

Part of our Social Media & Live Streaming Series



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What you need to know about...

FRIENDS & FOLLOWERS



What are they?

'Friends & Followers'

What makes social media actually 'social' are the connections users make with other users on the platforms. Every social networking site handles these connections differently, calling them 'connections', 'friends' and 'followers', amongst others. Having friends and followers is how we find out what other people say and do. Your friends and followers are much more likely to see your online content than those outside of your network, which is why it's important to be mindful of who you connect with and what you share. On some platforms, if two accounts follow each other, this may allow additional communication channels such as private messaging.

Know the Risks

Access to private information

This may include your child's home address, school, date of birth, names of siblings or other relations, as well as seeing photos that inadvertently contain sensitive information. This is completely harmless information for genuine friends or family but could cause issues in the hands of a criminal.

Catfishing

'Catfishing' is the common name given to an individual posing as someone else on social media. They do this to try and befriend typically young and vulnerable people who they look to then take advantage of. Unfortunately, there are many examples of this happening across the world that have had real-life consequences.

Online bullying

Once a connection is made on social media, there is the potential to send private messages between individuals. It is difficult for social networks and other users to see what is being said between accounts. This provides an opportunity for bullies to victimise individuals and can create a dangerous spiral of online activity.

Safety Tips

Check privacy settings

Platforms such as Facebook allow users to modify their privacy settings, which means people who are not friends can't see all your profile information. It's also possible to hide this information for some or all of your connections. Always make sure your child's accounts are set to private.

Talk about strangers

Make sure children understand that they should only connect with people that they know or can completely trust. They should be wary of anyone messaging them frequently who they don't know in real life or have never spoken to or actually seen online. Catfish will stick to text-based messaging only, to keep their identity secret.

Delete old connections

Children should be mindful that everything they share will probably exist online forever and that they shouldn't share anything that gives too much information away. Every now and again, they should delete old connections that they no longer spend time with. Old accounts can easily be hacked, exposing personal information to strangers.

Ellie-May

FRIENDS ✓

28 Followers

Oscar

FRIENDS ✓

147 Followers

Kumail

FRIENDS ✓

63 Followers

Jada

FRIENDS ✓

56 Followers

Amelia

FRIENDS ✓

45 Followers

Further Support

Encourage an open dialogue

It's really important that your children knows that they can speak to someone about anything they're not sure of online. It's crucial that they know they won't be judged or told off for anything they've done; it's far more important to know if they're in danger or worried about something.

Seek additional guidance

If your child wants to spend a lot of time online and is displaying compulsive or addictive behaviour, is negative, struggles with schoolwork and reduces real-life interactions or has frequent changes in mood, they could be experiencing negative interactions online. Speak to them and seek support from their school or your local safeguarding team if you think your child has been affected.

Our Expert Emma Davis



Emma Davis is a cyber security expert and former ICT teacher. She delivers cyber awareness training to organisations nationally and has extensive knowledge and experience of managing how children access services and apps online.