

Remember these FIVE P's for social networking:

POSITIVE:

Stay positive about social networking sites: try to strike a balance between educating children and young people to behave safely and trusting them to get on with it. Get involved yourself: ask them to help you set up a profile (even if you already know how) to test their knowledge and assess how they behave online.

PRIVACY:

Most sites have privacy settings and it's important to keep up with developments as they can often change. Discuss the value of privacy with children and encourage them to keep passwords secure and to use different ones for each service they use. Encourage them to only allow friends to see their details, and to remember that unless they know these friends in the real world that their online friends are really strangers. Don't allow open social networking profiles.

PHOTOS:

It's only natural to want to post photos online, but encourage children to think about what they contain: does it show a school sweatshirt with a logo that could be used to track them down? Do they have permission of the others in the photo to post it? Photos can easily be copied and altered so children and young people should ask themselves "would I want a relative or future employer to see this?"

POSTINGS:

Help your child to think before they post. Set some ground rules about what a child says about others as much as themselves. What begins as a joke or gossip can escalate and cause real pain to friends which cannot be taken back.

POLICE:

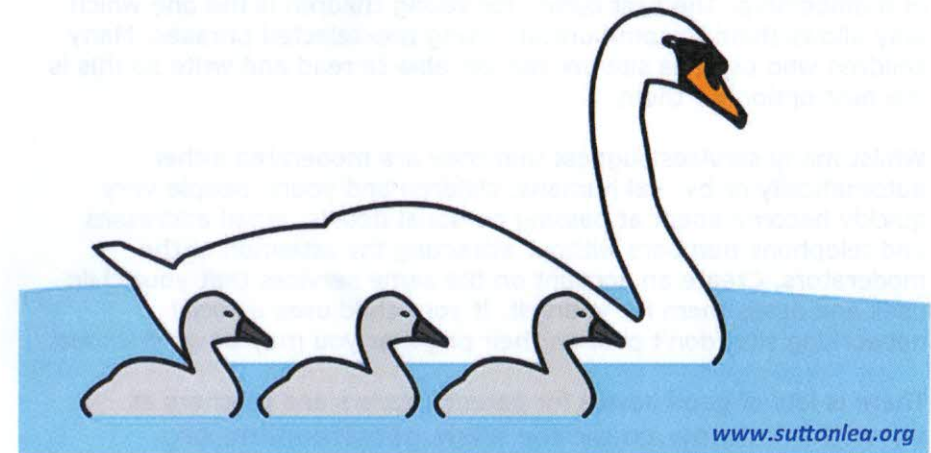
It's really important to encourage your child to tell you about any inappropriate activity or material they come across. If they are being harassed by somebody keep the evidence and report them to the service provider. If you suspect a child has been the subject of inappropriate sexual contact report it to CEOP at:

www.thinkuknow.co.uk via the CEOP Report button.



Social Networking

*A guide for parents, carers and teachers about
social networking websites.*



www.suttonlea.org

Social Networking Websites are popular with children as young as six or seven. These websites such as Facebook, MySpace, Piczo and others allow children and young people to be incredibly creative online, keep in touch with friends and express themselves using a wide range of media and applications such as video, photographs, music and chat.

Whilst it's very important to recognise the benefits, we should also be aware of the risks which can include cyberbullying, inappropriate sexual contact, grooming and the misuse of personal information.

As a parent, carer or teacher it's really important to familiarise yourself with social networking services.

Most social networking sites have a minimum age of thirteen, defined by American advertising law.

By understanding these sites you can help support your children in choosing an appropriate site and using it safely and responsibly.

For younger children, let's not overlook sites such as **Club Penguin** and **Habbo Hotel** which can still represent a risk depending on how the account is managed and how well your child understands the language that is being used. Club Penguin for example, has two types of membership. The best option for young children is the one which only allows them to communicate using pre-selected phrases. Many children who use this site are not yet able to read and write so this is the best option for them.

Whilst many services suggest that they are moderated either automatically or by real humans, children and young people very quickly become adept at passing personal details, email addresses and telephone numbers without attracting the attention of the moderators. Create an account on the same services that your child uses and assess them for yourself. If your child uses a social networking site, don't post on their page, or you may be *un-friended*.

There is lots of good advice for parents, carers and teachers at www.thinkuknow.co.uk and www.getsafeonline.org.

Public or Private?

Increasingly children and young people are able to access their social networks with their mobile telephone or games console whilst they are away from supervision and can publish details and pictures instantly. Children and young people often believe that their content will only be seen by friends but what they post can often be seen by a much wider audience and can put them at risk in two ways:

CONTENT:

Children creating or posting inappropriate, offensive or even illegal content on their own or others' pages could get themselves into trouble with their school, friends and even the police depending on the nature of the material. Content posted to the web can be copied, altered and reposted by anybody and it's very difficult to remove what may later be regretted. This can damage reputations and friendships as well as future career prospects.

CONTACT:

Children and young people can put too much personal information online and this exposes them to adults with a sexual interest in children. Posting or chatting about personal details might encourage someone to identify and contact your child online or in person by asking to meet. There is also the potential for cyberbullying where people seek to intentionally distress or harm another person online.

It's not always easy to talk to a young person about their social networking online or offline. They often think of these sites as their private domain in the same way as they would regard their personal diary or address book. It's therefore important that they and you understand the risks because young people are often damaged by inappropriate behaviour in these public spaces and it's critical that they are able to safeguard themselves when they are online. Talking openly about the issues will encourage them to talk to you when there is something that upsets them. <http://cybermentors.org.uk> offers fantastic support for young people who are being bullied.