

## Net Aware: A Parent's Guide to Social Networking Sites

### Aims

The NSPCC's Net Aware guide is for parents of 8-12 year olds, and its aim is to provide them with information about the 48 most popular social networks used by children and young people. The guide includes conversation starters and links to the online safety information on the NSPCC website. It also provides parents with the information to enable them to make informed decisions about the types of social networks they allow their children to use. The Net Aware guide is part of the NSPCC Share Aware campaign (see [www.nspcc.org.uk/shareaware](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/shareaware)) and was launched in January 2015.

### Key Findings

#### What did children and young people tell us?

- The most popular social networking platforms used by children and young people were YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and Minecraft.
- 92% of children and young people had accessed social networking sites and apps before the age of 13; 36% had signed up to Facebook and 60% to YouTube.
- Children viewed the riskiest websites and apps to be Omegle – Talk to a Stranger, Chatroulette and Ask.fm.
- Children and young people's main concerns were talking to strangers and sexual content.
- There is emerging evidence that young people are deliberately using some sites as a type of game or 'dare', one to play with friends and cope with the consequences together.
- Children and young people said they wanted parents to be educated about social networks and have an open dialogue with them about it. They wanted parents to be more open and engaged with children about the issues of concern that they face online.
- In 73% (35 sites) of the cases, children provided an alternative minimum age to the official age stipulated by the networks. For 20 of these sites, children said the minimum age should be older and for 15 they said that it should be younger.

#### What did parents say?

- Parents provided an alternative minimum age to that stated by the networks in 94% of cases (45 sites). For 37 of these sites, parents said the minimum age should be older and for eight they stated it should be younger.
- Parents felt that all social networking sites were too easy to sign up to. In particular, for sites who stipulated a minimum age of 13, 49% of parents said that it would be very easy for an 11 year old to sign up to these services.
- Parents reported that it was difficult to find the reporting/blocking features.

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- For 20% of the sites, parents reported that they could not find where to go to adjust the privacy settings for 20 of the social networks.
- Parents reported not being able to find any safety information on 32% of sites, and that on 85% of sites this information was difficult to find.
- Over 50% of parents viewed inappropriate content on 22 sites, and over 70% of parents viewed inappropriate content on eight sites.
- In terms of frequency, sexual content was the most frequently viewed, followed by violent content.

### Methodology

The NSPCC consulted with 1854 children and young people aged 11-18 across the United Kingdom in order to establish the most used social networking platforms. We consulted children and young people in schools and in our service centres. Of the children and young people we spoke to, 35% were aged 16-18 and 65% were aged 11-15. The children and young people involved were a mixture of genders, ethnicity and abilities. We used this data alongside other external credible sources such as data from Ofcom (Comscore) to select the most popular social networking platforms, which were then included in the Netaware guide. We worked closely with the parenting website Mumsnet to recruit 511 parents, who reviewed the most popular websites, apps and games against a set of criteria which were provided. These criteria were based on national and international best practice in keeping children safe online. Parents were asked to comment on the signing-up process, ease of reporting/blocking, the accessibility of safety advice, privacy settings and the availability of content that would be inappropriate for children.

### Background

The NSPCC is the leading children's charity fighting to end child abuse in the UK and Channel Islands. We help children who've been abused to rebuild their lives, protect those at risk, and find the best ways of preventing abuse from ever happening. We believe every childhood is worth fighting for. We share our experience with governments and organisations working with children so together we improve the protection of children and we challenge those who will not learn and change. We campaign for better laws and we educate and inform the public to improve understanding about child abuse. Our services include the NSPCC Helpline, for adults worried about a child, and ChildLine, the UK's free, confidential helpline for children and young people

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**Full report** <http://www.net-aware.org.uk/>

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