

# Can I have a social media account?

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Advice for parents on conversations to have before children get social

## Things to consider:

### *Are they old enough to use the social media app?*

Most social media apps have a [minimum age requirement of 13](#) but from research we know that children as young as 10 are using social media apps so, it's important to think about the type of content they are likely to see on the app and **whether it is age-appropriate**.

### *Are they asking to have a social media account because of pressure from their friends?*

From our research we know that **children typically get their own smartphone between 10 and 11**. This is a time where they may be starting secondary school and settling into new friendships groups so, being on social can take a new level of importance for them.

In this case, it's important to show them that you **understand the need for them to connect with friends to maintain relationships** but make them aware that it's easy to say something online that may be misunderstood by friends and cause issues in real life.

Also, as with **peer-pressure** before the digital age, it **can push you to do things you wouldn't simply to fit in** so it's important help them understand that it's okay to say no if something doesn't feel right.

### *Have they road tested a social media platform made for kids?*

If your child is not quite old enough to use Instagram or Facebook, **there social platforms such as like ChatFOSS and Kudos that are designed for children with safety features in-built** to help them learn how to communicate with each other online in safe environment.

Like training wheels on a bike, steering them towards these apps could help them to navigate the complexities of communicating online before using the popular apps.

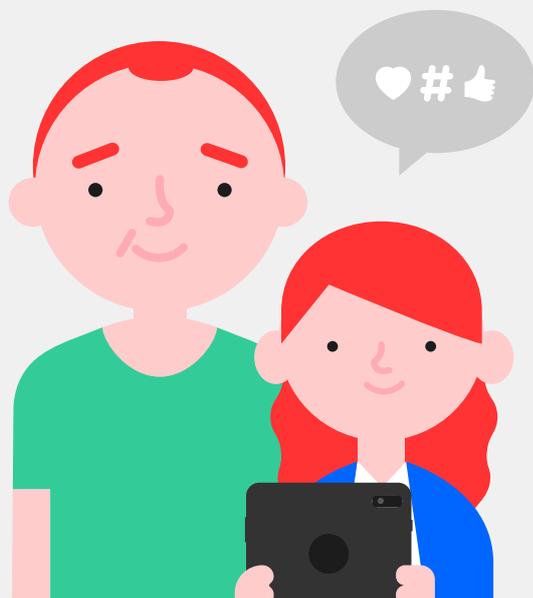
### *Are they well prepared for the risks that they may face?*

**Social media offers children the opportunity to express themselves and access support systems** to help build their identity but it can also open them up to issues around sexting, cyberbullying and FOMO to name a few.

Before letting them loose on social, **make them aware of the issues they may encounter on social media**, what steps they can take to deal with them and where to go for help if they are feeling overwhelmed. Organisations like Childline and Young Minds offer helplines and forums to give children one-to-one advice if they run into difficulties.

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# Creating a space for them to talk



You can't monitor children 24/7 so, one of the best ways to support them is to create a safe environment for children to feel at ease to share issues they face on and offline.

- **Talking early often** about what they do online can make it easier to maintain good communication
- Choosing the right time to talk is essential, particularly when **they feel comfortable** i.e. over a meal or during their bedtime routine
- **Sharing your own experiences** can also help them learn from your experiences and model the behaviour that you'd like them to show
- **Listening and giving them the space to talk** during conversation can encourage them to feel like you value what matters to them

## Questions to ask

When asking questions make sure they are open-ended and feel less like an interview and more of a relaxed conversation. Here are a few to get you started:

### *Who do they want to be online?*

The choices we make online say something about **who we**. Talk to your child about how the things they do online paint a picture of themselves, so they shouldn't post things without thinking about it.

### *How much would they share about themselves?*

Talk to your child about the risks of sharing, identifying where they live or go to school, and what people online might do with that information. **Talk about what the risks might be of sharing personal thoughts and feelings.**

### *How much time should they spend on social media?*

Talk about the possible impact of spending too much time online and agree sensible 'bed-times' and breaks during the day. Create opportunities as a family to get 'off-line' and have fun together.

### *What apps do you want to use and why?*

Find out the reason why they want to use a **specific app** to get a better understanding of how they'll use it in the future.

### *How can they know what and who to trust online?*

There is a lot online that is made up or exaggerated, and there can be a lot of pressure to show what a great time you're having. **There is always the possibility that someone is not who they say they are.** Teach your child to question what they see and to talk to you if something doesn't seem quite right.

### *What can they do if they see something horrible or something bad happens?*

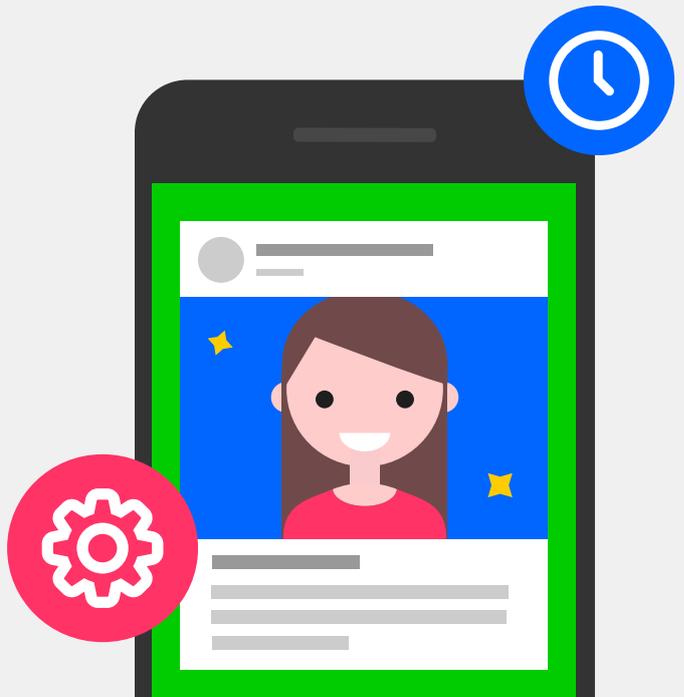
No matter how many precautions you take there **will be times where your child feels hurt**, scared or confused by something they've seen or experienced. Calmly talk through what they've seen, how to understand it, and what you can do together to make things better.

# Checking-in

If you decide to let your child use a social media app, it's important to keep the conversation going about what they are doing and how they are interacting with others.

Putting in place a **family agreement to ensure they know the rules** and boundaries of when and how they are to use the app can help manage expectations and help them make smarter choices.

Also, **reviewing their privacy settings** every once in a while to make sure they are sharing their posts with the right people can help them stay safe.



# Supporting them when things go wrong

If you feel that they are not ready for social media and you say no, they may still go ahead and create an account without your knowledge.

Children will test boundaries and **may create secret accounts** which could make it harder for them to seek your support if they run into any problems. **It's important to keep the conversation going even if the answer for now is 'no'.**

## *What if they make a mistake or do something they later regret?*

The important thing is that **your child talks to someone if they've messed up.** Try not to get angry or overreact. Work out together how to remove content and make amends for any harm caused.

**If they find it hard to talk to you,** let them know they can always contact a confidential helpline like Childline if they need advice.

