

## Social Networking Guidelines for Parents



Sutton & Cheam Swimming Club recognises the increasing use of social networking sites by young people, and the safeguarding risks associated with them. The following guidelines have therefore been produced and adopted by the club to alert parents to these dangers; and to recommend best practice in avoiding them. They have been compiled using content from the following sources:

<http://www.childline.org.uk/Explore/Bullying/Pages/online-bullying.aspx>

[http://www.kidshield.co.uk/dangers\\_social\\_network\\_sites.htm](http://www.kidshield.co.uk/dangers_social_network_sites.htm)

<http://www.netmums.com/teenagers/safe-surfing-on-the-internet/your-children-and-the-internet-social-networking-s>

### What are social networking sites?

Social networking websites build on the concept of traditional social networks where people meet new friends through mutual acquaintances. These sites provide opportunities for young people to 'meet' (electronically) and to share experiences.

Although features of social networking sites differ, they all enable users to provide information about themselves (an online 'profile') which can be made public or restricted to an approved circle of 'friends'. They also offer some means of communication (chat rooms, email, instant messenger, Blackberry Messenger) that enable account holders to connect with others.

Some sites also permit users to write 'blogs' or to post pictures and video clips. With the latest mobile phones and cameras, uploading images and content to the social networking sites has become almost instantaneous.

Examples of well known social networking sites include Facebook, My Space, Bebo, Twitter and YouTube, but there are many more.

Founded in 2004, Facebook is by far the biggest and has grown to well over 1 billion users worldwide including over half the population of the UK.

Although many of these sites have age restrictions, children may misrepresent their ages so that they can join. In order to be eligible to sign up for Facebook for example, account holders must be at least 13 years old. However, recent surveys indicate that nearly 40% of children with Facebook accounts are under age, with some account holders as young as 6.

Unfortunately, whilst these technologies provide exciting opportunities to young people, children and teenagers are particularly susceptible to the dangers that social networking sites present. With the freedom that comes with internet-based social networking sites, comes an associated risk stemming from improper use.

### What are the dangers?

Social networking sites are all about connecting people and all ask users to provide personal information about them (a 'profile'). Unfortunately, when providing such information, young children and teenagers may not apply the same amount of caution as they would when meeting someone in person because:



- the internet is anonymous
- the lack of physical interaction provides a false sense of security
- children and teenagers tailor the information for their friends to read, forgetting that others may see it
- they want to offer insights to impress potential friends

While most people using social networking sites do not pose a threat, it is well known that where children go online, so do those who seek to abuse them. Predators are drawn to them because of the accessibility and amount of personal information available to them.

### **Particular threats**

#### **Online grooming**

Perhaps the biggest threat to a young person's safety on social networking sites is that of online grooming. By pretending they are the same age as the child they are communicating with, paedophiles will find out information about that child - where they hang out, which school they go to etc.; with the intention of gaining their trust online; forming a relationship; convincing young people to meet them directly, and ultimately manipulating them into doing what they want.

#### **Age-inappropriate content**

The Internet provides access to all kinds of content at the click of a mouse - but not all of that content is suitable for children and young people to see. Even if parental controls are set up on your computer, your child may still be able to access inappropriate material if someone in their social networking circle makes it available to them.

#### **Identity theft**

Now that more and more children and young people are using the Internet regularly they are becoming ever more vulnerable to identity theft. Identity theft isn't just limited to adults and posting personal details on a child's 'profile' leaves them open to this serious crime. It is important that your child never gives out personal details such as names, addresses, phone numbers or email addresses in any online context.

#### **Cyber-bullying**

Unfortunately, social networking sites, mobile phones, email or any other kind of digital technology can also be used by some to carry out 'cyber-bullying', for example by posting malicious comments about an individual online, or sending them abusive, humiliating messages or other content. Online bullying can also be conducted anonymously, as technology-savvy users are able to set up fake accounts, or even hack into another user's account to send abusive messages in their name. Cyber-bullying can be particularly hurtful because it can happen 24 hours a day, seven days a week and victims can feel there is no escape.

### **Protecting your children who use Social Networking sites**

Many of our young members will be using social networking sites. By teaching them about internet safety, being aware of their online habits, and guiding them to appropriate sites, parents can make sure that the children become safe and responsible users.

