

Creating a Safer Social Platform for our Young People



#SID2018
Safer Internet Day

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Introduction – Howard Burge, National Director, New Directions Education

I have had the privilege of working in close partnership with schools and colleges across England and Wales for over 15 years. In that time the technological advances that have revolutionised how we communicate have been, quite simply incredible.

On the most part, the freedom offered of information exchange digitally has been a positive experience. However, we also must acknowledge that with the evolution of such platforms comes great responsibility to protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

Personally, as a father of three young girls, I am consistently making strides to understand all things online. From the early days of Facebook to the undeniable growth of Instagram and beyond. It is fast-paced and requires energy and time, but that is my responsibility as a father guiding his children.

Our team got together recently and decided to create an overview for schools about their own relationships with social media. This is by no means a steadfast, prescriptive guide – but rather one developed out of conversation and experience as parents, care givers and education partners.

We hope this goes some way to help with your own approach as a professional to handling all the nuances – positive and negative of social media.

Howard.

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The Facts - who is using social media and for what?

Social media continues to be the fastest growing communication tool of our times. Our young people have more exposure and access to information than at any other point in history. But who is using it and what are they using it for?

Facebook remains the most popular social media tool with **22%** (approximately) of the world population using the platform. **72%** of male internet users and **83%** of female internet users are active on Facebook.



According to one survey – if they were trapped on a desert island 44% of teenagers would choose Snapchat as their social of choice followed by 24% choosing Instagram and 14% opting for Facebook.

9,000 snaps are shared on Snapchat every second of every day.

Snapchat is such a quick and easy way for young people to communicate and share their updates. One quick snap and their image can be available to so many in seconds. It pays for parents to be diligent with Snapchat. Visual communication and the desire to demonstrate exciting happenings and moments can be overwhelming. From new trainers to parties with friends. I would encourage persistence in responsible behaviour with this channel. Once something appears online, it never really disappears.

Kelly Storer, National Manager, New Directions Education

91% of social users are accessing these platforms from mobile devices

81% of Millenials are checking Twitter once a day

I can't recall a time recently that I haven't seen a situation where young people are involved, that a mobile phone or tablet isn't present. At the touch of a button they have access and exposure to the world. The great debate rumbles on in households across the nation about the appropriate time to give a child a mobile device. It is inevitable and often unavoidable. Moreover, we should be considering how we educate our young people to 'handle with care'.

Gary Williams, Director of Business Development, New Directions Education

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The impact - for better or for worse...

Technology has been developed for optimisation in all aspects of our lives. Social media is one of the more recent developments that exposes opportunity and risk to young people. In the best instances these channels of communication can help them to socialise and interact with their peers, identify new opportunities to grow and develop and get involved with the subjects that matter most to them.

On the flip side, our young people are exposed to cyberbullying and other online aggression. They may become vulnerable to online predators, and the content they share could put them at grave risk. Further research also identifies that addiction and mental ill health can also become an issue for those overusing the platforms.

Social media can become a positive for a young person and may help them to grow into well-rounded, well-informed adults...or it could impact them in a negative fashion and create a negative sense of wellbeing and safety.

Our job as parents, carers and educators is to engender a responsible attitude to social media for our young people. It is one of the single most important factors in creating a positive sense of wellbeing for our children.

**Ruth Dalton, Group Head of Communications and Marketing,
New Directions**

For worse...

A total of 57% of young people in a recent survey said they had received abusive comments online, 56% admitted to being on the edge of addiction and 52% said social media made them feel less confident about how they look or how interesting their life is. While more than 60% believed friends showed a "fake version" of themselves on social media, 85% of pupils questioned denied they were guilty of that themselves.

For Better...

Charlotte Robertson, the co-founder of Digital Awareness UK, said: "We speak to thousands of students on a daily basis about safe internet use and while it's a matter of concern to see the emotional impact social media is having on young people's health and wellbeing, it's encouraging to see that they are also employing smart strategies such as digital detoxing to take control of their social media use.

"Social media allows us to be creative, connected, to campaign for things we believe in, to become entrepreneurs.

"It's a platform that should be celebrated and if online abuse or fake news stops it from flourishing we all lose.

"This research is a real wake-up call for all of us working in social media to ensure that we listen to the needs of young people, who will ultimately dictate the direction in which the industry moves."



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Top Tips for a Safer School



Help pupils recognise how the internet makes them feel – create opportunity for conversation

Encourage students to be aware of what they post – to take ownership

Consider how long young people spend online, create dialogue and realisation with your pupils about what they may consider is appropriate

Signpost students to feel comfortable and happy online

Help students to understand that some 'jokes' may not be appropriate, help them to be considerate

Advise students – even if they disagree with someone, be respectful

Remind pupils that they must ask for consent before they share anything

Social media can be a platform for positivity and celebration. Use your school social platforms to lead by example – you have great kids!

Does your school have social media ambassadors – celebrate them and empower them to create positivity surrounding engagement with social

Protect your pupils – remind them about the pitfalls of oversharing. Once it is online, it is out there for all to see

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We hope this brief guide gave you some food for thought. Of course, we are not the experts in this field – but we LOVE some of the resources below and would encourage you to take a look...

<http://www.childnet.com/resources/school-pack-for-online-safety-awareness>

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/oct/05/growing-social-media-backlash-among-young-people-survey-shows>

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/>

