



People Online

Children can be tempted to accept friend requests online for fear of offending others or out of a desire to appear popular. Unfortunately, this can be exploited by those who wish them harm. Due to the physical distance, children may be less cautious in their interaction with new people online than they would be in person. It can be difficult for them to understand that something online could affect them in real life. Children need to understand that new people online may not be who they say they are, they may lie, and they may try to trick.

Collecting 'Friends':

With the rise of social media, the numbers of friends, followers and connections is associated with popularity. Your child may be driven by social pressure to accept friend requests from new people online.

What do I need to know?

Your child has been learning about the difference between online friends and real-life friends. They have learned about the concept of identity and how it is possible to create fake profiles which alter or disguise our identity online. For example, it may be done by digitally altering an image or using someone else's image; it could be with makeup; it could be by using different styles of language or expressing different views or interests. You can reinforce this concept with your child by demonstrating how easy it is to create a fake profile and pretend to be someone else online. Your child has learned about privacy settings on phones, games and social media and how they can be used to restrict contact with unknown people. You may like to check with your child that these settings are applied.

What to talk about with your child:

- ★ **Talk** about what makes a good friend and how we decide who to trust.
- ★ **Discuss** the difference between online friends and real-life friends and the advantages and disadvantages of both.
- ★ **Explore** together how easy it is to pretend to be someone else online.
- ★ **Encourage** the idea that quality is more important than quantity – a person's value and popularity is not related to the number of 'likes' or online 'friends' they possess.
- ★ Look through your child's list of online friends together and adjust their privacy settings accordingly. Ask them to consult you before accepting new online contacts.
- ★ **Ask** what they would do if they were worried or upset by someone online.
- ★ **Reassure** them you will be there to help, even if they have made unsafe decisions.