## Social Networking Guidelines for Parents



Prevention is better than cure and to help protect your children, they need to understand how to prevent putting themselves into vulnerable situations:

- **Limit the amount of personal information** - Educate your children to limit the amount of information they post that could expose them to risk. Avoid information that would allow predators to ascertain whereabouts (e.g., real name, age, address, phone number, which school they go to, information about routines, clubs or anything else that could help strangers find out more about them).
- **Remember that the internet is available to everyone** - Educate your children to only post information they are comfortable with anyone seeing.
- **Be wary of strangers** - The internet makes it easy for people to misrepresent their identities and motives. Educate your children to consider limiting the people who are allowed to contact them on these sites.
- **Be aware** - Educate your children to be aware of potential online predators. People may post false or misleading information about themselves, including their own identities.
- **Check privacy policies** - As a parent or guardian, be aware that some sites may share information such as email addresses or user preferences with other companies, your children should be alerted to this potential hazard. Try to locate the policy for handling referrals to make sure that your children do not unintentionally sign up their friends for spam emails. Some sites will continue to send email messages to anyone you refer until they join.
- **Be on the lookout for cyber-bullying** - If you suspect your child is a victim of cyber-bullying:
  - It can be dealt with. There is always a trail and keeping records can be very useful when it comes to reporting. Therefore If you are aware your child is being bullied in this way, remember to keep copies of any abusive texts, emails, comments or messages, recording the date and time they were sent/received.
  - Educate your child **NOT** to reply to any messages they receive. It can encourage the bullies to continue their bullying
  - If your child is being bullied on a social network, you could think about deleting their profile or disabling it temporarily.
  - Email addresses or chat users can be blocked if bullying is being conducted by email or by instant messenger.
  - On some mobiles, it is possible to place a bar on a particular number. Check your phone user guide to see if yours can.
  - Report it!



### Further Information

Further information is available on the club website:

- [http://www.suttonandcheam.co.uk/policies/Parents\\_Guide\\_to\\_Twitter\\_1.pdf](http://www.suttonandcheam.co.uk/policies/Parents_Guide_to_Twitter_1.pdf)
- [http://www.suttonandcheam.co.uk/policies/Good\\_Practice\\_Guidelines\\_on\\_the\\_use\\_of\\_mobile\\_phone\\_and\\_emails\\_by\\_ASA\\_Clubs\\_and\\_Club\\_Members.pdf](http://www.suttonandcheam.co.uk/policies/Good_Practice_Guidelines_on_the_use_of_mobile_phone_and_emails_by_ASA_Clubs_and_Club_Members.pdf)
- [http://www.suttonandcheam.co.uk/policies/Good\\_Practice\\_Guidelines\\_on\\_the\\_use\\_of\\_mobile\\_phone\\_and\\_emails\\_by\\_ASA\\_Clubs\\_and\\_Club\\_Members.pdf](http://www.suttonandcheam.co.uk/policies/Good_Practice_Guidelines_on_the_use_of_mobile_phone_and_emails_by_ASA_Clubs_and_Club_Members.pdf)
- <http://www.suttonandcheam.co.uk/policies/Child%20Protection%20Contact%20Information.pdf>

### If you have concerns

If your concerns are connected in any way with Sutton & Cheam Swimming Club, then in the first instance, please contact:

- Clare Bayles, Welfare Officer, Sutton & Cheam Swimming Club via [welfare@suttonandcheam.co.uk](mailto:welfare@suttonandcheam.co.uk)

Alternatively, depending on your concerns, the ASA has drawn up a list of agencies that you (or your child) can contact, anonymously if you wish, as follows:

- The ASA through SwimLine Child Protection Helpline Tel: **0808 100 4001**
- The Child Exploitation online Protection Unit (CEOP) at [www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk) or by pressing the CEOP button on Facebook or on the “Child Power” section of the ASA website.
- If your child is under 18 they can use the “Your Chance to Talk” form on the “Child Power” section of the ASA website - <http://www.swimming.org/asa/clubs-and-members/your-chance-to-talk/>
- [www.childnet.org.uk](http://www.childnet.org.uk) which is an NSPCC support service specifically for young people.
- Childline Tel: **0800 1111** .
- [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) is another NSPCC support service. Using this website, children can talk confidentially to NSPCC advisors online about any issues or problems they may be experiencing
- Sutton Police Child Abuse Investigation Team/Unit Tel: **020 0300 123 1212** Ask for Child Abuse Investigation Team Sutton Police Station
- Sutton Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Children’s Services Tel: **020 8649 0418** or Out Of Hours Contact Number Tel: **020 8770 5000**
- The NSPCC helpline Tel: **0800 800 5000** or [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk) for adults concerned about the welfare or safety of a child.
- The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) [www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk) The IWF was established by the internet industry to provide a UK internet hotline which can be anonymous for the public and IT professionals to report criminal online content in a secure and confidential way.