

8 tips to keep kids safe on social media

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Parents need to actively assist their children to keep them stay safe online. Photo / Thinkstock

It may be a universal truth that parents are less tech and media-savvy than their kids. Experts say parents need to improve their understanding of social media and technology to protect their kids from risks.

Social media can expose children to inappropriate content, subject them to cyber bullying or make them targets of predators and stalkers. Children can put themselves and their families at risk of potential identity theft by revealing personal and intimate information.

Read more: [New text speak parents need to look out for - report warns](#)

"Parents need to actively assist their children to keep them stay safe online," says Martin Cocker, Executive Director of NetSafe, a not for profit that advocates responsible use of online technologies.

"Learning about technology and social media with your children and discussing them openly is the best way to keep safe."

NetSafe is aware that parents need help to reduce risk for their children. Monitoring social media use has become increasingly difficult for parents, as smartphones enable children to send and receive information without parental guidance.

NetSafe created the "[OWLS](#)" website, in joint partnership with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and the NZ National Commission for UNESCO to help teachers keep students safe online.

The OWLS website has a series of 24 modules on different aspects of managing personal information online, including: ownership of information; waiting before uploading; locking information; and putting safety first.

Tips on social media safety

1. Engage in open discussions

Parents should sit down with their children and learn about technology together. Work out a plan for monitoring, and how to behave safely. Find out more about applications such as Facebook and Instagram on their websites.

2. Meet minimum age requirements

Parents should not permit children under the minimum age requirements to register on social networking sites. The minimum age requirement is 13 years on most social media sites including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. For information on minimum age restrictions [see the website](#).

3. Teach respect for others

Teach children to respect others when using social media, including posting, sharing, tagging and commenting on information. Examples of respectful behaviour include: check before sharing photographs of other people online; treat others as you would want them to treat you; and not to post "funny" material that could be hurtful for someone else.

4. Information is not easily removed

Online activity can become a permanent digital footprint of a young person's life. It can affect a young person's reputation and how they are perceived by future employers.

Information is not easily removed once it has gone public. While removal can be achieved, deleted posts remain available for viewing once they have been copied and shared.

5. Share less detail

Sharing less personal information can reduce the risk of identity theft. Children should refrain from posting sensitive personal information online, such as phone numbers, addresses or IRD numbers, which can assist predators or perpetrators of identity theft. From time to time, parents should check that their children's personal details are not in public places online.

6. Learn about privacy settings, user settings and content filters

Encourage your children to use privacy settings wisely, and to understand the dangers of sharing sensitive information in a public setting. Find out more information about security features such as encryption and the importance of having a security PIN on a smart phone, on the OWLS website.

It is important to protect your family computer through up-to-date antivirus software and firewall settings. Use a child safe search engine, and internet content filters like Google's SafeSearch filter to change browser setting to prevent adult content appearing in search results.

7. Beware of Predators

Children should take care before accepting "friend" requests - it's easy for people to pretend to be someone else online. Parents should remind their children not to interact inappropriately with people they do not know, and not to meet online "friends" in the real world unless accompanied by an adult.

8. Deal with bullying

Discuss parameters around behaviour and the impact the online world can have on real world friendships. Parents should encourage children to let them know about any online or text bullying, and discourage their children from responding to it.

For more information visit the [NetSafe](#) or the [Office of the Privacy Commissioner's](#) websites.