

Social media advice for parents and guardians

Many children and young people are using social media platforms to keep in touch with friends.

However, with increased time online comes increase risk, so it is important we talk to children and young people to ensure they know the risks online, and where to go for help and support when needed.

There is a lot of information out there

[The Children's Society](#) tell us there are five points we should to talk about:

1. **Different Identities** – Some people may pretend to be someone else online. It's easy to lie about age, gender, interests.
2. **Personal Data** – The risk of sharing personal data to anyone online (e.g. address, photos, school, and bank details).
3. **Meeting people** – The dangers of meeting up with someone they met online in the real world.
4. **How to stay safe** – If the young person is planning to meet someone they met online, make sure they tell a trusted adult and know how to stay safe.
5. **Stay curious** – Share the same curiosity for online friends as you would for offline friends.

Posts and Messages

It is important that children and young people are aware that they should not post messages or chat to someone online in anger or on impulse. Nor should they talk to someone they do not know.

Ask your child to think before they post anything, as these messages (which could include inappropriate pictures and videos) are almost impossible to take back. An example of this is Snapchat - an app, where people can upload a number of photos which disappear after an allotted time frame – it could be seconds or minutes. However, many young people do not appreciate that a screenshot of these pictures can be taken and the photos printed to keep.

Inappropriate indecent and Sexualised Messaging

Whilst many social media posts are completely harmless, there are occasions where young people are posting inappropriate images of themselves.

Young people may send sexually explicit images of themselves to increase their self-esteem, to prove their sexuality or even for monetary gain – aspiring to emulate their role-models online.

If young people are 'selling' inappropriate images online, this money is gained illegally (proceeds of crime) and would be seized by the police.

- **It is illegal for young people to take, share or sell indecent images of themselves.**
- **It is illegal for young people to post indecent images and then demand money for these – this is against the law.**

If anyone contacts a young person offering money for images, they need to report this to a trusted adult for appropriate action to be taken.

Is It Legal? - The law says that creating or sharing sexual images or videos of a child under 18 is illegal, even if the person doing it is under 18. This includes:

- Sending sexual messages to a child
- A child taking an explicit photo or video of themselves or a friend
- Sharing an explicit image or video of a child, even if it's shared between children of the same age
- Having, downloading or storing an explicit image or video of a child, even if the child gave their permission for it to be taken.

If the content is reported to the police, they will make a record and could investigate the circumstances.

Reporting a Sexual Image or Video - Some of the ways you can report a sexual image or video are:

- Contact www.ceop.police.uk if you are worried about a child sending naked images, videos or sexual messages.
- Report the image to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) on <https://report.iwf.org.uk/en>
- Make a report on the social media platform where the image or video is shared. To help, use www.net-aware.org.uk to learn more about what social platforms, apps and games are available for young people and how to report content.

Staying Safe on Snapchat

As Snapchat has grown over the years, there are some steps you can take to make sure you and your child stay extra safe:

1. **Snapchat etiquette:** be kind and respectful to other Snapchatters. Be thoughtful about what can be 'Snapped', and don't send people anything they you wouldn't want to receive.
2. **Snaps disappear, but ...:** remember, even though Snaps are designed to disappear, someone can still grab a screenshot or take a picture with another device.
3. **Privacy settings:** check the privacy settings to choose who can send Snaps or view Stories and location on Snap Map.
4. **Friends:** Snapchat was made for keeping in touch with close friends, so we strongly suggest against friending anyone you don't know in real life.
5. **Report safety concerns:** if your child comes across something upsetting, or if anyone asks them to do something inappropriate or that makes them uncomfortable, please report the Snap to Snapchat directly – and talk to your child about it.
6. **Bullying:** if someone is bullying or harassing your child, report the Snap directly to Snapchat. Make sure to block that person and leave any group chat where bullying is taking place.
 - **Additional help:** check out www.ceop.police.uk to help report someone who is attempting to communicate with a young person online in an inappropriate way.

- International resources are available through the NSPCC website and 'ThinkUKnow' web portals.
- 7. **Password security:** keep passwords safe and don't share it with any other people, applications or websites under any circumstances. We also suggest using a different password for every service you use.
- 8. **Age minimum:** Snapchat was made for people 13 and older. If you have a child under 13 using Snapchat, please contact Snapchat with your child's username and verification of your relationship.

Support for Parents / Guardians

- CEOP's Thinkuknow (www.thinkuknow.co.uk) has online safety advice for parents, children and young people, including short videos to help parents understand why children send and receive inappropriate content and how to talk to them about it.
- Children under 18 can visit Childline (www.childline.org.uk) for advice on sexting and online safety.
- Young people can also use the Zipit app (<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/bullying-abuse-safety/online-mobile-safety/sexting/zipit-app/>) to send a funny comeback if someone's pressuring them to send naked images.
- To understand what some of the messages are, The Children's Society have put together a helpful [slang dictionary](#) and [emoji dictionary](#) which unlocks some of the codes young people may use.

If your child has been sending, sharing or receiving inappropriate or sexualised messages, photos or videos, you may feel angry, confused and upset – it's natural to feel like this. The most important thing is communication. Talk about how to treat others online with respect and what is and isn't appropriate online behaviour.