

Social Media: What is the right age to allow access?



One of the most common questions we receive at Family Zone is 'How old should my child be before I allow them to use Social Media?'

We sat down with three leading Cyber Experts who have all shared their opinions on what age they feel kids should be allowed access to Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

Plus, they discuss a few other social media platforms that they suggest parents should be very wary of. The experts are;

- Pete Brown, an experienced IT educator at a leading WA private school
- Dr Kristy Goodwin, an academic and author specialising in children's digital safety
- Kim Maslin, a digital technologies educator

Facebook

Cyber expert age recommendations;

- Pete Brown - 13+
- Dr Kristy - 13+
- Kim Maslin - 13+

Kim and Pete agree age 13+, because this is Facebook's required minimum age by law. Dr Kristy also agrees that 13 would be the absolute minimum, however 'It's difficult to prescribe a precise age limit as kids need to have social and emotional skills to cope with the demands of social media. For some kids, this is 13 years and for other kids it may be 15 years. We also need to adhere to the legal age requirements because if we tell our kids it's okay to set up an account before they're 13 years of age, we're sending them a powerful message that it's okay to break the law and that's a difficult moral position to come back from' she explains.

Instagram

Cyber expert age recommendations;

- Pete Brown - 16+
- Dr Kristy - 13+
- Kim Maslin - 13+

Dr Kristy and Kim both suggest age 13, however they strongly urge parents to monitor their kids use of Instagram given the amount of inappropriate content available. Dr Kristy also says parents need to 'help their children understand that their identity and sense of worth is NOT determined by the number of likes,

comments and shares'. Pete suggests 16+ 'As the app contains a lot of pornography that kids shouldn't be able to look at and after discussing it with my Year 12's, they agreed'.

Snapchat

Cyber expert age recommendations;

- Pete Brown- 16+
- Dr Kristy - 16+
- Kim Maslin - 16+

Dr Kristy suggests that the minimum age depends on each child's level of maturity 'Adolescents' brains are wired to be impulsive. Their prefrontal cortex which is the part of the brain responsible to managing their impulses isn't fully developed until early 20s for females and late 20s for males' she explains. Pete suggested '16+ due to the security risks, anonymity, Geotagging issues and graphic content. Adult content posted as stories such as relationships etc'. Kim also agrees that 16 is the minimum age for Snapchat.

Apps that should be banned for use by young people

The cyber experts have also outlined a few apps that are very popular amongst kids and teens, which they believe should be banned entirely for kids 17 and under;

- Yellow - Similar to Tinder, except aimed at teens
- Omegle - Graphic live webcam chat
- Sarahah - Can be used for anonymous bullying
- Whisper - Inappropriate content
- Live.ly - Live video content with minimal censoring

Each of our Cyber Experts agree that whilst parents can follow the suggested minimum age provided by law for each social media platform, the right age is very much dependant on your child's level of emotional maturity. 'Some kids are more equipped than others to deal with the psychological impacts of using social media and it's important that parents guide them through the process' says Dr Kristy. Pete

agrees 'It's important to do your research on each social media platform before allowing your kids access, find out how it's used and what it does - then you can determine if your child is ready'.

Conversation starters to help determine if your kids are ready for social media

- 'Do you know what the app is used for?'
- 'How do you plan to use it?'
- 'What sort of things will you post on the app?'

If they display a lack of understanding around what the apps are used for, or are vague when discussing how they'll use the app then it is fair to say they aren't ready for it. Our Cyber Experts strongly urge parents to research an app before allowing kids to use it.