



# AUTISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

## Helping Your Child to Navigate Social Networking Sites

Presented by: Dr. Taryn Wood, School Psychologist

Marie Dalli, Speech and Language Pathologist

# Social Media/Social Networking



# WHAT'S OUT THERE?



# NAVIGATING THE OPTIONS...

The most popular social networks for older children/adolescents include:

Facebook - A social networking website that lets users create their own profiles, share status updates, pictures, videos and chat with other users.

Instagram - Photo-sharing social network which allows users to alter photos, upload them to Instagram and share them to other social networking sites. Photos can be sent directly to specific users. A video feature is also available.

YouTube - Video sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. You can create and upload your own videos to share with others. You can comment on videos.

Twitter - A social network that lets users send and read "tweets" messages limited to 140 characters

Tumblr - A social networking site where users can post blogs and follow other people's blogs. Some of the content on this site contains sexual or pornographic images.

Ask.fm - A social networking site, based in Latvia, through which users can ask other users questions, with the option of anonymity.

Snapchat - A photo-sharing app where users can send photos or videos to their friends. These will display on screen for up to ten seconds before being deleted, although it is possible to take screenshots of messages and download other apps designed to capture and save Snapchat content.

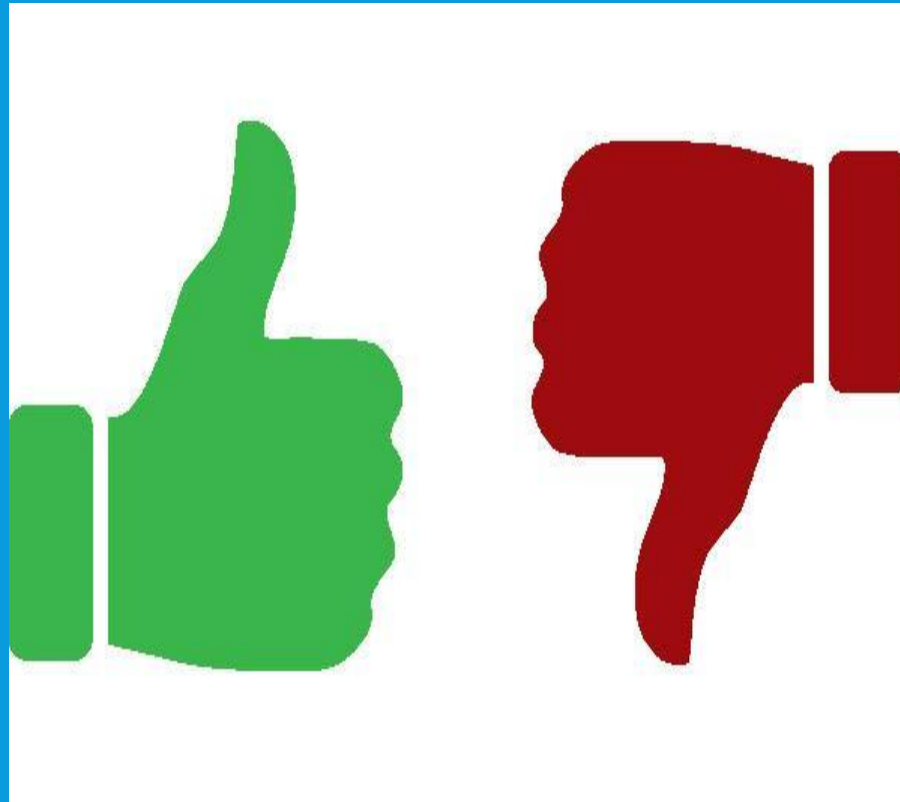
# NAVIGATING THE OPTIONS...

