Safety Online: A practical guide for parents and carers

Dear Parents and Carers,

Social networking is hugely popular. Many young people are sophisticated in the way they use social media apps and websites, tailoring their communication for different audiences, and accessing them from a range of devices including smartphones, tablets, and games consoles. But social media, like all forms of public communication, comes with some risks. Not all of these risks turn into actual problems; and if young people never face any risks, they never learn how to deal with them. By helping young people understand what the risks are, we can play a big part in preventing them from turning into problems.

Understand the risks young people may need to deal with:

- Seeing or sharing of violent, sexual and pornographic content
- Inaccurate or false information and extreme views
- Promotion of harmful behaviours including self-harm, anorexia and suicide
- Over-sharing of personal information

Who might they meet:

- People who might bully, intimidate /frighten
- People posing behind fake profiles for:
- Mischief-making
- Sexual grooming and stalking
- Blackmail and extortion

How could this affect them?

- Fear of missing out leading to excessive use or exaggeration
- Getting upset by things they have seen and being uncertain about what to do
- Engaging, or being pressured into engaging in more risky behaviour either by accident or by design
- Developing unrealistic, and perhaps depressing ideals of body image and gender
- Becoming subject to peer pressure or interactions that are intense or too difficult to handle
- Creating an online reputation that may create problems for them in the future

Practical tips to help minimise the risks young people may face:

Work through safety and privacy features on the apps that your child is using, or might use. Make sure they understand the point of these and how to use them. Don't be put off by believing your child knows more than you: the tools are actually quite easy to manage.

- Ask them to show you which social media apps they use and what they like about them. Talk about how they use them and what makes them so engaging.
- Explain how you can use privacy settings to make sure only approved friends can see posts & images.
- Check if any of their apps have 'geo-location' enabled, sharing their location unintentionally.
- Show them how to report offensive comments or block people who upset them.
- Check 'tagging' settings so that when others are posting or sharing photos online, your child's identity is not revealed. Also, get people's consent before sharing photos.
- Encourage your child to come and talk to you or another trusted adult if they see anything that upsets them.

For more information:

You can find out more about how young people use social media, the apps they use, the risks they face, how to use privacy settings, and advice and tips about how to talk to your child at:

www.childnet.com/sns
www.nspcc.org.uk/onlinesafety
www.parentzone.org.uk
www.thinkyouknow.co.uk/parents

Concerned about online grooming or sexual behaviour online?

Contact CEOP: www.ceop.police.uk

Miss H Howson—Designated Safeguarding Lead