

# Information for Teachers

The following section provides some background information for teachers on online privacy, social networking sites, statistics and answers to some frequently asked questions.

*The information in this section can be used by the teacher in answering students' questions, advising them about the issues raised in class, and in order to facilitate discussion and debate during the lessons through questions and answers sessions.*

## The Risks of Using Social Networking Websites

Like most online activity there are risks to the users. In the case of social networking websites the risks include the unintentional disclosure of personal information, bullying or harassment, and in a small number of cases targeting of users by predators.

**It is important to highlight that children and young people may not only fall victim to these harmful behaviours but they may also be involved in initiating, maintaining or perpetrating the same against other children, young people, adults and /or organisations.**

### 1. DISCLOSING PERSONAL INFORMATION

The way these sites work is based on users creating sites/profiles including their personal opinions and in most cases their photographs. This enables people with the same interests to meet others. Users' profiles are also a way of attracting potential girlfriends or boyfriends. Many young people will send flirtatious comments to others having been attracted to photos on their site.

The problem with posting personal information to the internet is that as soon as it goes online, you have lost control over who will see it and how it will be used.

Pictures can be easily be copied and displayed in a completely different context. Because of the digital nature of the photos, they can even be altered or distorted.

Many social networking websites give the impression to users that they are in closed networks of friends. This encourages young people to disclose more personal information or to be more intimate with their communications than they would be if they thought it was a completely public forum. This is a dangerous fallacy.

The fact that certain websites claim to connect students from the same school means nothing. The information provided by users when they are registering is not validated. Anyone can create a user profile pretending to be anyone else. Moreover, anyone regardless of their real or pretend age can join as many school communities as they want.

### 2. BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Many social networking sites include modules where users are encouraged to rate profiles they come across on the site. This relatively innocuous capability can lead to users being sent harmful comments. As these comments usually relate to personal pictures posted on the websites they can often relate to physical appearance and ethnic origins.

There is also a tendency for offline bullying to be amplified online. Under the perception that there is a reduced likelihood of being caught and because they aren't directly confronted by the consequences of their bullying, it is easier for children to engage in bullying online than it is in the offline world. Young people need to be made aware that despite the perception it is relatively easy to trace online bullies and that the consequences of being identified can be very severe. Many online bullying activities are illegal and are frequently dealt with by the police.

### 3. BEING TARGETED BY PREDATORS

Because there is no routine validation of users, personal information contained in profiles can be harvested by unscrupulous individuals who can use it as the basis for scams, malicious attacks, or in the worst case by paedophiles to groom potential victims. These people often operate by collecting small pieces of information at a time while slowly building up a bigger picture of their target without rousing suspicion. They can use multiple different identities to avoid detection.

**Some Things to Remember**

– if you are posting material

- Do not post or send anything on the internet that you would not be prepared to write or send on paper.
- Do not post anything you would not be prepared to put your name to.
- Do not respond to abusive messages.
- Do not jump on the bandwagon in respect of abusive message.
- Do not react on-line.
- Do not post private or personal information about other persons on the internet.

**What to do if you are the victim of inappropriate messages or material**

- Advise the site owner immediately. Most websites have a report abuse or complain button.
- See if you can ascertain who has posted the material in question and take it up with the person/their parents or their school.
- If there appears to be a school element to the material, the school should be notified particularly in respect of material which could be construed to be bullying.
- Where appropriate, block email messages and if the material continues to be published on a particular site, withdraw from that site.
- In many cases, the purveyors of defamatory and bullying material thrive on response and reaction. If

they do not receive such response and reaction, they tend to get bored and move on.

- In appropriate circumstances bring the material to the attention of the Gardaí or the Data Protection Commissioner.

**Some useful statistics:**

**The 2008 Watch Your Space Survey of Children's use of Social Networking Websites in Ireland.**

The 2008 Watch Your Space Survey was the second annual survey of how young Irish people are using social networking websites such as Bebo, My Space and Facebook. It was conducted by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) with assistance from the Anchor Youth Centre at the Young Scientist Exhibition in January 2008. A short survey on young people's use of social networking websites was administered by members of the Anchor Youth Centre. The Anchor members distributed 510 questionnaire sheets to their peers from around Ireland who were visiting the exhibition. 408 of the questionnaires passed the controls for the survey and were entered into a database by the Anchor members.

These surveys indicate that social networking websites are very popular with young people and show no signs of this popularity waning. Overall levels of usage in January 2008 were similar to those found in 2007 in terms of frequency of access. However, teenagers appear to be spending less time on these sites.

We also found indications that a combination of successful awareness raising activities in Ireland and improvements in the child protection

aspects of the technical features of the Bebo website has led to a reduction in risk behaviour by Irish teenagers:

- Fewer teens are using these sites primarily to make new friends.
- Fewer teens are adding as friends lots of people they don't know.
- Fewer teens are publishing personal information on their profiles.
- More of them are keeping their profiles 'private'.

There are also signs that the systems for user-moderation of content are starting to lead to reductions in the amount of harmful content on social networking websites. Significantly, it seems more difficult to encounter pornography or violent content on these sites than it was a year ago.

