

Awareness of catfishing

It is important that parents are aware of the dangers that involves catfishing. Research has been conducted and has been found that most children will have communicated with someone online that they do not know.

What is catfishing?

Catfishing occurs when a cybercriminal creates a fake online profile to deceive victims into believing they know or are forming a connection with the individual. These perpetrators adopt a false identity and often go to great lengths to make their deception convincing, ensuring their target fully believes in their fabricated persona.

Why do people catfish?

The goal of catfishing is often to lure victims into an intimate relationship, but it can also be part of a larger social engineering scheme aimed at tricking individuals into giving away money. Once the perpetrator has built trust and established a relationship with the victim, they may request money under various pretences, such as asking for a loan, funds for travel, or other financial support.

Concerns and worries:

When someone is carrying out a catfishing scam, they typically have a specific goal in mind, which can vary widely. To avoid detection, they often aim to progress quickly, encouraging the victim to develop a relationship faster than they may feel comfortable with. Additionally, catfishers may steal and use the victim's photos, often taken from social media platforms like Facebook or Instagram, to further their deception and make their false identity more convincing.

Top tips for parents:Monitoring and conversation:

Parents should encourage their child to speak openly with them or another trusted adult about anything online that makes them feel uncomfortable, especially if they have been contacted by someone they don't know. It's crucial to remind children never to accept friend requests or communicate with strangers online and to seek guidance if they are unsure.

Parents should actively monitor their child's internet usage to stay informed about who they are interacting with, particularly if the child seems secretive about their online activities. Having regular conversations about online safety is essential, including discussing what information is safe to share and what should remain private. This helps protect against cybercriminals who may exploit personal details to manipulate or harm the child.

Privacy and security:

Parents should regularly go through their child's security and privacy setting, so that they can ensure that the child's profiles are set to private. This means that only friends will be able to see their profile and can contact them. It can be a beneficial to go through the child's friend list with them, to see if they know a certain person and can they trust them. In some

cases, parents will find it difficult to stop their teenagers from talking to new people that they have met online.

In these situations, parents should encourage them to ask lots of questions rather than relying on information that has been given to them, from someone's online profile. It is important to make sure that young people know not to arrange to meet up with people that they have met online. This also includes sending them money or sharing other personal details.

Be alert and report:

Parents and their children will need to be aware of how to report and to block accounts on all social media platforms that the child or young person has used. Reporting and blocking the stranger that is friends with your child can prevent them from using their photograph for their own advantage, this can be done by checking google image search to make sure that the image has not been used by a stranger. Parents can also upload a photo and google will then show related image that may have been used on other websites. This will help to make sure that no one is using your child's photo. If this is ever the case, then you would need to report the user directly to the platform. If you suspect that fraud, illegal or inappropriate activity has taken place, you will need to contact the authorities.

How can catfishing affect children, teenagers and adults?

Teenagers and young adults often struggle internally with whether to speak up, fearing embarrassment or getting into trouble. This can result in them suffering in silence. Children, teenagers, and young people may find themselves in situations where their safety is at risk, particularly if they come into contact with individuals who are deceptive or have harmful intentions. Such experiences can deeply impact victims, leaving them feeling isolated or with low self-esteem—vulnerabilities that perpetrators often exploit.

If parents are concerned about their child, teenager, or young adult, it is important to encourage open communication and seek professional help, such as support from healthcare services, when needed.

Source:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

<https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/professionals/guidance/thinkuknow-parents-and-carers/>

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/parents-and-carers>

<https://www.internetmatters.org/>

You can visit the Safeguard Board for Northern Ireland's [Online Safety Hub](#) website for lots of advice and support about how to keep your child safer online. It is split into two sections, one for adults and one for [young people](#). It signposts to local support if help is needed.