

Social Networking – pros, cons and advice

Social networking is the use of applications or software to communicate or form communities online.

Examples of social networking tools include;

- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Snapchat

ALL of these are designed for people over the age of 13 and should, even then, be considered carefully for teens. This age limit has more to do with privacy legislation in the USA than it has to do with suitable fit for age.

Social networking sites allow users to post comments, images, videos, and links. They require an online profile which may require personal information.

Your child does not need to access social networking. It is a tool you can decide to allow, or not. In fact, few primary school aged children in Australia have access. Despite what a child may say about ‘all their friends’.

“Of Australian children aged 9-10 years, 29% have a profile on a social networking site” (Raising Children 2015)

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s free – the applications and the chat (In comparison to phone SMS expenses or telephone calls) • Social networking can be used as a learning tool to teach children how to interact appropriately online in a social setting • Children enjoy it (although of course this is not guaranteed and it can lead to problems) • Can create a sense of belonging and connection – family, friends, people with similar interests (eg online games) • Can be used to express creative or individual thoughts/products (such as images they create to express their feelings or thoughts or videos that amuse them) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds another layer (time) for parents/carers to consider and monitor/control • Connects your child with other people who may cause issues for your child Cyberbullying brings school issues into your home. The bullying no longer stops at the school gate. Indeed some children are nastier online than in the school yard. Even if your child isn’t the one being bullied, they may be part of the chat and see it happening. • Virtually all sites have no monitoring, moderation or, more importantly, identity verification (You can’t be confident the person is who they represent themselves to be) • Increases the likelihood that your child will be exposed to inappropriate or unsuitable topics, images or discussions • Requires your child to place some personal

	<p>information into the public arena</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most people in social networking sites are adults • Your child may accidentally provide personal information that makes their identity, location, personal details available in a public place. • Some social networking sites have location tracking or GPS coordinates attached (eg linked to images or Facebook checkins). Make sure these functions can be switched off.
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Checklist – should your child have access to social networking sites?

Here are some questions to consider;

- Why does your child need the network?
- Why does your child want to use social networking?
- Is this a good match for your child? Every child is different. Is your child well equipped or suited to social networking tools?
- Is your child able to deal with nasty comments, being excluded or watching others get hurt?
- Are you prepared to be on the same tools and 'friend' your child as a safety net?
- Do you have a family social networking site your child can join?
- Do you and your child know how to report offensive, abusive, or pornographic content?

Strategies that work

- Don't offer social networking tools to your child. Wait for them to ask.
- If they do ask, put them off. Make them wait awhile. Consider the options only if they persist. Often they are not that passionate about the idea and can be distracted.
- Use the usual technology rules.
- Be sure they really want to be involved in social networking sites because they can be difficult to get out of.
- Only if they are persistent and you have CHOSEN to allow them access – give access to one site only, make sure you know how that site works, and join the site too.

*At this age, your child will miss out on NOTHING if they don't use social networks.
It is not essential to their development.*