## Social networking sites specifically for individuals with Autism:

- [WeAreAutism.org](http://WeAreAutism.org)
  - Allows individuals to share, talk, and communicate in a user-led social network for individuals, family members, and members of the community.
- [WrongPlanet.net](http://WrongPlanet.net)
  - A web community designed for individuals (and parents/professionals of those) with Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD, and other neurological differences. A discussion forum is available for members to communicate with one another. There is also a blogging feature and a chat room for real-time communication.
- [AutismSpeaks.ning.org](http://AutismSpeaks.ning.org)
  - An online support forum for individuals on the spectrum.



# PROS AND CONS







- Impulsive texts/emails/posts can have consequences and leave a permanent digital footprint
- Perseveration
- Limitations of social opportunities
- Exposure to inappropriate material
- Exposure to predators
- Cyberbullying
- Social anxiety/unreasonable expectations
- Extensive “secret rules” for social networking exist







- Using social media can reduce feelings of isolation and increase a sense of community
- Interactions via social media can be easier than face-to-face interactions
- ASD individuals can find personally relevant resources and information when involved in online communities
- Access to support groups
- Connection to others with shared interests
- Opportunities to practice interactions to improve real-life communication skills

# GAMING AND SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

## What is online gaming?

- Can range from task/mission based activities to sports themed games
- Traditional formats include XBox, PlayStation, Nintendo
- Online games are played on the internet via a computer console, mobile device, or application
- Online gaming allows players to communicate with other gamers



# GAMING AND SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

## What types of online games are there?

- Web Games and Apps

Games that can be played on the internet through specific websites, or through apps that can be downloaded to mobile phones.

Includes games played via social media services (i.e., Facebook) which allow players to connect with friends

- Console Games

Games that are played via entertainment consoles (i.e., XBox, Playstation, Nintendo)

Consoles are connected to TVs and games can be purchased in stores or downloaded online

# GAMING AND SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

- Mobile Games

Games that can be downloaded to your mobile phone

Many are free to play, initially (parents can de-activate in-game purchases)

- Handheld Games

Devices like IPADs or Nintendo DSIs also host online gaming



# GAMING AND SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

## Risks of Online Gaming

- **Inappropriate Content**

May contain violent or sexual images

- **Pay to Play**

Free to download but additional functions can be purchased

Can be very easy to inadvertently run up bills

- **Multi-Player Gaming**

Multiplayer mode users can play other gamers from anywhere in the world

Some games allow users to send messages to each other via text or audio modes

Players can experience abuse/harassment from other gamers, particularly when emotions are high after a competitive game



# GAMING AND SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

## Tips for Keeping Your Child Safe

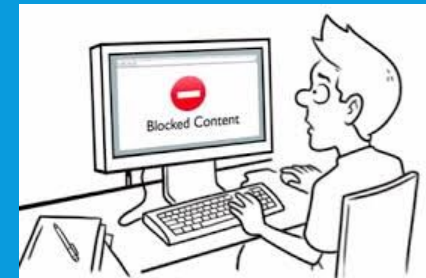
- Check the age rating and consider your child's *developmental age level*
- Advise your child not to share personal details online or in their profiles
- Encourage your child to play fairly and treat other gamers with respect
- Use family safety settings
  - Information on parental controls for the most popular consoles can be found here:

Xbox – [xbox.com/en-IE/parental-controls](https://xbox.com/en-IE/parental-controls)

PlayStation – [support.us.playstation.com/app](https://support.us.playstation.com/app)

Nintendo – [nintendo.co.uk/Support/Parents/](https://nintendo.co.uk/Support/Parents/)

- Set time limits



# GAMING AND SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY

Pan European Game Information (age ratings, game reviews, etc.)

