



SOCIAL MEDIA 101

What is social media?

Social media platforms are online spaces where people can connect with others. Social media allows us to stay in touch with friends and whānau all around the world, hear from people we admire (including celebrities, sportspeople, politicians, activists and other ‘influencers’), share our own thoughts and content, watch videos, have discussions and play games. Each platform has its own algorithm that determines what content will be shown, how often and when.

What are algorithms?

Algorithms are complicated, but the simplest way to think of them is as recipes for computers and online platforms, an ever-changing set of rules and instructions they follow to **pick the content they’ll show you to keep your attention and to keep you engaged**. Every social media platform has its own complicated (and secret) “recipe books”. They monitor where you are, what you watch, the times you’re online, who you interact with, your friends and their behaviour, what you post, what you’ve liked before, what’s popular with other users like you and add all this to their recipes.

Is social media good for young people?

Social media is now a normal part of life for most young people. It’s important to teach them how to use it so they can be safe and well online. It can help young people stay connected to friends, be informed and entertained, express their creativity and will increasingly be important for young people in their future careers. However, it can sometimes also harm young people’s mental health, expose them to risks of abuse and cyber-bullying, pose privacy risks and contribute to the spread of misinformation. Sometimes humans are the ones causing harm on social media and other times algorithms are feeding users content that can be harmful. Most young people will navigate the challenges of social media wisely and thoughtfully, but guidance and encouragement from supportive adults will help them overcome these challenges and seek help when they need it.

How can I make sure my young people are safe and happy on social media?

- Talk to them about what social media platforms they use, how many profiles/accounts they have (it's quite common to have more than one on the same platform), how they feel after they spend time on different platforms and whether any changes need to be made.
- Make sure your young person knows they can play an active role in making their social media spaces enjoyable by engaging with content they like, trust and want to see more of and doing their best to ignore, unfollow and block content they don't like or trust. It's not a perfect method – algorithms will always find ways to push things through, but it's a good start.
- Stay present and involved with their online life, setting good boundaries and stepping back when they're ready.
- Search online for the tools you need to adjust your young person's privacy settings together, talk together about who they're interacting with (following/friending/playing with/watching).
- Get to know the social media platforms your young person uses (join them yourself and explore them) and find out whether they have family controls you and your young person might agree to use together.
- Reach out for support when you need it – from Netsafe, your young person's school, other parents and whānau, older siblings and cousins.

- Stay in touch and up to date with social media platforms – they're always changing. This is the best way to ensure you're able to support your young people and help them to stay safe.
- Be aware many young people will have multiple profiles on the same platform, with different friends/followers on each profile. This is common and not usually cause for alarm, but if their social media has become unsafe for any reason, then they will need to review all of their profiles (with or without your support).

Should I ban my young person from social media?

In most cases, no. If they're old enough to be using the platform, it's almost always better to help them use social media safely and openly. The time to teach them is now – you don't want them using it in secret (and unable to come to you if something goes wrong), and you don't want to raise an adult who doesn't have the skills and understanding they need to be safe and successful online. Help them set limits on the time they spend online, ensure they know they can talk to you if anything goes wrong, find the tools and guidance that work best for you and your young person.