



Parents' and Carers' Guide: Let's talk about life online

Our children's lives are impacted by the online world. With everything from education to entertainment to socialising having an online part, it's difficult to escape lots of digital platforms.

While staying connected to friends and peers and can be beneficial for children, the online world presents a wide range of threats. Chats are conducted through a number of different platforms, including instant messaging systems, email, social media, and web forums. But these often expose children to dangers such as cyberbullying, scams, predators, and malware.

Where are children communicating online?

There are virtually endless possibilities for ways to communicate online and most of these are easily accessible by children. Here are the main methods of communication:

- **Instant messaging:** While texting was popular in the past, instant messaging systems are often the chat vectors of choice for children and teens. You have the most popular services such as Messenger, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and iMessage, but there are also many lesser-known applications such as WeChat, Oovoo, and Kik Messenger.
- **Social media:** Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Twitch, and TikTok offer a variety of communication methods including posts, comments, and direct (private) messages.
- **Email:** While it's less popular among children and teens, email remains a viable method of communication and is one that represents serious risks, including phishing and malware attacks.
- **Chat rooms and message boards:** There are a ton of opportunities for children with similar interests to chat. Forums are often dedicated to or especially popular with users with a particular interest, for example, Discord is favoured among gamers. Not all forums are standalone and websites might host their own chat rooms or message boards.
- **Video conferencing:** While not new, video conferencing platforms have exploded recently. Apps like Houseparty and Airtime enable groups of people to "hang out" and chat via VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) and video.

How can I help my child stay safe online?

1. Help them set up online accounts
2. Adjust privacy settings
3. Never share personal information online
4. Avoid sharing pictures
5. Use parental controls

If you need help with setting up parental controls please visit these websites for support, or contact the ICT coordinator at school.

