

## Remember...

- Social networking is a relatively new area, but it is growing really quickly.
- **The best thing you can do is talk about e-safety at home and talk about it often.**
- There are leaflets available to help you have the discussion at home and to arrive at a shared set of values for using technology.
- **You are not alone. If your child is being bullied, or there is another problem, your child's teacher may be able to offer some really good ideas. They will certainly want to know about it.**
- Your child's school can request an e-safety parents evening. This is a chance to talk about e-safety in general and any particular concerns.
- **Children will explore the new technology far more readily and with greater energy than we do.**
- Make the journey with them, Ask them to show you their online world often. Be a part of it with them.
- **If things go wrong there is always help available. It is non-judgmental, and based on successful outcomes for all.**
- There are many self help leaflets like this available.
- **Together, we can make E-Sussex, E-Safe.**

## Social Networking

Social networking is the fastest growing area of online activity for children. It has even surpassed online gaming as the number one activity that children like to engage in. Their social networking presence means a great deal to them.

There can also be immense peer pressure to have the "right" social networking site. In the majority of cases, this means Facebook.

It is not only children who are subject to pressure sometimes, as all parents know! It really boils down to how much time you can put into monitoring your child's online presence. Using the simpler, child-friendly systems helps, but even so you should limit the amount of time they can spend on this type of activity and support them in learning safe habits.

**Together, we can make**

**E-Sussex, E-Safe**

# Social Networking sites

(A guide for Parents and Carers)

### **My child really wants a Facebook Account. Should I let him/her have one?**

There is a user age limit on Facebook. No-one should have an account who is under 13 years of age, and Facebook will delete any accounts they find that are obviously being used by people under this age. **However**, as you are probably aware, there are a number of young people under this age who use the product.

### **Why does Facebook require user to be at least 13?**

Facebook is not moderated, although it is possible to report abuse to them. Some of the groups and applications can make changes to your privacy settings. There are other social networking sites that are more child friendly.

### **Does East Sussex endorse children under the age of 13 using it?**

No. We agree whole-heartedly with the product designers and support their user policy. However, we are also realists, and know that the product is in use by under-age people.

### **My child knows more about it than I do!**

This is not uncommon, so don't worry. To some extent, we are certainly learning to play in *their* playground now! You could get your child to show you around their social networking site, no matter what product they use. (But note where they **don't** click, as well as where they do.)

### **How can I help my child stay safe?**

The best thing is to be a "friend" on their site, then you can check in as often as you like. The next thing is to look at the content they have up there. Does it give too much away? Here are some things to watch out for:-

- Photographs that give away where you live or where your child goes to school.
- Any information that would allow someone to know where your child will be at a given date or time.
- Any people in the friends section that you do not feel comfortable with or you do not know who they are.
- Any content on the "Wall" or other public place that contains language or comments you do not feel are appropriate.
- Any areas of the site you are unable to access.
- Any "code" words that you do not understand.

Some social networking sites have built-in chat rooms. You should certainly be a part of those too. In some cases the chats can be recorded, if not in verbal terms, then in text terms. You should enable this so you can feel comfortable that there are no discussions going on that you are not comfortable with

### **It sounds like I am spying on my child. Am I?**

Yes, in a way, but you are doing no more than responsible parenting. You would not allow them to go to a new adventure park without looking at it yourself first. Well, this adventure park covers the planet! You are only being careful, and as your confidence grows you will find yourself visiting less often.

### **How do I know when my confidence should be growing? This is all so new to me.**

If your child tells you readily if they have had a problem, or if you become totally satisfied that their conduct online represents the standards of behaviour that you instil in them, you can be confident they are becoming safe users. However, there are new applications and behaviours being created all the time. Regular observance is no bad thing.

### **What if they don't tell me? How will I know there is a problem?**

Usually when children are frightened or upset there is a change in behaviour. They may become angry, or withdrawn, or may exhibit other behaviour such as bedwetting or aggression. Unusual behaviour, particularly if it is sustained may indicate a problem. The key message is don't overreact. The main reason children do not tell adults is a fear of overreaction. **There is a self-help leaflet on dealing with this available.**