

Online safety is an important part of keeping children safe at school and at home.

We try to address this in school through teaching our students how to stay safe and behave appropriately online. Clearly this approach is most successful if we work together and reinforce safe behaviour at home too.

It has been brought to our attention that there are a number of year 7 students who are currently using ‘WhatsApp’ and other social media sites. I would like to bring your attention to the current age restrictions in place for the most common social media sites and apps:

Social media	Age on terms and conditions	Further information
<b>WhatsApp</b>	16+	Until recently, you could sign up at 13 but WhatsApp <b>changed the rules</b> following the implementation of the GDPR in May 2018, stating you will have to be 16 to use the service.
<b>Snapchat</b>	13+	Common concerns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It shares your location if you don’t use ‘ghost mode’</li> <li>• People can screen shot images you share</li> <li>• Getting messages or request for sexual images from people you don’t know</li> <li>• It can be used for bullying</li> </ul>
<b>Instagram</b>	13+	Many parents say Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms with young children. You don’t have to be over a certain age to look at photos posted publicly on Instagram, but if you want to make your own account, the age limit is 13+.
<b>Facebook</b>	13+	Facebook’s policy is to delete accounts if there is proof that the account holder is under 13.
<b>Twitter</b>	13+	
<b>YouTube</b>	13+	You don’t need to be over a certain age to watch videos on the site (although very young children might be better off using YouTube Kids, which only features child-friendly videos). To comment or share your own videos you’ll need a Google account, which requires users to be 13 or older.

We know that social media services are popular with young people of all ages, and you may be aware of your child already holding accounts for the sites above with a false date of birth. One of the reasons for why these age restrictions are in place is due to the maturity of the users and their ability to keep themselves safe online. We are running online safety sessions in tutor time to help educate your child in the following areas:

- Grooming
- Privacy
- Sexting
- Cyber bullying
- Consequences for victims/aggressors
- Where to seek help
- Digital Footprint

However, you as parents also have an important role in helping to prepare your children to go online before they start to use social media platforms.

It is our experience that for many year 7 students the transition of going from a small primary with between 30 and 60 peers, to a large secondary of 300 peers in conjunction with beginning to access social media is often far too much for them to cope with. They struggle with the social pressures but also with moderating their own online behaviours. Due to the nature of communicating online, it is far too easy for comments to become inappropriate in many ways often leading to racial, homophobic and sexually explicit comments as well as it being a prime space for bullying. The students often do not appreciate the seriousness of the words they use and they also feel less accountable for the way they express themselves, as they are not immediately face to face with the victims or the consequences. It has also been reported that 58% of students believe that it is easy to delete information that has been posted about or by themselves and they are not aware of their digital footprint. Once content is uploaded onto a website, it could potentially stay online forever and regardless of whether the owner takes down the content, anyone who had access to that content could have copied it for themselves, kept it for their own records or distributed it further. Messages that are sent, by text or WhatsApp, can be copied, altered and reposted by anyone and it is very difficult to 'take back' things that they may later regret.

Therefore, I am writing to you to ask that you begin and continue a conversation with your child about their activity and safety online.

**Here are some starting points:**

- Set parental controls on your broadband to prevent your children seeing things they shouldn't.
- For smart phones check parental controls are also set up on the mobile network.

**Set up the device safely:**

- Use the device setting so you can only download age appropriate apps and games.
- Disable location services so that your child doesn't unintentionally share their location with others.
- Set up password control or disable in-app purchasing so big bills are not run up accidentally.
- We strongly advise that the age restrictions for social media are adhered to but if your child is using social networking apps check their profile and privacy settings, make sure they are not sharing personal or private information with people they do not know. Also, regularly monitor the content of what is being shared with and by your child.

**Setting boundaries:**

Much like the 'real world', parents need to set boundaries for children online; this provides them with a clear understanding of the limits, expectations and consequences of their behaviour.

- Discuss and agree as a family, how the internet and technology will be used in your home; consider nominating 'tech-free' areas or times, such as your child's bedroom or dinner time.
- Discuss online boundaries too; let children use the lessons they learn in school to tell you what they think is/isn't acceptable for them to do online and adapt these messages into your own family rules.

Take a look at the conversation starter ideas and family agreement template available from Childnet International: [www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/have-a-conversation](http://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/have-a-conversation)

**Talk to your children:**

Take an active interest in your child's online life and engage in the digital world with them.

- Let your children teach you about their online world and how they use technology; playing new games and exploring websites together can often open opportunities to discuss safe behaviour online.

- Make sure your children know that you are safe and approachable; remind them that they can tell you if something happens online that makes them feel scared, worried or uncomfortable, without being told off or punished.

You can find more advice about talking to your child about online safety from CEOP:

[www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/having-a-conversation-with-your-child/](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/having-a-conversation-with-your-child/)

You can learn more about social networking at <https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/social-networking/>.

**Other useful websites for parents/carers:**

- [www.net-aware.org.uk](http://www.net-aware.org.uk)- NSPCC guide to the most popular apps and websites available online.
- [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)- CEOP website for advice and reporting abuse online.
- [www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)- Report illegal content online (including indecent images of children).
- [www.parentport.org.uk](http://www.parentport.org.uk)- Report inappropriate content online.
- [www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org)- Free up-to-date security and technical advice.

If you would like further support and advice regarding online safety, please contact one of the Designated Safeguarding Leads in school who are:

**Karen Brookes (Deputy Head)**

**Nicola Santaana (Head of Student Support)**

**Vicki Woosey (Welfare Manager)**