

# Social Networking Websites - Advice Sheet

(from [www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie))

## 1. Discover the Internet together

Be the one to introduce your child to the Internet. For both parent and child it is an advantage to discover the Internet together. Try to find web sites that are exciting and fun. Hopefully you will together achieve a positive and conscious attitude to Internet exploration, which again could make it easier to share both positive and negative experiences in the future.

## 2. Agree with your child on a framework for Internet use in your home

Try to reach an agreement with your child on the guidelines which apply to Internet use in your household. Here are some tips to get started:

- How to treat your personal information (name, address, telephone, e-mail)
- How to behave towards others on the net (chat, e-mailing, messaging)
- What type of sites and activities are OK or not OK in our family

## 3. Encourage your child to be careful when disclosing personal information

It is important that adults are aware that many web pages made for children require giving out personal information to access content. Being conscious of when and where it is all right to reveal personal information is vital. A simple rule could be that the child should not give out name, phone number or picture without your approval.

## 4. Talk about the risks associated with meeting an internet-pal face to face

Adults should understand that the Internet could be a positive meeting place for children, where they can get to know other children and make new friends. However, to avoid unpleasant experiences, it is important that children do not meet strangers they have met on the net without being accompanied by an adult, friends or others they trust. In any case, the child should always have their parents' approval first.

## 5. Teach your child about source criticism on the net

Most children use the Internet to improve and develop knowledge in relation to schoolwork and personal interests. Net users should be aware that not all information found online is correct. Educate children on how to verify information they find by comparing to alternative sources on the same topic.

## 6. Don't be too critical towards your child's exploration of the Internet

Children may come across adult material by accident on the Web. If a child intentionally searches for such web sites, remember that it is natural for children to be curious about off-limits material. Try to use this as an opening to discuss the content with them, and perhaps make rules for this kind of activity. Be realistic in your assessment of how your child uses the Internet.

## 7. Report online material you may consider illegal to the appropriate authorities

It is vital that we all take responsibility for the Web and report matters, which we believe could be illegal. By doing this we can help to prevent illegal activities online, such as child-pornography or attempts to lure children via chat, mail or messaging.

## 8. Encourage good Netiquette

Netiquette is the informal code of conduct for the Internet. As in everyday life, there are informal ethical rules for how to behave when relating to other people on the Internet. These include being polite, using correct language and not yell at (write in capital letters) or harass others. Also, children as well as grown up's should not read other's e-mail or copy protected material.

## 9. Know your child's net use

To be able to guide your child with regard to Internet use, it is important to understand how children use the Internet and know what they like to do on-line. Let your child show you which websites they like visiting and what they do there. Acquiring technical knowledge could also make it easier to make the right decisions regarding your child's Internet use.

## Advice to Young People on using Social Networking Websites

**Do** know who can access your personal information – many sites allow you to decide which parts of your profile can be accessed by others. Assume that everything is public unless you are sure that it isn't. Opting for private doesn't always mean that only your friends can see your profile. In some cases it means that everything you put on your profile can be seen by everyone but only your friends can post comments or IM you.

**Do** trust your instincts - If it doesn't look or "feel right", it probably isn't. If you find something online that you don't like or makes you feel uncomfortable, turn off the computer and tell an adult.

**Do** be careful with your personal information - The problem with posting personal information to the internet is that as soon as it goes online, you have lost control over who will see it and how it will be used. Pictures can easily be copied and shared with 100,000 of others at the press of a button. Because of the digital nature of the photos, they can even be altered or distorted. Don't post any pictures that you wouldn't want everyone you know to see, that includes your parents and your teachers.

**Don't** assume everyone you meet online is who they appear to be - The fact that certain websites claim to connect students from the same school means nothing. The information provided by users when they are registering is not checked. Anyone can create a user profile pretending to be anyone else. Moreover, anyone regardless of their real or pretend age can join as many school communities as they want.

**Don't** post information that could be used to find you offline – without meaning to, you can give away information that could help someone to find you. Be careful of posting photos with things like car registration plates or identifiable landmarks in them. Avoid posting messages to blogs along the lines of "I usually walk home down the lane by the railway tracks". There are some people out there who will piece together little snippets of information about you over a long period of time.

**Don't** reply to messages that harass you or make you feel uncomfortable! - Even though you may really want to, this is exactly what cyberbullies want. They want to know that they've got you worried and upset. They are trying to mess with your head. They want to think that they are important by being able to get a reaction from you. Don't give them the pleasure.

### Useful Websites:

webwise.ie  
internetsafety.ie  
protectyourkids.info

commonsensemedia.org  
wiredsafety.org

safekids.com  
safeteens.com

### Useful software:

filter for wi-fi connections: **OpenDNS**.com

filters for wire connection: **KidsWatch** (time on PC), **SafeEyes** (YouTube filter)

mobile phone control software: **safetyweb**.com, **kidzafe**.com

## Concerns re Social Media

1. Waste a lot of time!
2. Detrimental to ability to concentrate and focus
3. Receive or gain access to unsuitable material
4. Encourage curiosity, vanity & jealousy
5. Develop unhealthy social behaviours  
(e.g. 12 year-olds mixing with 20+; disengaged from group)
6. Distorts emotional communication:  
body language, expression of feeling, empathy, etc

## Serious Concern: Bullying

- Receiving abusive messages & comments
- Defamation: spreading hurtful rumours
- Displaying offensive photographs & videos
- Fake impersonation and identity theft: hacking
- False reporting of abuse leading to dismissal

## Parental Guidance

- Do not be afraid of technology: need to know
- Warn of dangers: tell real 'horror' stories
- Tell them not to provide private information
- Tell them to only accept real friends as 'friend'
- Tell them to block unsolicited stuff and delete inappropriate comments
- Sign up and look up their profile

## Parental Guidance (ctd)

- Report if your child gets cyber-bullied
- Set up time limits: avoid being hooked
- Be aware of private/incognito browsing
- Install wi-fi filter software: e.g. OpenDNS
- Warn them that stuff they write might come back to bite them
- Lead by example:  
help them acquire good habits



## Advice regarding SmartPhones

- Best is to engage with child and know how they use it
- Be aware of what apps your child installs
- Dangers of "sexting" – social humiliation
- Criminal charges for child porn distribution
- Geo-tagging photos makes them trackable
- Wi-Fi hotspots can lead to malware sites
- Use filtering & monitoring software to control usage
  - e.g. **O2 & Vodafone services, SafeEyes, Qustodio**

## Internet Safety resources

- [Webwise.ie](http://Webwise.ie) & [Hotline.ie](http://Hotline.ie)
- [Connectsafely.org/Guides](http://Connectsafely.org/Guides): SnapChat, Instagram
- [CommonSenseMedia.com](http://CommonSenseMedia.com)
- Safety advice & parental resources in apps (Facebook, Google, YouTube, O2, Vodafone, etc)
- Filters: OpenDNS, NetGenie, Qustodio, SafeEyes



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