Gooseberry Parent

Twitter

What is Twitter?

A free, online news and social networking website where users post messages up to 140 characters long, known as "Tweets". Twitter can be downloaded as an app to digital mobile devices or accessed through its website interface. Twitter is one of the ten most visited websites in the world and is popular with all age groups.

Twitter offers users a real-time experience and enables them to view comments and updates from a variety of different people. The speed at which information can be shared on Twitter can be overwhelming, as users are able to comment on Tweets and re-tweet them. Twitter can be challenging to manage and it keep on top of updates and posted Tweets.

Key Features of Twitter to be aware of

- To use Twitter, a user needs to create an account using an existing email address. Registration also requires creation of a user name and password.
- Each registered Twitter user has their own home page, where their user name is displayed and they can enter biographical and location information.
- Users also have their own 'timelines', which display all of their Tweets they have posted themselves, as well their re-tweets and favourites.
- Users can post Tweets about anything they like, such as their thoughts, status updates or links to other media such as news articles, photos or videos. Each Tweet is limited to a maximum of 140 characters, this can make it a challenge to fully express a thought with such a limited number of characters.
- Tweets can be made through the app itself or from mobile phones via SMS sent to 40404.
- Tweets from public accounts are visible to all, and can be viewed by registered and non-registered users. All Twitter accounts are automatically set to 'public', though this can be changed to 'private' in the app's settings.
- Registered users may 're-tweet' other users' Tweets, which places them on their own timeline whilst retaining the username of the user who posted the original Tweet.
- Users can also 'favourite' Tweets by clicking on the heart button underneath the Tweet itself.
- Users may 'follow' other public accounts by clicking the 'follow' button on the account's home page.
- To follow a private account, the user must send a request to the account they wish to follow. The owner of the account can then either accept or ignore the follow request. A safer way to manage your Twitter account is to make it private.
- Registered users can send direct messages to other users who follow them. Direct messages are private and cannot be read by other users.
- Blue ticks are for official accounts, usually belonging to famous persons, brands or organisations, and indicate that the account has been verified by Twitter as genuine.
- Twitter uses characters like @ to identify users and # to indicate a trend and to enable users to add their Tweet to a specific trend. For example, #onlinesafety.

Enjoying Twitter safely and managing the risks

- **Communicate your expectations** – As a parent, it is your responsibility to make clear what is and is not acceptable online behaviour. You need to accept that allowing your child access to online apps like these, requires trust and clear boundaries, for their own wellbeing.

- **Children can Tweet, but should they**? – A Twitter account is linked to Facebook and account holders should be 13 years or older. Twitter has no way of monitoring the age of account holders and assume that they meet the recommended age. Twitter can be difficult to manage and careful consideration should be given to whether it is an appropriate app for a child.

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KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE ONLINE

- **Signing Up** – Encourage your child to keep log in details and passwords secure and share them with you. Users should be 13 to sign up for Twitter, though they are not required to enter an age upon registration.

- **User Names** – Encourage your child to choose an original and creative username that avoids giving away their own. User names can be changed at any time by going into the 'Edit Profile' section of your Twitter home page.

- **Privacy** – Encourage your child to select the 'Protect my Tweets' option in the privacy settings of their account. This feature ensures that only approved users will be able to see your child's Tweets and they will not be publicly visible.

- **Discoverability** - Consider de-selecting the options that allow others to find your child's account through their email address and phone number. This is found in the privacy settings.

- **Following** – Encourage your child to follow accounts that interest them and to steer clear of any personal accounts belonging to people that they do not know in real life, as well as those that contain adult content.

- **Location Settings** – Ensure that these are turned off, so that your child's account cannot be tracked to their location. Remind your child not to share their location on their home page and keep their personal information private.

- **Age Screening** - This feature enables Twitter to target advertising for suitable age groups. Prior to following certain brands, the user must enter their birth date. Encourage your child to enter their real birth date to avoid receiving age-inappropriate adverts. Read Twitter's policy on use of personal data to help inform a decision to share personal information.

- **Keeping safer on Twitter** – Log on to www.Twitter.com and explore the Safety area for tips and instructions on securing a Twitter account.

- **Tweets** –Encourage your child to think carefully about the content of their tweets. Tweets can be deleted by the user themselves, but re-tweets cannot and can be saved to the pages of other users.

- **Muting** – Encourage your child to use Twitter's 'mute' feature to remove any unwanted Tweets from their timelines. Muted accounts will not know that they have muted.

- **Blocking** – Encourage your child to make use of Twitter's 'block' feature if another user posts offensive Tweets or attempts to use Twitter to bully or harass them.

- **Reporting underage users** - If your child creates a Twitter account and they are under the age of 13, it is possible to report the account to Twitter and the account will be deactivated. This will not prevent a child setting up another account but may prove enough of a deterrent.

- **Having the difficult conversation** – Educate your child in the correct way to communicate online. Avoid writing anything inappropriate or entering any 'wrong' conversations. Explain why your child should not send rude pictures. Talk this through with them and explain the possible consequences and how much trouble they can get into both legally and personally.

- **Tweeting is a skill** – It takes skill to condense a meaningful comment or thought into 140 characters. Even the most skilled struggle at times.

- **Add your child** – If your child is using Twitter ensure that their account is private and consider following them. You will be able see every Tweet they make and will be included in re-tweets. If you don't like what you see, you can then discuss this and advise them accordingly.

- **Model positive and safe online behaviour** – Safe behaviour online starts with us as adults. Following basic safety suggestions and demonstrating these will help your child to follow in your footsteps. You also have a better chance of staying safer online yourself.

- **Do your homework** – Take time to read Privacy Policies and Terms of Use to find out how app developers use personal information. You can also learn about acceptable use of the app and find advice on securing online accounts and set privacy settings on devices.

- **Download and use the app** – Having a go yourself can help you understand how the app works and how to secure an account.

- **Read the reviews** for the app, this will give you an idea what other people are saying about it and what potential risks there may be.

- **Making an informed decision** – You are a parent and you will know your child enough to decide on allowing them to use Twitter or any other social networking app. Twitter is designed to be a fun and appealing app and allows access to a variety of different people online, it is not difficult to see why it is so popular. By following the steps outlined above you have a better opportunity to ensure that your child is protected online.

Remember the World Wide Web should be a fun, creative and liberating experience for all, but take the right steps to make it a safe one!