The 2008 survey for the first time asked teenagers about meeting people face-to-face that they first met online. 40% of responding to this questionnaire had done this on a least one occasion. It appears that this behaviour has become much more prevalent since the advent of these sites.

## Key Findings

- 72% of young people surveyed (up from 69% in 2007) were accessing social networking websites more than 3 times a week, 37% were doing this on a daily basis. However, indications are that while they are accessing these sites with the same frequency as in 2007, they are spending much less time on them.
- Posting comments is still by far the most popular aspect of these sites.
- Most young people (87%) are accessing social networking sites primarily from their home.
- 2% said that they mainly use their phone to access their profile, although 28% had used their phone on at least one occasion.
- 65% of the teens (down from 71% last year) said that their profile was public.
- Down from 12% in 2007, 8.6% admit to displaying their mobile phone number on their profile, there is an increase in the disclosure of other personal information such as age and school name, 79% of teens displays their full name on their profile.
- Young people are primarily using the communications capabilities of these sites to stay in touch with friends that they see often.
- One in eight says that their main reason for using these sites is to make new friends.
- Three-quarters of social networking site users have 'added'.

## Questions & Answers:

Further information for discussion and debate during lessons.

**Q: Who has access to your personal social networking site?**

**A: Potentially everyone on the Internet. It is important to Watch Your Space**

Unless you apply privacy setting to your social networking site everyone using the internet has access to your information.

### Know Who Can See You:

Managing your privacy settings on an online social networking site is very important. To be as secure as possible, you should set your privacy settings so that only your approved friends can view your profile and that your profile is not public. Also ensure that hyperlinks to others users of the service on the grounds of data included in your profile are disabled. Be aware that some social networking sites have made their users' profiles public and searchable through a search engine so it is important to adjust your privacy settings if you do not wish your information to be accessible by strangers.

### Someone's Looking at You:

Remember, anything you post can not only be seen by others but can easily be copied and stored. Your photos and blogs might be getting you noticed in a way that you didn't intend. Guys, next time you're thinking about posting pictures of your six-pack on your profile think about whose attention they are likely to attract and what site those photos can end up on.

**Q: Can I safely upload pictures and videos of myself and my friends to websites? Are there any risks?**

### Examples:

— I took a picture of myself and a friend with my mobile phone and I want to post it somewhere on the web. Can I do it?

— I threw a party at home where some of my friends got pretty drunk. Someone took a video of them and uploaded it onto a video-sharing site; will everyone have access to it?

— I have a profile on a social networking site where I upload my poems, films and pictures so I can share them with my online friends. Are there any risks I need to think about?

**A: The law protects your privacy and your intellectual property rights, as well as those of the people you mention on your blog or social network. But be aware that there is always a risk that what you post on the internet — blogs, photos, videos, messages — could be misused by others.**

There are simple ways of protecting your privacy and reducing the risk of **ID theft**. One way is to restrict access to your online content, e.g. by using the privacy-policy settings on the host site, setting up a password for your blog so you can control who sees it, blocking access to your photo albums on social networking sites to all but a select group of friends.

The responsibility is yours. Be cautious as to the type of content you put on the web and keep track of what you post where. Once you've uploaded something or sent it to another person, it stops being private and

others may use it in ways you hadn't intended. Many employers now check to see what information they can find about job applicants on the internet. The photo of you at that wild party could cost you your dream job.

**Also, remember that *you should only upload things – text, music, pictures and video – that you have created yourself.*** If you want to upload other people's materials, you must obtain their permission first, otherwise you will be breaking the law in most European countries!

It is often the case that by uploading your content - pictures, paintings, text or music - to web-platforms like social networks, you might give them the licence to use your intellectual property. It is therefore useful to read the terms and conditions of the website before you upload something.

**Q: If your privacy is violated who can you or your parent/guardian report it to?**

**A: Office of the Data Protection Commission**  
www.dataprotection.ie

You or your parent or guardian can make a complaint to the Office of the Data Commissioner if you feel that your data protection rights have been violated. This could occur if for example, you cannot gain access to your personal information or you are receiving direct marketing communications against your will.

**Q: If unusual, weird or pornographic images appear on your computer screen or mobile phone, what should you do?**

**A: Inform an adult**

If unusual, weird or pornographic images appear on your computer screen or mobile phone, you do not need to feel guilty about this. Contact an adult immediately and report this content. Photographs which are taken with mobile phones or digital cameras and which are uploaded onto the internet can be shared rapidly among friends. Strangers may also be able to access these photographs and store them. It is possible to copy or alter images and photographs, which may lead to embarrassment or offence. For these reasons, it is important to make sure that the photos or videos that you post online are appropriate and will not hurt the feeling of others, their friends or their families.

**Q: From what age can you have a page on BEBO/My Space?**

**A: Over 13 years**

Children under the age of 13 are not eligible to use Bebo or to provide personal information. To be eligible to sign up to MySpace you must be over 14 years of age. Facebook is intended for those who are over 13 and users who are under 18 must be currently in secondary school or college. Children under the age of 14 should always give their real age when signing up to social networking sites online. However, it is recommended that you do not display your date of birth on the site as this could also aid an untrustworthy user to steal your personal details and identity. Remember that people who you meet online may not always be honest about their age or who they are.