mind when your hormones are bouncing off the walls. It's our job as parent to help establish boundaries, worth and value in our kids no matter the gender. Pressure and manipulation are exactly that, the pressure to conform and follow the crowd even if it takes you off the cliff. We must teach our kids how to recognise the patterns of manipulation - when they are being manipulated and when they are manipulating!

The land of confusion:

Being in a new relationship can make you feel excited, happy and in control. It's normal to enjoy getting compliments, feeling special and safe or like you've got more confidence. Relationships can often change and it can be hard to know when things are starting to go wrong.

The safe place can spiral out of control very quickly to become unsafe - if you love me you would!

Sexting can easily happen. Things can go wrong – even when you didn't mean for them to.

It starts with:

- Rude text messages or videos
- Underwear shots
- Naked pictures
- Sexual pictures or videos

What you need to know about sexting:

- Once you send a message you can't control what happens to it
- Don't let someone guilt or pressure you into sending a sex text
- If you've sent a nude pic, have an honest conversation with the person you sent it to. Ask them to delete it
- If an indecent or nude pic of you is posted online, you can contact the website directly or make a report online to try and get it removed.



Golden rule:

If you wouldn't do it in public, don't do it in private

If he or she says if you don't I will leave, then let them go with good riddance (to bad rubbish)

Online Bullying - the keyboard warriors

The fear of being isolated or excluded as a teenager is a massive influence on the choices we make. Teenage years are never easy, changes in your body, emotions and expectations. The pressure to make right choices and decisions that will impact your future.

Spots, greasy hair not wearing the right label or being seen with the right people huge pressures. Little do they know that at that age it seems so important until you bump into these guys 20 years later on and see just what their lives have amounted to.

Bullying:

Back in the day it was a wedge or a smack in the mouth, and in some ways it's easier to deal with physical pain rather than the emotional and mental pain.

The keyboard warrior so willing to challenge and challenge from behind a screen in that invisible world. Most are just losers who feel no shame or guilt for the distress that their worthless words cause.

The danger of digital:

Images captured on a digital device - no longer pegging it down to Boots with your roll of film waiting a week to see the results. Now instant uploading and sharing, embarrassment, that awkward moment and revealing image that can be used to manipulate and control.

Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me! Says who?

Your bit:

Keep the lines of communication and trust open! Teach your kids the behaviour and patterns a bully and what to do about it. What is really hard for them to experience is when they are being bullied by someone they think is their friend or they are being hurt to try to get the approval of a group of friends.

What can I do? - Cover don't smother:

Start by talking and create open lines of communication, it's never too late but you may need to be patient.

Practically:

Turn off the telly at teatime, have a phone or tablet amnesty, get everybody to put their device in a box and leave them there. And that means you too!

Understand the platform and online environments your kids are involved with. Each platform will have a set of guides on how to keep safe and protected whilst using the app.



Set ground rules and a safety policy:

Privacy and location settings must be adjusted on each platform for your own protection. You are not smothering but protecting. Don't get them afraid of the biggie man, take responsibility and walk through the potential dangers and blessings of any platform on the internet.

Let kids be kids:

The pressure to grow up so fast, to be sexualised and to conform to a flawed model are everyday issues, let our kids stay kids with an air of innocence as long as possible it won't do them any harm.

5 Tips for Using any Social Network

- 1) Set appropriate privacy and security (location defaults) and choose a complex/unique password for your account. People who hijack your account, the damage that can be done.
- 2) Be careful installing third-party applications.
Don't install applications from sources you don't trust.
- 3) Only accept friend requests from people you know directly.
- 4) Limit the personal information you share. (Mum and dad away this weekend - vulnerable position)
- 5) Be careful what you post. Consider all information and pictures you post are public!

It was a good idea at the time:

Do you realise the impact that a profile can have on your future employers will often look you up online when finalising job positions, they have so much invested - the police do the same have you been tagged into a photo that can then incriminate you?

User name: Bobbybigboobs@hotmail.com

Pictures you post: you told them you are a tea-total angel your posts say something different.

Comments about your boss or the company: Can be used to discipline or fire you

Likes: You like a statement or image, you will be classed as endorsing that view as if you posted it yourself, racist, homophobic, a bully

Social Media Golden Rules:

- "Don't Talk To Strangers"
- "Don't gossip"
- "Don't criticise"
- "Don't volunteer your opinions"
- "Don't post any form of nudity"
- "Don't waste time unless it's productive"
- "Think before you Friend"
- "Think before you Share"
- "You are liable for posts or even re-posts"
- "Contrary to what people say, you are being watched"



- “Private is the only security you have”
- “With Friends is USELESS because you’re linked to Friends of Friends etc. GOT IT!
- “Finally, Search (Google, Bing etc) Yourself on the Internet to see what you find about yourself”

If you don't like what you see then go a fix it!

Build boundaries in a safe place, reward trust.

Tools that can help:

MamaBear: <http://mamabearapp.com>

Phonesheriff: <http://www.phonesheriff.com>

Norton Family Premier: <https://family.norton.com/web/>

Keep talking and remember the greatest strength you have is influence.



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Never before has a
generation so diligently
recorded themselves

accomplishing

so little

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