

## What Parents and Carers Need to Know about Twitter

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to help get informed conversations about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many topics which are covered in our wider resources. For further guides, news and tips for adults.

# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about TWITTER

Twitter is a social media network which allows users to post short messages. These are called tweets. Tweets can consist of text, photos, videos, links, polls and GIFs. Often shared by celebrities and influencers, a common theme or message is usually repeated, reaching high levels of interest. On Twitter, users can engage with others by using a 'retweet' button (which is a copy of the tweet) or by 'liking' (commenting on) a tweet. The website was launched in March 2006 and has since grown to become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world.

**WHAT ARE THE RISKS?**

**INTERACTION WITH STRANGERS**

Twitter is public by default, meaning that anyone can view and interact with your tweets. This means that anyone can see what you are saying and send direct messages. The concern here is that young people may interact with strangers. Some individuals may follow a young person's tweets and then contact them. However, others may be out to harm young people.

**FIXATION ON VIEW COUNT**

Twitter has recently introduced a 'view count' feature - telling users how many people have seen their tweet. This feature has been criticised by some, as it encourages young people to experience feelings of 'fixation' - leading to an obsession with increasing their views.

**TROLLS AND BULLYING**

The anonymity offered by the platform encourages users to post comments designed to provoke a reaction or disrupt conversations. To report an account or to block a user, click on the three dots in the top right corner of the tweet. This will open a menu with options to report or block the user.

**PAID-FOR VERIFICATION**

Previously, if a Twitter profile displayed a blue tick mark, it meant that the person - usually a celebrity or a major organisation - had been verified as genuine. Now, however, anyone can pay for a 'verified' status. This means that anyone can appear to be a verified account, which could lead to people being misled or harassed.

**CONTENT MODERATION CHANGES**

In June 2022, Twitter announced that it was introducing a new system of content moderation. This means that some content that was previously removed will now be allowed. This could lead to more harmful content being seen by young people.

**HACKED HASHTAGS**

This has happened (as) in the case of a Twitter user who has been hacked. The user's account has been taken over by someone who is using it to post harmful content. This could lead to young people being misled or harassed.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

**SET ACCOUNTS TO PRIVATE**

To reduce some of the risk of your child's account being seen and copied by anyone, you can change their account to private. This means that only people you approve can see their tweets. To do this, go to the 'Settings and privacy' section of the app and click on 'Privacy'. Then, click on 'Protect your tweets' and turn the switch on.

**FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING**

It can be difficult for anyone to discern if something is real or fake. Encourage your child to check several reputable sources to see if a story they've seen is true. Remind them to think about the source of the information and to be aware of the fact that not everything they see is true.

**ENGAGE SAFETY MODE**

When Safety Mode is activated, Twitter restricts the content of tweets that your child can see. This means that they won't see any tweets that contain language or images that are considered to be harmful. To activate Safety Mode, go to the 'Settings and privacy' section of the app and click on 'Safety Mode'. Then, click on 'Turn on Safety Mode'.

**EXPLORE THE NEW SETTINGS**

Previously, any user could reply to anyone's tweets. However, the new 'reply controls' allow you to choose who can reply to your tweets. This means that you can restrict replies to only people you follow or to only people who follow you. To set these controls, go to the 'Settings and privacy' section of the app and click on 'Reply controls'. Then, choose the option you want.

**PAUSE BEFORE POSTING**

It's important that young people think about what they're about to post and whether they might regret it later. Twitter has a 'pause before posting' feature that gives you a 5-second pause before you can post a tweet. This gives you time to think about whether you really want to post that tweet.

**BLOCK, REPORT OR MUTE**

If someone is upsetting your child on Twitter, you can block and report them. Blocking means that you won't see any tweets from that person and they won't be able to contact you. Reporting means that you can tell Twitter about the person and they can take action against them. To block or report someone, go to their profile and click on the three dots in the top right corner. Then, click on 'Block' or 'Report'.

**BE CAREFUL WHO TO FOLLOW**

As accounts are no longer being as rigorously verified as they once were, it's important that young people are careful about who they follow. This means that they should only follow people they know and trust. To see who your child is following, go to their profile and click on the 'Following' tab.

**Meet Our Expert**

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For more than a decade, Twitter has rarely strayed far from the headlines. Since its takeover by tech tycoon Elon Musk last autumn, however, the social media giant has been receiving even more news coverage; some of the subsequent changes to the platform – such as introducing 'view counts' and the option to 'buy' verified account status – have caused particular concern.

Keen to feel connected to their heroes of sport and showbiz by following their accounts, children are allowed onto Twitter from the age of 13 (while many even younger ones use it unofficially) and are often significantly influenced by what they see there. This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide tells trusted adults what they need to know about the current incarnation of Twitter.

Although it's since been expanded to 280, Twitter's initial 140-character restriction (the limit imposed because Twitter was originally conceived as an SMS platform, trivia fans) was designed to make posts short and punchy. Counter-intuitively, however, these bite-size injections of information and opinion can drive users to engage with Twitter for hours at a time.

There are a mind-boggling 6,000 tweets sent every second, for example, while around 250 million people (roughly two-thirds of its total user base) go on Twitter every single day. For young people, there is clearly a risk of compulsive use – and, as today's #WakeUpWednesday guide explains, that's not the only pitfall on Twitter that trusted adults need to stay aware of.

[Click here](#) to download the guide