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Safeguarding in a digital world



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The online world brings so much to our dance schools. Social media helps us to advertise classes, connect with families, showcase what we do and reach a wide audience but how do we navigate this online world safely and protect ourselves and our students?

Social media brings risk both for teachers and those we teach.

These risks can include experiences of; bullying, harassment, exploitation, grooming, discrimination, stalking, hacking and impersonation.

There are also risks around misinformation; being told things that are not true, that are unsafe and could potentially put people at risk, that could lead to extreme views, radicalised behaviours, or exploitation.

Young people can find upsetting, illegal or inappropriate imagery online which can affect their mental health and emotional wellbeing and they can regularly access information by accident that leaves them feeling scared.

It is important to explain that social media companies do try to prevent harmful or illegal content and for most of us, most of the time, the powerful algorithms they use send us helpful and relevant information relating to our hobbies, interests, and communities. However, people do post things on social media that can be very damaging to our young people, for example groups that focus on encouraging self-harm, eating disorders and suicide. Sometimes an algorithm can pick up these potential threats to our young people but not always because these topics are nuanced, complex and difficult to understand. A computer cannot work out these subtle and complex issues.

Most social media companies then also employ People. People who are paid to sit and check the internet for dangerous, damaging, illegal, predatory, and generally unsafe or inappropriate material but this is still not 100% accurate because what

I perceive as inappropriate may seem perfectly ok to another person, it's a judgement call not an exact science. Safeguarding is never clear cut. It is always complex and full of different interpretations and different possibilities.

Millions of people post online. This means damaging and disturbing images will appear regardless of our best efforts to prevent them. As an army of social media posters, we post such volumes of content it will often be the case that images are online and have been viewed, potentially thousands of times before they are taken down. The world of social media works at a fast pace, and this is true of all types of content.

We cannot protect young people from the internet, there are things out there that we cannot control, just as there are in rest of their lives, we cannot control for them. We can however teach and support so that they are entering that environment as well equipped to face those challenges as possible. We can answer questions honestly, talk about ways to keep safe, be a safe person for them to talk to if they ever encounter anything that worries them, and we can follow our safeguarding policies and procedures if concerns do arise.





Unsplash Franck

We can also role model what a good and safe online environment looks like by controlling our online spaces and making them as safe as possible. We can do this by:

- Password protecting all our accounts to make sure they can never be misused by anyone else
- Ensuring at least two members of staff have access to all accounts, including Facebook groups for transparency and to avoid any miscommunications
- Make sure your Designated Safeguarding Lead is also following your social media posts so they can support with information and advice, they may notice something that you don't.
- Make sure your online activity aligns with your face-to-face activity and day to day code of conduct, be the same in all environments, allow people to know what to expect from you, always keep it professional and friendly.
- Make all online activity fit for purpose, if it's not about your school, don't post it.
- Be professional and appropriate in all your communication both online and face to face, it can be easy on social media to slip into a less professional conversation, it feels different when it's not face to face and it's really important, we don't let that happen.
- Do not post enough to identify a child for example don't post their full name and the school they attend together, this is good practice for everyone – all children and all adults including yourself, do not allow people to profile you from your social media accounts
- Always get consent for all photographs and videos and remember that consent can be withdrawn at any time and can be partial, for example I do consent to my photo being taken but not to it being used on social media.
- Ensure photos taken for social media purposes are stored securely, preferably on an external hard drive backing up to a secure cloud service such as Google Drive, iCloud, ensuring that multi factor authentication is enabled. Photos should not be left on a portable device such as a phone

- Try to use the most appropriate platforms and learn about risks associated with various apps but please be aware that child exploitation and grooming DOES happen and in significant numbers on mainstream apps such as the ones many of you use day to day
- Do not communicate directly with children – remember it is the parent / carer who is your customer – this is a good rule for everything not just social media.
- Do not friend or follow children directly
- Always choose the most professional channel of communication e.g., send an email rather than WhatsApp
- Have a separate page / profile for your school for public information. Keep your business and yourselves separate.
- Allow yourself a private life, if we are asking our children not to over share for safety it is important, we role model this too.
- Create a social media policy for staff and parents

These points are all covered in the IDTA social media and online teaching policy template to help plan how best to use social media in our schools whilst safeguarding our students.

This document is in the IDTA Members Area along with additional safeguarding

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information at: <https://www.idta.co.uk/members-hub/running-a-dance-school/safeguarding/>

Useful Links:

<https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/teachers-and-professionals>

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/professionals-online-safety-helpline>

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/teachers-and-school-staff/professional-reputation>

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

If you are ever worried about a child or young person's safety, online write down your concerns then contact:

Safeguarding@idta.co.uk for professional advice

Your local Authority Safeguarding team to raise a referral

NSPCC on 0800 800 5000 or help@nspcc.org.uk

Professionals, parents, and children can all raise a report to a CEOP child protection advisor www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/

Children and young people can contact: Childline 0800 1111