

SOCIAL MEDIA 101

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Social media platforms constantly evolve, with even the most popular platforms seeing fluctuations in engagement. Whether the child in your care uses Instagram, TikTok, or any new platform, understanding the key features will help you grasp the appeal and recognise associated risks.



User Hashtags & Trends

Hashtags help categorise and organise content, making it discoverable by users interested in specific topics.

User Profiles

Personal profiles are online identities, with usernames, bios, profile pics, and optional details.

Interactions & Engagement

Interactions between users such as likes, reactions, comments, shares or reposts.

Search & Discovery

Search finds accounts, hashtags, topics, and trending content. Discovery suggests new content based on interests.

Notifications

Alerts users about profile activities such as mentions, comments, likes, friend requests.

Newsfeeds/Timelines

Displays content shared by users and the accounts they follow, tailored to user preferences, connections, and interactions.

Posting & Sharing

Text, photos, videos, links, and articles shared with online connections or publicly.

Privacy & Security Settings

Options to control privacy, audiences, viewing permissions, and account security.

Connecting & Following

Connections through friend/follow requests keep users updated on activities and content. Connections may be mutual (both users follow each other) or one-sided (one user follows another without reciprocation).

Something we are starting to see more of is the integration of AI as a more visible feature on social media platforms.

Messaging & Communications

Direct messages, group chats, voice/video calls facilitate communication between users.

NO AGE RATING



! RISKS AND TOP TIPS ✓

Age Verification

Most platforms have age ratings to stop users viewing age-inappropriate content.

Not all platforms have robust verification methods.

Ensure young people are registered as the correct age (a 12 year old who registers as 16 will see content designed for an adult after two years)

Look for platforms using YOTI as their age verification method. This facial scanning technology is harder to get around than most other methods.

End-to-End Encryption

This ensures a message between the sender and recipient can't be viewed by anyone else - even the police or hackers!

Encryption provides an opportunity for predators to groom young users without detection.

Make sure they understand what to do if someone is making them feel uncomfortable.

Talk to young people about accepting requests or adding people they don't know.

Digital Footprint

Whatever a young person posts online leaves a digital footprint that could impact their future.

Universities, friends, and even employers might come across their previous online activity.

Help your child set up their accounts so that posts are visible only to friends and not the public.

Make sure a young person only posts content they would be comfortable with anyone seeing.

Algorithms

The content a user interacts with or searches for influences what they will see next.

This may affect an impressionable young person's thoughts and actions.

Understand that one piece of harmful content can lead to the algorithm showing you more.

Keep in mind the negativity bias. Just like staring at a car crash on the road, it doesn't imply a desire for more or an enjoyment of it, but rather reflects how our brains tend to focus on the negative for longer.

Persuasive Design

Clever design features keep users engaged on social media platforms for longer, through things like the endless scroll or push notifications.

This can lead to excessive screen-time and in some cases, addiction.

Agree screentime limits with young people to promote a healthy balance between offline and online activities.

Encourage them to recognise when they are being influenced to stay online.

Personal Information

Information such as full names, locations, or other platform usernames are frequently shared on social media.

Sharing this information may seem harmless to young people, but can be exploited by predators and cybercriminals for harmful purposes.

Ensure children know what is appropriate to share online and what isn't.

Make sure they know that bios can be seen by everyone, even with a private account.

Remind them to scan their photos for anything that could identify them before they are posted.