

Internet Safety & Autism

This information sheet is designed to help you to stay safe online. It gives some detailed explanations of **why it is important** and **what can go wrong**, as well as **some top tips**.

Being able to use new technology is an important part of life for most people. You can use the internet for activities like banking, buying tickets to events, ordering food, buying items, as well as socialising with your friends and family.

Social networking and messaging allow you to talk to people who are not in the same place as you and they can also be useful if you prefer not to communicate with somebody verbally and/or face-to-face. Many autistic people find it preferable to communicate through typing rather than speech, so **social networking can also be a more comfortable way for you to socialise with others**.

By bringing together large numbers of people, social networks are also great places to discuss **shared interests**. Whichever site you use, it is likely that you will be able to find a group or forum especially for your interests. It is therefore important that you know how to be safe online and when using an electronic device.

How to stay safe online

Sharing things online:

Things that you upload or post to the Internet may stay there forever. Once you've sent or uploaded a message or a photograph it is very difficult to get it back or control where it goes. Even pictures that you send to your friends may end up online, where other people will be able to see them. People put things online for lots of different reasons:

- They think it would be funny for other people to see it
- They might want to embarrass you (because they are not very good friends)
- They might not know that you didn't want them to share your photo. If you are sending something to a friend, make sure that they know that the photo is just for them, and that you do not want it to be put on the Internet or shown to other people.

Sharing pictures:

Most people like to use social networking sites to share their favourite pictures with their friends. These are often pictures of themselves, their friends and family, or places that they have been. It is okay to share these kinds of pictures.

Some people, like boyfriends and girlfriends, also choose to send other types of pictures. These are often sexual pictures of their body. This is legal if you are over 18. However, there are still **risks in sending sexual pictures and videos**.

You should not send sexual pictures or videos if:

- You are under 18 – this is illegal. If anyone asks you to do this, or shows you sexual pictures or videos, you must tell an adult immediately, as this is a crime. You should never ask for these types of pictures of someone who is under 18 years old, and you should not send any of these types of pictures to someone who is under 18. If you do, you will be committing a crime.
- You have just started a new relationship with someone - they may be taking advantage of you to get these photos, or they may want to embarrass you by showing them to other people.

- The other person doesn't know you are going to send them a sexual picture or video – you may scare them or make them feel uncomfortable.
- You would not show them your body in person.
- They are one of your friends or a family member – even though you know these people well and trust them, some things are still inappropriate to be shared with them.

Keeping passwords and personal information safe:

There are many sites which require you to use a password. This includes online banking and social media sites. It is important that you **keep your access information private**, even from close friends and family. If someone has the details to access your online banking, they can steal your money. If this happens, you should contact your bank immediately.

If someone has the password for your social networking sites, they will be able to see everything on your site, including your private pictures and messages. They will also be able to post from your site, pretending to be you. Other people will not know that it is not you is posting. If you use your phone to access social networking sites, you should **set a password on your phone** so that people can't access your social networking sites by using your phone.

Be careful with your personal information online. Do not share your address or school or workplace, because someone could find out where you live or work and turn up without being invited. This could be very dangerous, so if this happens, speak to an adult you trust as soon as possible.

Meeting someone in person:

Sometimes, someone you have met online may ask you to meet up with them. This can be very dangerous, and you should **never meet anyone you have met online without taking an adult you trust.**

Online bullying and abuse:

Some people may pretend to be your friend online so that you will commit crimes for them. You may not know that what they are asking you to do is a crime, or you may want to help the person that you think is your friend. However, if it is illegal, you could get into a lot of trouble. People who do this usually get others to do the illegal thing for them so that they do not get the blame.

Some people might use the internet to bully you because it is harder for them to get caught and for you to get help. If this happens you must tell someone you trust straight away. Some people may ask you to send pictures or videos of your body, including your private parts, for them to look at. They may also ask you to remove clothing during a video call or touch yourself while they watch. Or they may send your pictures of their private parts or show them to you in a video call, or they may touch themselves during a video call. This can be **sexual abuse**, and you should **tell someone you trust about this straight away.**

What is “trolling”?

Trolling is when **people make comments in forums and on social media sites that are intentionally nasty and hurtful.** Often, they target people that they do not know. It is important to report anyone that you notice doing this, especially if they are targeting you personally. It is also important that you **avoid making rude comments** about strangers, as people may report you and you will no longer be able to use certain sites.

Are my posts private?

Different social networking sites have different rules about whether your posts are private or not. It is important to remember that even if you think you are talking directly to one person, it may actually be seen by a lot of people.

Snapchat

This app allows you to take pictures using your mobile phone and then send them to somebody else. The picture only appears on the other person's phone for a few seconds before it disappears.

This may seem like a very private way of sending pictures; especially ones that you don't want other people to see. However, people have found ways to 'grab' these pictures or take screenshots of them. This means that the pictures can still be seen after they are meant to have disappeared. The pictures can then be shared with other people who you may not know or who you do not want to see the pictures.

