

#WakeUpWednesday

What Parents and Carers Need to Know about X

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 apps which we believe trusted adults should be aware of. Please visit nationalonlinesafety.org for further guides, hints and tips for adults.

What Parents & Carers Need to Know about X

In October 2022, the enormously popular social media network Twitter was purchased by tech tycoon Elon Musk. That sparked a host of changes to the platform, not all of which have been received positively by its fans. The alterations have continued with each passing month, many of them raising online safety concerns among the 530 million users of Twitter (now rebranded as simply X). With further adjustments reportedly in the pipeline, X has attracted more than its usual share of controversy and caution in recent times.

AGE RESTRICTION 13+

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

A BLOCK ON BLOCKING

X has announced plans to remove its blocking feature. Previously, this stopped other users from viewing your profile or sending you direct messages, while also hiding their posts from your feed. Only this latter function will now remain. The decision has been criticised by some members, who feel that blocking (in its current form) protects them from X users who promote denial and hatred.

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Many of X's less age-appropriate posts can feature violence from extreme political views to pornography. While accounts marked as 13+ are restricted from non-members, it's still fairly easy to stumble across this material accidentally. X's new 'For You' page also shows content from accounts that a user doesn't already follow – meaning that almost anything could end up on a child's feed.

LIMITED REPORTING FEATURES

X offers a premium membership, with some functionality (such as controlling who can view and reply to your posts) increasingly being made exclusive to those who pay the subscription fee. Several commentators have speculated that X could one day become an exclusively paid-for service, with access to accounts being revoked for anyone unwilling or unable to take out a subscription.

VERIFICATION FOR SALE

Historically, Twitter's moderators granted account verification, certifying someone as authentic by placing a blue tick next to their username. One of X's earliest changes was to place verification behind a paywall. This caused the number of celebrity impersonators to rise and left no way to distinguish any legitimate influencers from a copycat fake account seeking to exploit other users.

BLUE TICK SALE

Advice for Parents & Carers

PROTECT PRIVACY

Unscrupulous characters may try to gain access to a young person's X account – either to view their posts and gather information on them, or to completely take control of it. To minimise risk, ensure the account has a strong password and enable the 'Protect Your Posts' feature (via the account settings), so that strangers can't view your child's posts without first being approved as a follower.

DON'T RISE TO THE BAIT

To gain more views and followers, some X users post deliberately inflammatory comments on sensitive topics such as race, sexual orientation and gender issues. Many young people could find this upsetting. Emphasise that, if your child encounters someone spreading hate on X, it's best not to give that person what they want: an argument. Ignore them, mute their account and move on.

STAY ALERT FOR IMPOSTERS

Make sure your child understands that X's blue ticks no longer guarantee the identity of anyone on the platform. While it might be exciting if a celebrity liked your child's post, it could just as easily be an imposter with malicious intentions. If your child's not 100% sure that an X user actually is who they claim to be, advise them to err on the side of caution and avoid interacting with that account.

ONLY FOLLOW TRUSTED ACCOUNTS

Using the 'Following' tab on X helps to ensure that the only content your child sees has come from accounts they've chosen to follow: this should reduce the chance of them inadvertently being exposed to harmful, violent or explicit content. Show your child how to report another user's account if, say, they're behaving inappropriately by spreading misinformation or offensive opinions.

BE READY TO TAKE ACTION

If your child suffers harassment on the platform or becomes the target of a hack, you could consider deactivating their account entirely. Recently, X's safety features have been criticised for allegedly failing to protect users' wellbeing – so if your child is being subjected to abusive messages or similar mistreatment on the platform, it might be prudent to remove them from X altogether.

Meet Our Expert

David Coleman is a Fellow of the Institute of Learning and currently also a Fellow of the Institute of Education. He has worked in the gaming industry for over four years. He is a regular speaker at various events, including the National Online Safety Summit, and has been published in various media outlets including National Geographic.

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Around 35 million X users are under 18 😬 So it's essential that parents and carers stay up to date with the changes made to Twitter since its reinvention as X – and the online safety hazards these alterations might pose, including exposure to explicit content and unpleasant behaviour

That's not to say, however, that X is a ruined platform: a more cautious approach can still enable young people to navigate it comparatively safely. This week's

#WakeUpWednesday guide suggests some steps that can help children avoid common pitfalls – both new and old – on X.

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