

TWITTER: A Parent's Guide



What is Twitter?

Twitter 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 and stay up to date with news.

What does it look like?



Main Concerns for Parents



Everyone has access

In the 3rd quarter of 2017, Twitter had 330 million active users. With this number only appearing to be increasing, it's fair to say that pretty much everyone and anyone has access to Twitter and the content that children post on it.

Hijacked Hashtags

One of the most commonly used aspects of Twitter are hashtags (#) which allow users to easily search for specific topics or subjects. For example, if someone posts a Twitter message (or tweet) about online safety, they may include, #OnlineSafety. However, due to the astronomical number of Twitter users, it's unsurprising that many of these individuals have - 'different' intentions. One person may use a seemingly innocent hashtag with one thing in mind and before you know it, hundreds of people could be using the same hashtag for something inappropriate or dangerous that your child certainly shouldn't be exposed to. This is mostly common with 'trending' tweets, as people know that their tweet will be seen by a greater number of people.

The speed of sharing

Similar to live video, the speed in which 'tweets' are shared on Twitter can be unbelievably fast. Just look at a tweet from 2017 that has been 'retweeted' (or shared) and has more than 3.6 million 'retweets!' Over a man asking a fast food chain for a year's supply of chicken nuggets! As such, it's easy for people to quickly and unexpectedly retweet a tweet posted by your child, meaning there is no going back. This can be extremely compromising if they post something they may regret in the future.

Fake profiles

Fake Twitter accounts are made to impersonate a person, celebrity or public figure. Because these 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.



Make their Twitter account 'protected'

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 your child posts on Twitter has to request approval from them. Follow these steps to make this change, depending on your device:

- On the top menu, click on either an icon with three horizontal lines or your profile picture. Next, tap 'Settings and privacy'.
- Click on 'Privacy and safety'
- Check the box next to 'Protect your tweets'.

Advise not to engage in arguments etc

Twitter is a popular outlet in which many choose to post their opinions about things (just look at any celebrity or politician) but social media is not always the right place to engage in arguments. It can hurt your child's feelings, encourage other people to join in and harm your child's future reputation. As such, talk to your child and help them to understand the risks. By just liking or retweeting a post, it can show endorsement which can sometimes be classed as cyberbullying.

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, simply do the following to turn this feature off and you can more easily moderate the videos your child watches before they see it:

- Click on your profile image in the top right
- Select 'Privacy and settings'.
- Click on 'Accessibility'.
- Tap on 'Video autoplay' to uncheck it.

Change direct message settings

To prevent your child from receiving private (or 'direct' messages from anyone, follow these simple steps:

- On the top menu, click on either an icon with three horizontal lines or your profile picture. Next, tap 'Settings and privacy'.
- Click on 'Privacy and safety'
- Next to 'Receive messages from anyone', uncheck the box.

Mute Hashtags and phrases you don't want your child to see

To block certain words, hashtags or phrases from your child's timeline or notifications (eg. swear words, inappropriate phrases, emojis etc.) do the following steps. This will not block you child from searching for these words/phrases/hashtags, but will stop them appearing in their timeline:

- Click on the bell icon (Notifications.)
- Tap on the gear icon.
- Click on 'muted words'.
- Tap on the plus icon.
- Type in a word or hashtag you want to block (you can only input one thing at a time).
- Enable this in your timeline and notifications.
- Specify whether this applies to just people who don't follow your child or anyone.
- Input how long you want this to apply. ('Forever' is probably best.)
- Tap 'Save'.

Use login verification

To ensure that only you and your child can log in to the Twitter account, login verification is a useful security feature. As well as entering a password, users will be sent a six digit code to their phone which will have to be inputted alongside their password. If you already have a phone associated with your account, follow these steps:

- Tap your profile picture and 'Settings and privacy' in the top menu
- Click on 'account', then 'security'. At this point, you'll be prompted to add a phone number if you haven't already.
- Press on the 'Login verification' switch to turn it on.
- Tap 'confirm' and 'start' after reading the instructions.
- Enter your password and then press 'verify'.
- Press 'Send code'.
- Enter the code sent to your phone and press 'Submit'.

Location sharing

We strongly advise that children do not share their location on Twitter. To disable Twitter from knowing your precise location, follow these steps:

- Tap your profile picture or an icon with three horizontal lines in the top menu and go into 'Settings and privacy'.
- Go into 'General' and click on 'Location and proxy'.
- Next to 'Location', uncheck the box.

Look for the blue tick verification

When your child follows celebrities or public figures on Twitter, it's important for parents to make sure they are authentic and not fake accounts or impersonators. A good way to do this is by checking if they've been 'verified' and this is shown with a blue tick next to their username. While not every celebrity/brand has this, the majority do, so it is important to check who your child is following.

'Display media that may contain 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 which states the content is sensitive. You then have the option to view it or not. This gives a chance for you to moderate potentially harmful images/videos before your child sees it. This is on by default, but to check, head over to your Settings > Settings and Privacy. Under the 'Tweet Media' heading, ensure that 'Display media that may contain sensitive content' is unticked. 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 this by tapping the down arrow on the tweet and clicking 'Report Tweet'. Twitter should then inspect the tweet and decide whether they deem it to be 'sensitive'.

Blocking accounts

If a particular account is causing your child trouble on Twitter, whether it's cyber-bullying or simply upsetting images, you can simply block them which will prevent them from viewing, messaging or following your child and vice versa. To block an account, follow these steps:

- Go onto the profile you want to block
- Tap an icon with three vertical dots.
- Click 'Block' and then tap 'Block' again to confirm.

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/managing-your-account/two-factor-authentication> | <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/advanced-twitter-mute-options> | <https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/how-to-make-twitter-private-and-public> | <https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/public-and-protected-tweets> | <https://www.statista.com/statistics/493795/twitter-most-retweeted-posts/> | [Smallbiztrends.com](https://smallbiztrends.com/2013/08/what-is-hashtag-hijacking-2.html) | <https://smallbiztrends.com/2013/08/what-is-hashtag-hijacking-2.html> | <http://christiededman.com/5-things-you-should-know-about-hashtags-your-kids/>