Marazion School Online Safety Newsletter, July 2022

The internet is awesome!

It is a tool. It's the human behind it that makes it good or bad.

Would you let a 5-year-old use a hammer for an hour by themselves? We need to think about the internet in the same way.

Oh god, that's terrifying, it's too much, it's overwhelming, I don't really get it…we hear you say, but don't worry, we're here to help!
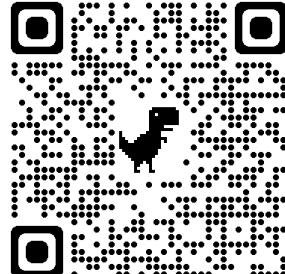
At some recent online safety training, we were told there are three types of children when it comes to the internet:

- cautious children
- children who take measured risks
- impulsive children.

We want our children to take measured risks, to be able to keep themselves and help others to stay safe online. There are some links to websites showing you how to set up safety settings on your internet, games and apps. If you have any other queries, please email Mrs Holmes lholmes@marazion.cornwall.sch.uk.

Internet setup

Gaming Guides

Tech Tools and social

media resources

<u>**Some thoughts on social media**</u>

In the latest online safety training we received, we were told that social media = relationships. During lockdowns, almost everyone went online to keep in touch with friends and family if we weren't already doing so. We were asked, as role models for our young people, can we really tell them they can't have social media, when we all use it? A more responsible response would be to allow it, but to have clear cut rules about how, when and where children are allowed to

access social media. We need to talk about who they talk to and what they say in order to protect their digital footprint, online reputation and self-esteem. In the past, we have used blanket statements for online safety like 'Never share personal information online', but actually, we need to, so we need to unpick the messages and teach our children when and where it's OK to do so. This being said, we came across this report from a school in Australia which raises some really important points and provides an excellent tick list for if you are currently thinking about letting your child join social media.

Why are age restrictions for social media important?

Answering the question of why age restrictions for social media are so important entails consideration of two major things: the sheer amount of content that can be seen and shared on social media, and the permanence of the decisions young people make on social media. Social media represents a virtual space that is occupied by a truly diverse demographic of people. There are few real-world spaces that attract such a wide range of age groups, so we're not necessarily accustomed to the notion of our young children occupying the same space as teens, young adults and older adults without constant supervision.

Typically, young children want to spend time on the playground; teens want to meet their friends at the beach or mall on weekends; young adults gather at boutique bars, while older adults have brunch in crowded coffee shops. Sure, it's not uncommon to see a child accompany their parent to any one of these locations, but we'd never consider letting them go there alone... would we?

Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat appeal to people of almost every age category. What this means is that these sites are not uniquely tailored to meet the needs of any specific demographic: they aren't necessarily 'kid friendly'. Yet, as it becomes more commonplace for young people to entirely overlook age restrictions for social media, we have to consider why these restrictions are there in the first place.

So, while Facebook's terms and conditions do prohibit illicit content, the site doesn't have the functionality to prevent the sharing of content that could be considered harmful or upsetting to a younger audience; which is undoubtedly part of the reason why Facebook requires its users to be at least 13 years old.

Of course, another reason that many social media sites have a 13-year age requirement is to comply with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA), which "prevents collection and storage of personal information from children under 13 years of age". This leads us to the other crucial item for parents to consider when questioning the importance of age restrictions for social media: digital footprints. We've spoken in previous articles about the fact that digital footprints is probably the wrong terminology; that the data being shared and stored online more realistically has the permanence of a digital tattoo. This is because the

decisions our children make online, from the statuses they post and private messages they send through to the images they share, can permanently shape their online reputation. Childhood and early adolescence are important, formative stages of a person's life, and they represent what is arguably the best time to make mistakes and learn from them. Unfortunately for modern generations, these mistakes can linger and have lasting effects. This is why it's really important for young people to have established the ability to evaluate risk and anticipate consequences before we give them access to social media.

Before letting children join social media, the Australian eSafety Commissioner encourages parents to reflect on the following:

- Will they be able to withstand taunts from others?
- Do they know what is and isn't safe to share online?
- Have you discussed what they should do if they see something abusive or offensive on social media?
- Have you established rules regarding your child's access to social media?
- Does your child know how to protect their personal information?
- Do you understand the potential risks associated with the social networking sites they want access to?

St. Bernardine's Catholic Primary School, Queensland, Australia.