

SOCIAL Networks

Session 3

Learning context



There are lots of different social networks online, all of which can be potentially harmful. Even applications that include opportunities for interaction can pose a threat. This is not to say that social networking is wrong, but it's very clear to see from the mistakes that have been made that it's easy for problems to occur. When mistakes are made, they can lead to severe consequences. Many people have lost jobs or put themselves in vulnerable positions through unknowingly posting, without considering the full range of possibilities. However this media may evolve, and whatever the latest app, the principles remain the same. It is also very fair to say that certain forums will attract people who would want to make contact for the wrong reason with others. This is because the internet makes this process somewhat easy. If we want to safely be a part of a social network, then we must be one step ahead once again. It isn't good to take chances when it comes to online safety.

Key points and content



Social networks have become a big part of everyday life for many adults. These applications and sites range from a 13 to an 18 year certification (this is often a recommendation and not a law). Why do you think this is? The reason for this is that there are hidden dangers that we have to investigate and understand, and that our behaviours once again require very good judgement. But are we old enough to really understand what can happen? The truth is no. Many adults fall foul to making mistakes on social network sites because they don't really understand how the implications, and so we must begin to identify risks and to avoid dangerous situations. This way we can learn to use social networks properly, productively and safely. Social networks will often provide more intimate conversations, unlike communities, where two people communicate.

This is important because



We're beginning to see a real pattern building in these lessons. Despite the fact we may be looking at different methods of communication, it appears that we need to establish an awareness of what the risks could be. To do this we must investigate and make educated decisions. This is really the way that life works -except so much online activity is discrete, global and continuous and as human beings, our vulnerability means that we can be misled if we are not careful.

Investigate



What do you think the definition of a 'Social network' is?

Let the children work in pairs to come up with an answer. Then reveal the definition below. Use the definition to investigate and to unpick the meaning. Certain words should immediately indicate the risks.

For example, the word 'personal'. What does this word mean? Also note the word 'relationship'. What does this mean? Can an online interaction really be a 'personal relationship?' How do you think other people will perceive this opportunity?

Let's remember, the majority of the people we have ever met have been good and honest, however, there will always be a small minority that are not.

Social Network (noun)

A network of social interactions and personal relationships.

A dedicated website or other application which enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc.

Some sources say that around 59 per cent of children have already used a social network by the time they are 10, and 43 per cent have messaged strangers online by the age of 12.

The risks



A social media site attracted the attention of an 11 year old American boy. His mother had no understanding of what he had been doing online. There were no indications to her of depression or destructive behaviour at the time. This boy was a kind and caring boy who loved his family deeply. However, because his family had not established a conversation about online activity and because he had been left unmonitored to work it out for himself, he ended up involved in seemingly the most unlikely activities.

The young boy had become involved in life threatening social media challenges, soon after, the boy had accidentally killed himself.

When his mother spoke following his death, she talked openly about the fact that there was no supervision of children on the web. She said that she would have monitored heavily, his use of social media.

It's clear from this story that the boy did not understand the consequences relating to the social network. He was unable to take a realistic perspective on the content of the site and therefore he could not risk assess what he was doing. Along with this, it was very normal for him to be online and unsupervised. It was even normal not to talk or share his experiences with the people who were closest to him, which did not allow for anyone to help him make safe decisions.

As we have discussed before, the content of the internet is not monitored or regulated, therefore we have to take responsibility for this.

More than half of children in the UK (57%) have done something "risky" or anti-social online, a poll of 2,000 11- to 16-year-olds suggests.

Almost two-thirds (62%) told a Learning poll they felt under pressure from others to act in this way. Activities included sharing unsuitable videos or pictures of themselves or saying nasty things about others and looking at unsuitable websites.

Some 20% said they had put pressure on someone else to act negatively online.

Activity



How many social networks can we think of and how do they function?

When looking at closely at any application or app that is, or incorporates social networking, we must think hard about how the software works, what it does and the risks involved. Some social networks may appear very safe and simple, however, other uses can find ways of interacting through a seemingly common interest. For example, if we take 'Spotify' it may look like a streaming music program. Yet this software has a thriving social network attached within itself and through twitter and Facebook.

If you really wanted to interact with a stranger who liked a certain band, you could easily establish this communication.

- Name:
- What does it do?
- How do you communicate:
- What are the dangers that I would need to know before using this?
- Positives:
- Risks or negatives:

Can we find the similarities across all forums? There are some very clear rules that apply to any app or social media. This means that however this medium may change or evolve, or whatever the latest app, the principles and warnings are the same.

- Do we know who could be on this site?
- Do we know personally who we are communicating with?

What are the (hidden?) risks when engaging? *Fans of the most popular children's music show on television. Chatting about the latest trends and sharing together. 2,835 members*

All of the above have some degree of risk although some should not be considered at all. Think carefully about who could be in the group and why they would join. Quite often the risks are hidden, and require real investigation. What if someone in the year 6 class group decides to make mean remarks?

Remember, if you choose to join any community, there will always be some risk. Any community could potentially have people that you do not know, and for this simple reason we can't truly be sure about who they are or what they do. Your profile can also be viewed by others. What does a photo or your comments say about you and does it make you safe? Also think carefully about your username. Is it smart to use your full, real name?

Summary

 Once again we begin by trying to risk assess the danger, which is often hidden, of each social network. Don't wait until a situation occurs, make a decision before, is this a good idea, or not? The principle is the same for all social media and we should always ask the key questions. Do my parents know the details? What could happen? Who could I be talking to? Do I know them? What are we discussing? Am I comfortable with the conversation? Am I in control?

Never do anything online that you are not comfortable with and always share any worries or concerns.

The benefits

 Social networks can help people who may feel lonely, depressed or isolated - if used carefully. It is widely reported that social media has mental health benefits in terms of feelings of inclusion and social connectedness. For people who experience barriers to social interaction, communicating with people over social media can increase feelings of connectedness with positive outcomes for self-esteem, attitude and decreased feelings of loneliness. As well as improving general social wellbeing, connecting via social networking tools can contribute to better outcomes for the treatment of various mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, suicidality and other disorders. More recently, social media is offering mental health practitioners new pathways to providing support and treatment to people experiencing mental illness. From options as basic as support and monitoring through social media, to setting up support groups or hashtags all the way to offering innovative treatments through social platforms and apps.

The social web has proven a game changer for mental health, helping to lead the way in harnessing this technology for the benefit of a diverse range of people.