

Acceptable behaviour online

Your child might already spend far more time than you do online, building worlds, exploring and playing games. But opening a social media account or allowing them to own their own smartphone will present them with a whole new set of challenges in terms of how to conduct themselves.

Most parents had the luxury of being adults or older teens when social networks were first introduced, making them more mature and better equipped to decipher a large range of media – and to deal with problems if they came along.

But for a 13-year-old (which is the age most social media platforms require participants to be before creating an account) working out what to post and how to react to certain messages and images, let alone how to deal with issues such as trolling and cyberbullying, requires a certain amount of navigation. Plus, many children under 13 bend the rules and sign up before they should, either with or without parental knowledge.

Below are 6 key pieces of advice we suggest you share with your child to help them navigate the online world.

- 1. Be nice** Unkind behaviour is just as unacceptable in the virtual world as it is in the real world. While this might seem obvious, joining in on a post of nasty comments (even as a joke) or sharing cruel images to impress friends may seem OK when you're not standing in front of the recipient and everyone else is doing it too. If you discover that your child has joined in online bullying, ask them to talk about why they did it. Explain to them why it was wrong and how you expect them to behave.
Further reading: <http://parentinfo.org/article/bullying-a-parents-guide-what-if-my-child-is-bullying-another-child>
- 2. Care about what you share** Have a conversation about what is OK and not OK to share. Would your child like it if someone posted an embarrassing picture of them online? Would they prefer it if someone asked their permission first before sharing a picture of them on social media?
Emphasise that if someone says that they do not want a picture or a video of themselves shared online then that decision must be respected. And don't forget to set a good example. Ask your children whether it's OK to share their images on Facebook and be prepared to take down any images of them when they were younger which they are now embarrassed about.
- 3. Avoid negative online behaviours and crazes** These include:
 - **Trolling** This involves people fishing for conflict online. The troll's bait is an inflammatory or bizarre comment, expertly designed to irritate people. They want people to respond to their remarks and to involve them in an infuriating, and pointless, argument. At best this behaviour can be viewed as banter – such as among rival football supporters. At worse, trolling targets have

received death threats, such as the one received by [Labour MP Luciana Berger](#) which resulted in a jail sentence for the perpetrator, John Nimmo.

- **Shaming** Is when a group of online, usually social media, users collectively attack a person or a company for their behaviour. The attacks are often insults, condemnations or threats to the victim of the attack. People can become quite self-righteous and put others down viciously. This type of online humiliation rarely justifies the supposed 'crime' and some of its victims' lives have been ruined, as in the case of [Lindsey Stone](#), who was shamed for posting an ill-judged selfie of her taken next to a veteran's war memorial.
 - **Roasting.** Be aware of online crazes such as roasting – in which an image of a person is posted (either with or without their permission) and people are invited to criticise them. While this is viewed by young people as a form of 'banter' it is essentially cyberbullying. Find out more: <http://parentzone.org.uk/roasting-the-new-cyberbullying-craze>
4. **Encourage your child to question the perfect world of Instagram.** They should never feel under pressure to look perfect. Since camera phones have become widely available, young people are under greater pressure to look like the stars they follow on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. Have a chat with your child about why a celebrity posted a certain image of themselves on social media and ask them what they think went into making the image look so perfect. <http://parentinfo.org/article/selfies-the-good-the-bad-and-the-downright-irritating>
5. **Make sure that your child knows the law around sexting.** It is illegal for a child under 18 to share a naked or sexual image of themselves. This is true regardless of the age of the person you are sending to, or how willing you are to send them – the pictures are still considered indecent images of a child. This means that if a young person engages in sexting (also known as sending 'nudes') with a friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend, all parties involved could find themselves in trouble with the law. Make sure that your child feels empowered to say no to sexting requests. There are apps such as [SendThisInstead](#) which help teens to generate alternative responses to sexting. Further reading: <https://parentzone.org.uk/peerpressure>

What can you do?

1. **Forgive mistakes.** Adults make bad decisions online too – and it is part of the learning process that all children have to go through.
2. **Make sure that your child knows what to do if they get themselves in trouble online.**
 - If they say or share something they regret, delete it.
 - If someone attacks or harasses them on social media, block them and report it to the platform the message(s) were sent on.
 - If they are approached by an adult online, tell a trusted adult and report it to CEOP.
3. **Let them know that you are there for them** and that they can tell you anything. Above all, however shocked or upset you are by what they tell you, try not to show it.