<https://pegi.info/page/parental-control-tools>



# HELPING YOUR CHILD TO USE TECHNOLOGY IN A SOCIAL WAY

A recent study published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* found that although individuals with ASD are often preoccupied with television, computers, and video gamers (screen based media), the majority (64.2%) spent most of their free time using non-social media (television, video games), while only 13.2% spent time on social media (email, internet chatting)

# HELPING YOUR CHILD TO USE TECHNOLOGY IN A SOCIAL WAY

1. Choose the right time of day
2. Monitor your child's account and delete any hurtful comments you find
3. Monitor and filter friends and contacts, within reason
4. Allow your child to have privacy about their conditions and to choose what they want to share
5. Explore many social platforms until your child find the one (or 2, 3, ...) that they like the best



# PREPARING YOUR CHILDREN

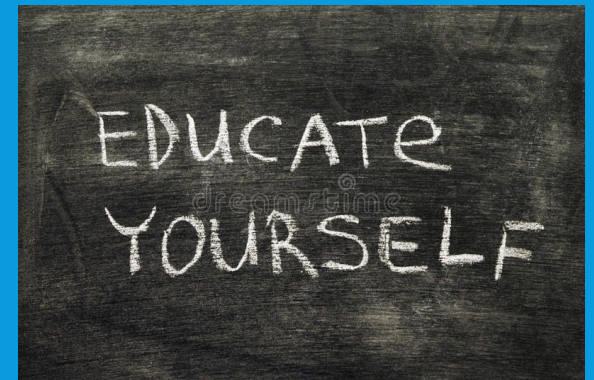
Know what types of media your children have access to

What apps are they downloading?

What websites are they visiting?

Check the history on devices

Stay involved and informed!



# PREPARING YOUR CHILDREN



Talk often with your child about:

The nature of posts online (they last forever!)

Online manners

What is appropriate and safe behavior

Consequences of making bad choices online

# PREPARING YOUR CHILDREN

## Set and communicate clear expectations

- Consider making a contract for use

- Set limits - when and where can media be used and for how long

- What privacy, if any, can they expect

- What do you expect of them

- Electronic free zones - only using devices in communal rooms



# PREPARING YOUR CHILDREN



## Consider....

Gadget free time, limited data plans, parental monitoring of devices

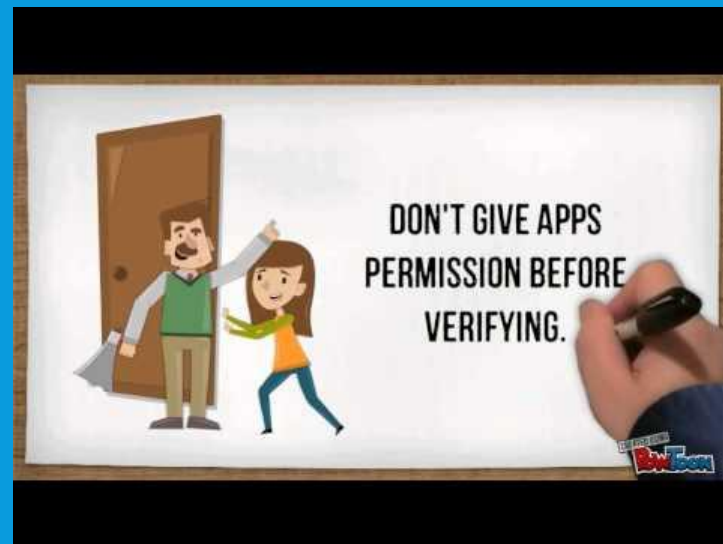
Requiring opting out of notifications

Requiring your child to share password with you

Wi-Fi router to turn off access at your discretion

Electronic free zones - only using devices in communal rooms

# PREPARING YOUR CHILDREN



# THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ASD

- Social skill groups for ASD children and adolescents need to reflect the changing nature of interactions (i.e., exchanging Instagram name or Snapchat code first instead of phone numbers)
- Social media and computer based communication technologies are making it possible for many people with ASD to enter the workforce more productively

Several large tech companies are intentionally tapping into the Autism community to access valuable skills that are in demand

Software company SAP launched “Autism at Work” in 2013, with the goal of employing 650 colleagues on the Autism Spectrum by 2020

- Utilizing computer based communication can help alleviate some of the challenges people with Autism may have in the workplace and allow them to better share their knowledge and skills