

## What are the risks?

**Inappropriate content.** Anybody can post and share videos, pictures, or ideas on social media. This means children may see things they don't want to, including sexual or violent content.

**Inappropriate behaviour.** Children, like adults, can feel more confident when they are online as they feel protected by the screen. This can result in them, or their friends, saying or doing something they'd be less likely to do offline, including oversharing.

**Over-sharing.** Social media lets people share information about who they are and what they like doing – with lots of different people. It's easy to share things online that we wouldn't face-to-face. Once something has been shared, you can never be sure who has seen it, saved it, or shared it.

**Making friends with people they don't know.** Chatting and meeting new people is the main reason that most social media services exist. This opens up the opportunities for adults to contact children online. It's also easy to set up fake profiles, and some adults may even pretend to be children when they're much older. This makes it hard to tell the difference between someone who's genuine and fake. Some people online can also put pressure on children or manipulate them into doing something they don't want to do.

## Is your child ready?

The age of your child as well as their developmental stage and maturity can affect their ability to have a safe and positive experience of social media.

## Minimum age requirements

Most of the popular social media services require users to be at least 13 years of age before they can register, although some sites are created especially for children under 13 (see Internet Matters' Social networks made for children).

The age requirements are there because of data protection laws. Online services are not allowed to collect or store children's personal information if they are under the age of 13. Data protection laws also say that only children aged 13 and over can sign up to online services without parental permission.

Following the age restrictions sets a good example for your child. Although the age requirement doesn't always mean the site is inappropriate for children to use, it's a good indication, especially for younger children.



**Video game age restrictions can help show what content is suitable for your child's age. You can also use them to set limits on what is available for your child to play.**

There are five age categories and eight content categories, set by the PEGI.

The age categories are '3', '7', '12', '16' and '18'. The number means that the content is suitable for that age and above.

The age restriction doesn't tell you anything about how difficult the game is. A game rated 3 might be too difficult for a three-year-old, but the content would be appropriate.

**The symbols on a game represent different types of content. This includes:**

**Violence.** Games with a rating of 3 won't include violence. For a 7 rating, the violence will be non-realistic or non-detailed. Games rated 12 can include violence in a fantasy or non-realistic violence. The 16 and 18 ratings can have more realistic-looking violence.

**Bad language.** There is no swearing in games rated 3 or 7. Games rated 12 can include mild swearing. Games rated 16 and 18 may include expletives.

**Fear.** The symbol can be on games rated 7 where pictures or sounds may upset young children. It might be on games rated 12 if there are horror effects or sounds but no violence.

**Gambling.** This highlights games that may teach or encourage gambling. Gambling is only allowed in games with 12, 16 or 18 ratings.

**Sex.** On games rated 12 or above. The higher the age restriction, the more explicit the game can be.

**Drugs.** Where a game refers to or depicts the use of illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco. This is only allowed in games with 16 and 18 ratings.

**Discrimination.** This symbol can only apply to games rated 18. It means the game contains stereotypes of religious, ethnic, or national groups. These could encourage hatred.