


Is my child old enough?



Get the answers to the questions you're asking about Facebook 

Facebook is a social networking site where users set up a profile with photos and information about themselves. Users share (post) photos, links, videos and comments with 'friends' of their choice and 'like' and comment on other people's posts. Users can limit who sees their profile. 13 is the minimum user age required by Facebook.

If your child is over 13 you should still consider the following before agreeing to unsupervised Facebook access:

Is your child able to withstand taunts from others?

If you think your child will become very upset (more than other kids) if they have a negative experience online, your child may need you to guide them through the use of Facebook. Look through their profiles and public feeds together, talk about how some people behave differently online and teach them how to filter abusive comments, block and report people.

Does your child understand what is safe to put online?

If they might put their name, address, school, sports club or information that allows people to identify and locate them (even after you have talked through the dangers) they may need your help with using Facebook. Talk about the risks of 'checking in', posting sexy pictures, meeting online friends in person, making offensive comments, and what is and isn't acceptable.

Does your child know how to report abuse and offensive or pornographic content?

If not you need to visit Facebook's Safety Centre with them to ensure they know how to block and report people. Visit <https://facebook.com/safety>

Are you worried your child will be left out if they aren't on Facebook but also worried they aren't ready?

As a compromise you may choose to let them have a Facebook account if they follow strict rules – including only using Facebook when you supervise them or you control their login. In return, and to keep them engaged with you, you can promise not to embarrass them by commenting publicly on their profile or posts. Teens tell us this is humiliating and it is their private world.

Are you going to supervise or 'friend' your child on Facebook?

If this is the case, be prepared to learn more than you might like about their friends. Try to withhold comment unless you are worried about safety. It is better to talk to your child in person if you have concerns than post comments publicly. If you publicly embarrass them, you will break your child's trust and they may simply communicate with friends on a different program – or open a separate profile without your knowledge.

How do I talk to my child about my concerns?

Be honest with them. Express your love and concern about what might happen online. Ask if they have experienced bullying or sexual advances. Banning seldom works and children will find other ways to get online and may stop talking to you about issues to avoid getting in trouble. Keep the communication open. If they won't talk to you about things, recruit a trusted family friend or family member to keep the communication going.

When should I be worried about my child?

If your child's behaviour changes at home and/or school you should talk to them. Examples of changed behaviour could include disinterest in things they used to like, seeming very unhappy and/or their sleep and eating is being impacted. Seek professional advice if necessary from a school counsellor, your GP or a psychologist. If your child has particular vulnerabilities, be vigilant about their contacts offline and online. Help them join groups out of school where they can find friends and support. Talk to the school and make sure they are supported.

Kids Helpline provides free online and phone counselling for children and young people. Visit www.kidshelpline.com.au or call 1800 55 1800.