



ThinkUKnow e-Newsletter - Volume 4, Issue 8

In this issue of the ThinkUKnow e-newsletter, we're going to look at an issue which lies at the heart of anti-social online behaviour - the allure of anonymity. We're going to focus on a few apps and sites which promote anonymous behaviour, as well as some general tips on how to ensure we only communicate with those we know and trust.

The allure of anonymity

Behaving differently when no one else is watching is nothing new to the digital age, just more pronounced. It's an extension of the "what would you do if you were invisible?" question, as there are opportunities for you to be somewhat invisible over the internet. Take any teen movie from the past 40 years, if a teenage boy were suddenly to become invisible, his first stop was the girls' locker room. A few intriguing incidents later and the moral of the story was always the same, being invisible is a lonely life.

So how can we translate the invisible person story into a digital environment and encourage ethical decision-making? We can look at it from two angles, the first being that there is always a way to trace who said what online (difficult at times, but possible), and secondly to encourage empathy

Ask.fm

Ask.fm is a social Q&A app created by a company in Latvia. It allows users to ask and answer questions using their public profiles or anonymously. Despite claiming that the site should not be used "to ask questions that are mean or hurtful," the company knows full well that its service can be used to cause harm. In the modern day version of "enter at your own

Time2Talk

In this section we look at ways to start talking with children and young people about their use of technology.

Do you use any apps where you or others can be anonymous?

Why is behaving anonymously so appealing?

Who do you share your username or account details with?

How could we prevent bullying through these services?

How do we encourage ethical use?

1. Restrict anonymous correspondence
Many young people begin using these services to have fun with their friends, so to keep the experience an enjoyable one, we encourage users to restrict correspondence from anonymous users. On ask.fm, this can be done by accessing "Settings>Privacy>Do not allow anonymous questions"
2. Only share account information with people you trust
Only letting people you trust to know your SnapChat username, Qooh.me account or ask.fm profile can limit unwanted communication from

risk," the app's terms and conditions state that "Ask.fm shall have no liability to you for content that you may find objectionable, obscene or in poor taste."

Qooh.me

Qooh.me is a website developed by a company in South Africa which encourages users to "Flirt/chat and be random." It allows users to answer anonymous questions asked by others (who do not need a Qooh.me account) and share these answers via Facebook and/or twitter. In a similar fashion to Ask.fm, it discourages abusive behaviour whilst simultaneously warning that "by using the Service, you may be exposed to content that might be offensive, harmful, inaccurate or otherwise inappropriate.

others. Broadcasting this account information on your other social media accounts isn't a great idea either. Treat them like your mobile phone number, only give them to people you know and trust.

3. Block and report
Most services have block and report functions for objectionable content. We should encourage all users to know how to use these functions and not to wait for someone else to report the incident. As per our other cyberbullying guidance, it's a good idea to keep a screenshot or copy of the objectionable content before deleting it, just in case it needs to be reported to police as a serious incident.
4. Encourage users to think before they post
Once something is shared digitally, it can be publicly and permanently available. All users need to think before they post, consider the impact of their words on others and ask themselves "would I still say that if everyone knew it was me?"

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