

What Parents and Carers Need to Know about Influencers

At National Online Safety, we believe in empowering parents, carers and trusted adults with the information to hold an informed conversation about online safety with their children, should they feel it is needed. This guide focuses on one of many issues which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit www.nationalonlinesafety.com for further guides, tools and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about INFLUENCERS

In today's digital age, social media influencers play an increasingly significant role in shaping the opinions, interests and behaviours of our children. While many of these individuals can have a positive effect, influencer culture can also present certain risks – such as encouraging consumerism, affecting self-esteem and blurring trustworthiness. To help ensure a safe online environment for young people, it's vital to maintain open communication, set sensible boundaries, promote a healthy self-image and teach digital media literacy. Our guide delves deeper into all of these.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

HEIGHTENED CONSUMERISM

A major way that influencers make money is through brand partnerships and sponsored content. As a result, children who follow them may be exposed to a steady stream of advertising; this can lead to materialistic attitudes, unrealistic expectations and an increased desire to have the latest products. Many influencers have built huge brand empires around their large, impressionable following.

THE SOFT SELL

Some influencers aren't always transparent about the motivations behind their posts. Blurring the lines between genuine recommendations and paid-for promotions – and young people sometimes find it difficult to distinguish authentic content from advertising. Many major social platforms have taken steps to make sponsored content and ads easier to identify, but it remains an area of concern.

PRIVACY CONCERNS

Inspired by their favourite influencers, children may start sharing more of their own lives online – which could reveal personal information or details about their daily routine. This openness can put them at risk of cyberbullying or even predatory behaviour. This is exacerbated by live streaming, which gives young people no time to consider the potential consequences of saying too much.

UNDERMINING SELF-ESTEEM

Many influencers share images and videos of themselves and their activities, which are often painstakingly curated and edited to present an idealised version of their life. Children who follow these influencers may develop distorted expectations about body image and the concept of beauty, which can potentially lead to negative self-esteem and even mental health issues.

Advice for Parents & Carers

KEEP TALKING

Chat to your child about the content they consume on social media and the influencers that they like. Encourage them to think critically about what they see and hear online, and listen to any concerns they might have. Maintaining this line of open, honest communication can help your child to make informed decisions about which individuals they follow and what content they engage with.

SUPPORT A HEALTHY SELF-IMAGE

Reinforce your child's awareness that real life isn't usually as picture perfect as it may appear on social media – and how some content (particularly that of influencers) is often curated, staged or edited to look more glamorous. If possible, highlight examples of other influencers who share authentic, relatable material which acknowledges their imperfections and struggles as well.

SET SOME BOUNDARIES

Agree age-appropriate boundaries for your child's social media use, including time limits and privacy settings (the two major operating systems on mobile devices, Android and iOS, have these controls baked in). Try to keep an eye on your child's online activity and discuss it regularly with them – including reminding them of the potential risks that can arise from following influencers.

PROMOTE MEDIA LITERACY

Talk to your child about the concepts of sponsored content, advertising and potential influencer bias. Teach them to critically evaluate the information they're presented with online, and to consider the possible reasons behind content creation. This can help young people develop the skills to make healthier decisions about the influencers they choose to follow and the content they consume.

Meet Our Expert

A former director of digital learning and currently a deputy headteacher and DSL, Jonathan's wealth of experience and expertise gives him a clear insight into how modern digital systems impact the experiences of children, young people – and which strategies help to ensure that for online world remains a safe and secure space rather than a minefield of risks.

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Not only is an “influencer” an increasingly powerful role in the digital age, but it's also become a desirable career goal for many young people – an enjoyable way to gain international fame and a gateway to financial success. A survey of Instagram influencers, for instance, found that those with over a million followers make an average of £12,000 (around \$15,000) per month.

Much of this wealth, of course, is unlocked by entering into partnerships with various brands – which then raises all manner of questions about some influencers' authenticity. Is their praise for certain products genuine, or simply because they've been paid for their endorsement? This week's #WakeUpWednesday guide peels back the filters for a closer look at influencers.

Celebrity cachet can send engagement stratospheric (Cristiano Ronaldo, Kylie Jenner and Selina Gomez all have hundreds of millions of followers) but previous unknowns like Lele Pons, Charli D'Amelio and Addison Rae have also successfully built their follower count to around the 50 million mark – allowing them to charge (according to some estimates) north of \$100,000 per post.

This highly visible end of the influencer market may occasionally be materialistic and superficial, but it's generally frothy, inoffensive fun. There are *some* hugely popular figures on social media, however, whose views and beliefs aren't what most parents would prefer their child was exposed to. Our #WakeUpWednesday guide highlights some of the potential risks around influencer culture.

Please [click here](#) to download the guide.