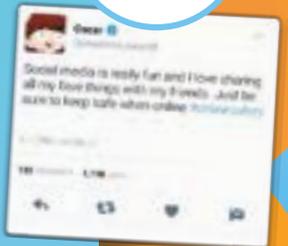Twitter is a social networking site where users can post 'tweets' or short messages, photos and videos publicly. They can also share 'tweets' written by others to their followers. Twitter is popular with young people, as it allows them to interact with celebrities, stay up to date with news, trends and current social relevance.

What parents need to know about
Twitter

TWITTER TROLLS

A 'troll' is somebody who deliberately posts negative or offensive comments online in a bid to provoke an individual for a reaction. Trolling, can include bullying, harassment, stalking, virtual mobbing and much more; it is very common on Twitter. The motive may be that the 'troll' wishes to promote an opinion or make people laugh, however, the pragmatics of what they post could be much more damaging, posting anything from racial, homophobic to sexist hate. Trolling can lead to devastating consequences for some victims.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Twitter gives users the opportunity and freedom to post their personal thoughts and opinions, meaning they can pretty much post anything they want despite restrictions on the platform. Swearing and inappropriate language is allowed if it does not violate the rules. If your child sees any inappropriate content, they might feel the need to replicate it at home or amongst their peers. Additionally, there are also a number of unofficial pornographic profiles on the platform that can easily be found and viewed without restrictions.

FAKE PROFILES

Fake Twitter accounts are made to impersonate a person, celebrity or public figure. As the accounts are not endorsed by the person they are pretending to be, they can often be used to scam or take advantage of young people who think that they're the real deal.

FAKE NEWS

The speed in which 'tweets' are shared on Twitter can be unbelievably fast, meaning that fake news can often be circulated across the platform very quickly. Fake news articles and posts can often be harmful and upsetting to young people and those associated with the fake news. In addition to this, it's very easy for people to quickly and unexpectedly retweet a tweet posted by your child, meaning there is no going back.

HIJACKED HASHTAGS

One of the most commonly used aspects of Twitter is the hashtag (#) – these allow users to easily search for specific trends, topics or subjects. However, due to the astronomical number of Twitter users, many hashtags can have 'different' intentions. One person may use a seemingly innocent hashtag, and before you know it, hundreds of people could be using the same hashtag for something inappropriate or dangerous that your child shouldn't be exposed to. This is common with 'trending' tweets, as people know that their tweet will be seen by a greater number of people.

MEMES NORMALISING RACISM, SEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA

Twitter is a popular platform for sharing Internet memes, helping to make concepts or ideas go viral across the Internet. However, despite most meme's being innocent and harmless, some often include sexist, racist or homophobic messages. Although they are typically sent as a joke, this type of content is contributing to the normalisation of topics including racism, sexism and homophobia.

PROPAGANDA, EXTREMISM & RADICALISATION

Social media offers a continuous stream of real-time coverage of extremist activity. Twitter is one of the many platforms that is exploited by extremist groups to help promote violence, radicalise and recruit people to support their cause. These groups cleverly target vulnerable victims, often young people, and find a way to manipulate them into supporting their beliefs.

EVERYONE HAS ACCESS

Twitter has over 335 million monthly active users across all age groups. When a user signs up, tweets are public by default, meaning anyone can view and interact with posts instantly. Your child may change their mind about a tweet they have posted but even if they delete it, there's always a chance that someone can screenshot, retweet it or post it onto another platform.

Top Tips for Parents

CHECK ACCOUNT SETTINGS

We strongly advise that you thoroughly check your child's privacy settings. To take away some of the fear of your child's tweets being shared by anyone, you can always make their account protected. This means that anyone who wants to view what yout child has posted, it requires approval from them. In addition to this, you can change the settings so that they cannot receive 'direct' messages from anyone on the platform and that their location is not shared.

BLOCKING & REPORTING

If a particular account is causing your child trouble on Twitter, whether it's cyberbullying or upsetting content, you can simply block and report them. Blocking them will help to prevent them from viewing, messaging or following your child, and vice versa. Reporting an account will alert Twitter to investigate the profile.

MUTING ACCOUNTS

The 'mute' feature allows your child to remove an account's tweets from their timeline without unfollowing or blocking them. This means your child will stop getting notifications about a particular conversation but can still view it in their timeline. This can be useful if they are friends with someone but don't really like what they share. The other user will not know that they have been banned.

TWITTER TROLLS & THE LAW

From 2016, the CPS were able to exercise new laws that could see those who create "derogatory hashtags" or post "humiliating" photoshopped images jailed. They also announced the launch of a hate crime consultation, issuing a series of public policy statements centred on combating crimes against disabled people, as well as racial, religious, homophobic and transphobic hate crime. It's important your child knows about building a positive online reputation, as well as showing respect for others online and offline.

SENSITIVE CONTENT

By default, if Twitter has found a tweet that 'may contain sensitive content', Twitter will hide the content in the news feed and you will be shown a warning that states the content is sensitive. This gives a chance for you to moderate potentially harmful images/videos before your child sees them. Unfortunately, some content may slip through the cracks and will be shown in the news feed. So, if you do see any sensitive content, you can report it. Twitter should then inspect the tweet and decide whether they deem it to be 'sensitive'.

MUTE HASHTAGS & PHRASES

Within the account settings, you have the ability to block certain words, hashtags or phrases from your child's timeline or notifications (e.g. swear words, inappropriate phrases, emojis, etc.)

TURN OFF VIDEO AUTOPLAY

'Autoplay' is a feature that automatically starts playing a new video seconds after another one ends on the platform. To avoid your child going from watching something innocent and harmless to something much more graphic or disturbing, you can turn this feature off in the settings and easily moderate the videos your child watches before they see them.

CONVERSATION & MONITORING

We always promote that you have regular open conversation with your child about their online activity, ensuring that they understand what healthy relationships are, what respect is, and how to be sensitive towards others' feelings. It's also important to monitor what they're doing online, including what they use the platform for, who they are talking to, and if they are viewing/taking part in anything that they shouldn't be. Discuss the dangers of the online world, such as fake news and online bullying - why do people involve themselves in these activities and what your child can do to prevent them.

TWITTER LISTS

Twitter lists allow your child to create other feeds besides the main timeline that only include certain accounts – this is a great way to segment followers based on common topics and interests.

SOURCES: Sources: https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/blocking-and-unblocking-accounts | https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/twitter-location-services-for-mobile | https://help.twitter.com/en/managingyour-account/two-factor-authentication | https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/advanced-twitter-muteoptions | https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/how-to-make-twitter-private-and-public I https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/public-and-protected-tweets | https://www.statista.com/statistics/493795/twitter-most-retweeted-posts/ | Smallbiztrends.com: 'What is Hashtag Hijacking?': https://smallbiztrends.com/2013/08/what-is-hashtag-hijacking-2.html Christiededman.com: '5 things you should know about hashtags and your kids': http://christiededman.com/5-things-you-should-know-about-hashtags-your-kids/