

Chat, messaging and social networking

Children can use social networking, chat and messaging services on mobiles and computers to keep in touch with their friends. But they need to understand the risks.

Our own public chat rooms are moderated, but other chat rooms might not be. Sometimes people are invited from a public room into a private chat, which is a one-to-one chat. This could be used, for example, by an adult who wants to strike up inappropriate relations with a child. So it's important to know the risks and remember that people online may not be who they say they are.

To understand the appeal of social networking sites like Bebo and Facebook, you could set-up your own page - it's usually free - so you'll be able to talk to your children about what they can do to stay safe online.

Parental Control is a feature that limits web surfing from a mobile to sites that are suitable for children aged 12 or under. To turn it on or off, call 61818 from your child's mobile or visit o2.co.uk/parentalcontrol.

If you've set-up Parental Control, then your children won't be able to access social networking services. As they grow up, this might place too much of a restriction on what they can do, and you may decide to turn it off.

Talking points

- You can't see the impact your words or images have on other people, so it's important to be careful about what you post. Discuss what's okay to post and what sort of behaviour is responsible. Remember it's important to ask permission of the people in your photos before you post them.
- People sometimes ask personal questions online. Giving out your mobile number, your address or any details about your school is not a good idea.
- You don't have to give anyone any information if you don't want to, and you can stop a conversation at any time. If you're not comfortable, just end the session and log off.
- Your online friends may not be who they say they are. They might claim to be 14 years old one day and 18 the next.
- There's no need to keep friendships secret. If somebody asks you to keep an online friendship secret, you should tell an adult who you trust straight away.