

Social media, body image and the pressure to look 'just right'

Social media can be a positive tool to help young people develop. But constantly chasing 'likes' can make them feel insecure. Psychologist **Dr Linda Papadopoulos** is here to help you find the right balance

78%
of 10-12-year-olds in the UK have social media accounts

49%
of under-13s have a Facebook account

41%
are on Instagram

40%
aged 8-17 years said they have received negative comments on a photo they've posted

35%
of boys and

51%
of girls aged 8-17 worry about how attractive they look when they share photos online



Dr Linda Papadopoulos is an ambassador for Internet Matters. For information on how to keep children safe online, visit www.internetmatters.org



Many social media platforms offer brilliant and exciting services. They remove the physical barriers to social connections and allow us to share things that matter to us.

They help young people explore new ideas, and have the power to motivate people and action social change. We want our children to tap into these positives.

However, social media now acts as an outlet for defining who we are, and as a tool for comparing our lives with others' – which can have a direct effect on self-worth and self-esteem.

Selfie culture means young people are 'fixing themselves' by editing and re-editing their images to get maximum approval. But, more often than not, they cannot

live up to their own creations, and their images are often driven by achieving unrealistic social media hashtags, such as #bikinibridge or #thighgap.

It's not a new phenomenon to be concerned about how others see us, but the ability to ask for opinions and call on our peers for constant feedback is. This preoccupation with how other people react to what we post can lead young people to feel unsure about their value.

Constant posting may also open them up to receiving more negative comments online than compliments. They are also performing to an audience they don't necessarily know, which leaves them vulnerable.

So, while there are many benefits to social media, it's important that we discuss with our kids the importance of using it in a healthy way.



What you can do

We need to talk to our children about the impact of seeking approval from the online world, and comparing their lives to the edited versions of other people's lives.

We must help them mentally disconnect from the constructed identities they've created online and allow them to gain the freedom to know who they really are.

As parents, we can help remind them not to put all their self-esteem eggs in one basket, and

to focus on other attributes other than their appearance.

We also need to stress the potential effects that constant communication can have on their sleep and their health, and help them make more informed choices about physically disconnecting by switching off at night.

We must value their mental health as much as their physical wellbeing, and help them learn to use social media as a tool for growth and development.

Never too young to boost body confidence

Minnie and Max Are OK! is a lovely book aimed at promoting self-esteem in children from three to seven years old.

"Celebrity culture, social networking and the rise of the filtered selfie is impacting on our young people," says co-author Nicky Hutchinson. "We need to start building body confidence as young as possible."

Minnie and Max Are OK! by Chris Calland and Nicky Hutchinson is published by Jessica Kingsley.



WhatsApp

What's it good for? Chatting with friends, arranging meet-ups, helping mates with homework.
Cause for concern? Could be used to bully, belittle or freeze someone out.



Instagram

What's it good for? Sharing images of people and special moments, following celebrities, showing off your creativity.
Cause for concern? Pressure to look good; unreal expectations of beauty or body image; negative comments.



Snapchat

What's it good for? Sharing photos, having a laugh with funny filters, building friendships.
Cause for concern? Ethereal nature of Snaps means people may share unwise images thinking they will disappear, but they can be screen shot and saved and shared by others.