

## Persuasive Essay

### *Should children (under 13) be allowed on social networking sites?*

In today's society social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter play a huge part in our lives. These websites are fantastic for communicating with friends and family that we don't often see. They are a great way of connecting with new people who have the same interests as you. They are also a great way to make new friends or find old ones. These websites, however, are not for children and with technology becoming increasingly easier to access, children are getting sucked into these sites younger and younger.

Studies show that children who are on social media sites show signs of behavioural problems. Children who are on Facebook happen to be more narcissistic, antisocial and aggressive than those not on the site. These websites are also known to affect their social skills as most kids would rather text or Instant Message than have a face-to-face conversation. Baroness Susan Greenfields, an Oxford neuroscientist said, "Kids are detracted from learning to communicate in the real world. There are reports from teachers that social networking is affecting kids' comprehension levels. Also, if kids communicate primarily through the screen, they do not learn the subtleties of real life communication -- such as body language, tone of voice..." There are many reasons as to why social media websites have age restrictions and if this is how it mentally affects children then I personally feel they should be enforced.

Another reason, arguably the most important, is the dangers children face whilst being on the internet. Privacy is a main concern to anyone online and children often don't understand the risks involved with giving out too much personal information. A recent incident proves exactly this. Police in Renfrewshire are investigating reports after a man contacted a school and claimed to be a young girl's parent in an apparent abduction bid. The police are looking into whether the girl was targeted after she posted details on a social network site. Older children and adults know not to put personal details on their profiles, such as what school you go to and where you live, but young children are often targeted because of their innocence. Children are not as capable of seeing and understanding the consequences of their actions. Their naivety is one of the main reasons they are targeted as they will often accept any old friend request, whether or not they know them, on the basis that they have a funny profile picture. Personally I believe this is the main reason as to why young children shouldn't be given access to social networking sites.

Today's generation known as the 'touch generation' are being introduced to technology earlier and earlier each year, with smart phones and tablets becoming the latest 'must-haves' for many younger children. Some children take on a different persona when they get behind the screen and cyber-bullying is perhaps the most common form of bullying in this day and age. Whereas before once the school day was over the bullying stopped, at least until the next day, with social media it is impossible to escape. According to the

Cyber-bullying Research Centre “about half of young people have experienced some form of cyber bullying, and 10 to 20 percent experience it regularly”. Many children have to deal with at-school bullying as well as at home. They are forced to see the rumours and hurtful comments about them spread around the internet. Unfortunately, the rise in cyber-bullying has also seen the rise in the number of suicides and attempted suicides in children according to the Bully Statistics website. The statistics on bullying and suicide are alarming, “Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people, resulting in about 4,400 deaths per year... For every suicide among young people, there are at least 100 suicide attempts”. People have to understand and see the connection between social media sites and bullying and realise that it can get so bad that children as young as **nine** will take their own life to stop their suffering. This is another extremely important reason as to why young children should not be allowed on social media sites.

Yet, there are some benefits to children using certain social media sites. For example, if children are curious about the internet there are many safe and monitored websites they can join such as Club Penguin. This is a website where children can design their own ‘penguin’ and can ‘chat’ to other ‘penguins’ and play with them. The good thing about sites like these is that when ‘chatting’ to each other they are following scripts carefully chosen by the website creators to ensure maximum protection. These websites are beneficial as they explain how social media works to young children. At the same time there are always going to be people who will be able to hack into anything and say or do anything they want, so at the end of the day children will never be 100% safe online, which is why I believe they should wait till they are old enough to understand how to handle issues surrounding these sites.

Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter play a huge part in our lives, with almost 1.4 billion of us using them each day. There are many reasons as to why I believe young children should not be allowed on these sites. They can be mentally affected due to the lack of social skills and interaction in ‘real-life’. Children face many dangers online such as grooming by paedophiles whom they can’t protect themselves from. Cyber-bullying is also, unfortunately another reason why children should stay away from these sites. We are forced to grow up very early in this day and age and I believe children shouldn’t have to worry about the aforementioned things, they should be able to just be children

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