The 5 risks you need to be aware of when your child starts using social media

Knowing when is the right time to allow your child to set up a social media account is tough. They may have been using it for quite some time already (remember YouTube is social media)

Sure, there are age guidelines for most platforms and features that allow you to see their activity but even with that in place, is it really safe?

It's not recommended for parents to refuse a child access to social media or to shut down their accounts; kids are smart, if they want to use it, they will find a way and having them sneak around isn't a good way to build trust.

Being informed is the best way to navigate the entry into social media with your kids. And the more risks you are aware of, the better you will understand what to do if anything happens to go awry.

These are the top 5 risks you need to be aware of when your child joins social media:

1. **Cyberbullying**
   Defined as bullying via digital technology, cyberbullying is the #1 concern for parents when it comes to social media and their kids.

   Yes, it happens, and yes, it can be really brutal. But the more you talk to your kids and listen to what they tell you, the more you will know about what's going on for them online and be there to help shut down anything negative.

   Cyberbullying can and should be reported and in these 3 simple steps, you can help your child stamp out the bullying behaviour: screenshot, block and report. Also, make sure you let us know so we can make sure the bad behaviour is not happening in the playground.

2. **Invasion of Privacy**
   When posting videos or images on social media, it's really important that privacy settings are applied and only friends or accepted followers can see the content.

When privacy features are not set up correctly, strangers may have the ability to see what your child is posting. They can record their images and videos on their own device, distribute them and you will never know.

3. **Identity Theft**
   Catfishing, impersonation, is something we're all familiar with and a very common issue on social media and Dating Apps. It's a risk we take every time we post a photo of ourselves or others online or share information like our phone number or email address.

   Again, ensure your privacy settings are set up correctly and only friends or accepted followers can see and access your child's content.

   If your child suspects that their identity has been stolen and is being used by someone else, it needs to be reported to your local police station immediately.

4. **Your child seeing offensive or inappropriate content**
   Unfortunately, many parents do not know how to fully implement parental controls and some platforms aren't very good anyway! There will always be the ability for strangers to directly message your child, somehow, someway, this is a very real and very common risk.

   Set up parental controls wherever possible and talk to your kids about what is appropriate content vs not appropriate. Tell them to let you know if they see something that upsets, disturbs or confuses them.

5. **The presence of people who may be there to groom other users**
   Unfortunately, there are people out there who use social media for unsavoury reasons, many of these are sexual predators who aim to coerce young people into sending them explicit images, videos or personal details in exchange for monetary reward or by threatening harm if they don't.

   It's important that your kids know not to respond to any activity of this nature and to tell you right away if they are contacted by someone they don't know.

As your School, we are always here to support you and we encourage you to come to us with questions or concerns you may have on this topic.