

Supporting your neurodiverse teen to be safe and positive on social media

Young people love to connect online but socialising on an app or online game is not always fun and positive if the young person is not socially aware or confident. For neurodiverse young people with **autism** (ASD) or **attention deficit disorder** (ADD), who struggle with social interaction offline, trying to keep up with the language and social conventions of social media can be an extra challenge. Here's how you can help them to protect their online spaces and have positive experiences online.

Protect their online spaces

Encourage your young person to use controls and settings. Internet Matters has excellent information on how to do this. See <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/social-media/>

Make sure they know how to report and block other users on the social media sites they use:
<https://reportharmfulcontent.com/>

Do they understand who their 'trusted adult' is? Neurodiverse young people often aren't clear about who this is, so discuss who they can go to if they need some support or advice. Sometimes, a cousin or older sibling is more acceptable than a parent. They can also be a more acceptable person to have as a 'friend' or 'follower' in the account who can help keep an eye on what the young person is posting.

Talk about potential negative or unwanted scenarios with your young person and plan for appropriate ways of dealing with these: social narratives are great for this. For more information about these, see our leaflet about talking to neurodiverse children about online safety and go to the National Autistic Society website: <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations>



Talk to your young person about false information online:

- What is fake news?
- Why do people create fake news?
- How can you tell if info online is fake or false?
- What is the difference between fact and opinion?
- Where are trustworthy places to find information?

Get some expert tips on the Internet Matters website:
<https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/fake-news-and-misinformation-advice-hub/>

Depending on how able your young person is, establish some clear boundaries and rules on managing their social media accounts. For example, lots of young people have more than one social media account:

- a public account for following and being followed by people that they don't know, where they limit the information that they post, and
- another private account that they use for communicating with only a few friends that they can trust and know in real life.





Some neurodiverse teens on social media can get particularly hung up on having lots of 'friends' and aren't able to differentiate their online behaviour between people they know and can trust off-line and anyone who will talk to them online. Separate these out and have clear rules about what your young person can and can't do in each account and why it can be helpful.

Seek out positive online spaces

If your young person has a special interest, they may already be involved in fan-based social media groups

where they can share their interests and talk about what they love with other, equally obsessed teens. Tumblr is THE online place for this, but wherever they go online, do some research on the specific risks for that app or website so you can support your young person to manage these: <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/guidance/what-is-tumblr/>

You can also encourage them, if appropriate, to seek out and follow some role models for developing a positive self-identity. For example:

- Ellen Jones has some great YouTube videos about her experiences as a young woman with ASD:
<https://www.ellen-jones.co.uk/>
- Jess McCabe is a funny and practical person with a series of YouTube videos about how to manage ADHD:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-nPMI_kSZf9lZGkcgy_95Q

Our TechSafe workshop leader, Sam Amos, is also a speech and language therapist with over 15 years of experience working with children and young people with communication disorders.



These apps are all **free** to download

