

Social Networking



A social network is an online community, often with a common interest.

What is social networking?

Social networking sites allow users to share comments and post images and videos in a contained environment with the account holder in control. The term has now broadened to capture many popular apps and platforms that are not strictly social media but it extends to any app or platform that allows online communication.

The most common site used in Australia is Facebook, followed by Instagram, WhatsApp and Snapchat. For young people, the most popular app is Instagram, followed by Snapchat. Other apps that are particularly popular are YouTube, TikTok and House Party. Many online games also have a social media like function. Each site comes with safety concerns, so please check out the advice on the eSafety website www.esafety.gov.au

Be aware that any app, site, game or platform that allows communication between users can be used to bully or harass and can be used by online predators



What are the risks of social networking?

Using a social networking site can be a lot of fun and is a great way to keep in touch, but it can carry risks, especially for children and young people. All social networking sites have age restrictions (usually 13 years) and it is important for parents to read and understand the site's **Terms and Conditions of Use**. You don't pick and choose which rules you follow in the real world, so please assist your children to follow the online rules as well. Children should not be permitted to access age restricted accounts. Talk about the rules and why they are important rather than working out a way to circumvent them.

Social networking sites require a large amount of time invested in them, not only to set up, but also to continually manage to ensure that the security/privacy settings are at their highest level. This is particularly important when the account holder is a young person.

Many social networking sites work on a 'real name' culture, which means that being truthful in the setting up of an account makes the account safer. You are far better being truthful and using the security settings to protect your privacy, rather than setting up a fake account, or lying about certain information such as age. Facebook for example has a range of important safety settings as the 'default' when the account holder is 13 - 17 years.

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Many parents are misguided and tell their children to set up the account with an older age for 'safety'. This is NOT a guarantee of safety, sets a poor example and puts the child outside the secure part of the site. You are far better to set up an account with your child together, with clear rules and guidelines, rather than have them set one up at a friend's house behind your back.

Social networking is certainly not all bad, although the media can focus on negative aspects. Embrace social technology with your child and ensure that you have an account on all sites your child does.

What are some ways to assist children and young people in social networking?

Here is how you can assist your child to be safe on social networking sites:

- Ensure that they comply with the age restrictions (DO NOT let them on Facebook under 13 years of age)
- Ensure that they understand how the privacy and security settings work and always have the account set to 'private'. Note that even with this setting, random people may still be able to contact your child.
- Ensure that they can change their passwords and they know how to report and block.
- Ensure that they know who to tell if they have an online issue.
- Set up an account yourself and be your child's friend (this is not going to ensure safety but is part of what is expected of you as a parent.)
- Know your child's password. This is not invading their privacy, it is parenting.
- Have house rules about what your child can post and when they can add new 'friends' (must ask you first). Ensure they know and understand the rules.

Where can I find out more about specific social media sites?

Many social networking sites create their own help guides. These guides provide tips and advice specifically for parents. You can download these guides from the site's Help or Support section, for example:

- **Parent's Guide to Instagram**
<https://help.instagram.com/299484113584685>
- **Help Your Teens Play it Safe - Facebook**
(<https://www.facebook.com/safety/parents/>)
- **Control Your Experience - Twitter**
(<https://support.twitter.com/articles/470968-families>)
- The **eSafety Commissioner** has a section with updated information about the latest apps and platforms.
(<https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/esafety-guide>)

