

7th October 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

Social media

Deciding when children should be allowed on social media is an important and sensitive decision, as it can significantly affect their development, safety, and well-being. Here are key considerations and general guidelines based on age groups:

1. Under 13 Years Old (Pre-teens)

- **General Advice:** Children under 13 should generally not be on most social media platforms. This is not only because of maturity concerns but also because many platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) have a minimum age requirement of 13 due to the **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)**, which restricts the collection of personal information from children.
- **Why:** At this age, children may not fully understand the implications of sharing personal information, interacting with strangers, or dealing with negative content like cyberbullying. They also tend to struggle with distinguishing between reality and social media's often curated and sometimes harmful portrayals of life.

2. 13-15 Years Old (Early Teens)

- **General Advice:** This age group may start using social media with **supervision** and **limits**. It's a good idea for parents to remain actively involved, discussing privacy settings, online safety, and appropriate behavior.
- **Why:** Early teens are still developing their critical thinking and emotional maturity, so they may be vulnerable to social pressures, peer comparisons, and harmful content. Encourage them to follow age-appropriate platforms and content. Social media can be a learning tool if approached in a safe, healthy manner.

Tips:

- Set time limits for social media use.
- Monitor who they interact with.
- Encourage open communication about what they see online.
- Use parental control apps or settings on devices if needed.

3. 16-17 Years Old (Later Teens)

- **General Advice:** At this age, many teens can handle more freedom, but they still need **guidance** and **occasional checks** on their activity. Encourage responsible and balanced use of social media.
- **Why:** Older teens are more independent and can better navigate social situations and conflicts. However, they are still susceptible to issues like online harassment, mental health impacts from constant comparison, or overuse. They also need guidance on building a positive online presence for future academic or professional opportunities.

Tips:

- Discuss digital footprints and the importance of their online reputation.
- Talk about mental health and the effects of social media on self-esteem.
- Encourage them to report inappropriate behavior or content they encounter.

4. 18+ Years Old

- **General Advice:** By adulthood, they should be responsible for managing their own social media usage, though parental guidance can still be helpful. Encourage them to set boundaries for themselves to avoid issues like overuse or being overly influenced by social media.
- **Why:** At this point, young adults should have the critical thinking and emotional regulation to use social media wisely. However, reminders about online privacy, avoiding misinformation, and taking breaks from social media are still valuable.

Additional Factors to Consider:

- **Child's Maturity Level:** Age is just one factor. Some children may be more mature than others at the same age, and parents should assess their individual child's ability to handle social media.
- **Type of Social Media:** Different platforms have varying content and interaction levels. Some, like TikTok or Instagram, focus on visual content, which can lead to issues around body image, while others like Reddit or Discord can expose children to unfiltered discussions.
- **Parental Involvement:** Regardless of the child's age, maintaining an open dialogue about their experiences and concerns on social media is crucial. Parents should also model healthy social media habits.

Warning Signs to Watch For:

- Increased anxiety, depression, or self-esteem issues.
- Decreased interest in offline activities.
- Excessive time spent on social media, leading to poor sleep, school performance, or other responsibilities.

In summary, while 13 is a common starting point for supervised access, the appropriate age for social media use will vary depending on the child's maturity, the platform, and the family's values.

Finally, just a reminder of ways to report any concerns about a child or to seek support:

- Speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who is Stephen Ord
- Speak to reception staff who will give you a paper form on which you can write your concerns
- Email address on the 'Safeguarding' page of the school's website

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- Contact children's social services: 0191 2772500

If a child needs support they can speak to any member of staff in school as all staff complete annual safeguarding training or they can ask to speak to the DSL or Deputy Safeguarding Leads. They can also use the paper form or email address if they do not feel confident enough to speak to an adult themselves.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Roderick
Trust Safeguarding Lead