- Don't send pictures using Snapchat that you are not comfortable with other people seeing.
- Only send pictures to trusted friends. Never send a picture to somebody that you do not know.
- Speak to a trusted adult immediately if someone asks you to send them inappropriate pictures, or if someone sends you inappropriate pictures.

Twitter (Now called X)

When you sign up to Twitter/X, you can decide whether to make your Tweets public or private. Public is the default setting. It means that your Tweets are visible to anyone, whether they have a Twitter account or not. Protected Tweets are only visible to your approved Twitter followers. People will have to request to follow you. This allows you to control who can view your Tweets.

To protect your Tweets, you will have to go to your **'Security and privacy settings'**, scroll down to the **'Tweet privacy'** section and tick the box next to **'Protect my Tweets'**. You then need to click **'Save'** at the bottom of the page. If you change your mind about who you want to be able to see your Tweets, you can change these settings at any time.

You can also block people on Twitter. To do this, simply go to the person's profile page, click the gear icon, and select **'Block'**. This means that the person will no longer be able to follow you, so you can control who can see your information.

Other people can see what you post on Twitter and there have been cases recently where people have been arrested for tweets that they posted. The law still applies on Twitter so do not post anything that is offensive or illegal.

Facebook

On Facebook you can post photos, videos, and written statuses and messages. You should not post anything that might upset other people. Most people post things about something interesting that they have done, for example a holiday that they have been on or an event that they have been to.

On Facebook, you can select who gets to see what you post and your information. You can do this using the '**audience selector**' tool. You can use this to make sure that only your friends and family see your updates. Only people who are your friends can post messages on your timeline.

You can '**unfriend**' someone if you don't want him or her to post on your timeline.

You can also '**block**' people. 'Blocking' somebody stops him or her from starting conversations with you or viewing things that you post on your timeline. People will not be told if you have blocked them.

You can send messages to individual people, but these are not always private, what you say and send can be captured with a screenshot and passed on to other people so only send things that you don't mind other people seeing.

Instagram

By default, any photos that you upload to Instagram are public and can be viewed by anyone. If you only want your followers to see your photos, then you need to set your profile to private by setting the **'Photos are private'** switch at the bottom of your profile page to **'ON'**. When your profile is set to private, people who want to see your photos will have to send you a follow request, which you can then either accept or deny. This allows you to control who sees your photos, but you should only post pictures you are happy to share with your friends as Instagram is not a secure way to share personal pictures or information.

On Instagram, it is also possible to add your photos to a **'Photo Map'**, which means that people can see where a picture was taken. You may not want people to see where you took your photos, especially if they were taken at your home.

Like on other social networks, Instagram allows you to **block** other users from seeing your account. You can also **report** users, photos, and comments that you think are inappropriate.

Remember: do not post any photos that you are not comfortable with. People may ask you to upload photos of yourself that are inappropriate. If this happens, do not upload any photos and tell a trusted adult immediately.

Messaging

There are lots of different ways to send people direct messages. You can text using your mobile phone, you can use the messaging functions on social networks like Facebook, and you can use apps like WhatsApp. These tools allow you to send direct, private messages to one person or a small group of people. However, you still need to be careful.

People can take screenshots of any message that you send them, and they can pass on what you say in a message to other people. This means that what you say in a message may not be private.

You should only send messages to friends and family members that you trust. If somebody that you do not know sends you a message, you do not have to reply.

DO...

- Make sure **anti-virus and anti-spyware programmes** are running at all times and make sure they are up to date.
- Always have **strong anti-spam and anti-phishing tools** installed on your computer and set them to update automatically.
- REMEMBER: when you post anything online, it is very difficult to get it back. Therefore, you need to **think very carefully** before you post something.
- **Ask a responsible and trusted adult** if you are unsure about anything on the Internet. This is especially important when you are spending money online – you need to make sure you are only paying the correct amount to a trusted site.
- If you only want to send a message to one person or a small group of people, texting or using the **personal messaging functions** on social networking sites are the best ways to do this. Both twitter and Facebook allow you to use this system.
- Make sure to check if a friend is ok with you posting something that involves them. This may be a photo, a tweet, a status update, or a comment. They may not want something about them to be made public, so **always ask for permission** before uploading something related to your friends. If they ask you to delete something that you have previously posted, always do so as soon as you can.

- **Don't post negative or hurtful remarks** about a photo that somebody posts of himself or herself online.

DON'T...

- Don't **give people you do not trust your password** for your computer or website profiles. Always check to see if anyone is around before you enter a password.
- **Avoid using an unsafe screen or domain name.** Don't use a screen name that gives away too much information about your name, age, or where you live.
- **Don't share information with a friend of a friend.** Even though your friend might know them, they are not necessarily your friend too. Only socialise online with people you know personally.
- **Avoid forwarding chain emails.** They are likely to be scams and may harm your computer or the computer of people you send them to.
- **Do not be fooled by spam emails.** They are tricks designed to get you to buy something you might not really want or enter your personal data so it can be stolen.
- **Do not post when you are angry, anxious, or stressed,** as you may post something you later regret. Take some time out away from your computer, laptop, or phone before deciding whether or not you want to post something.