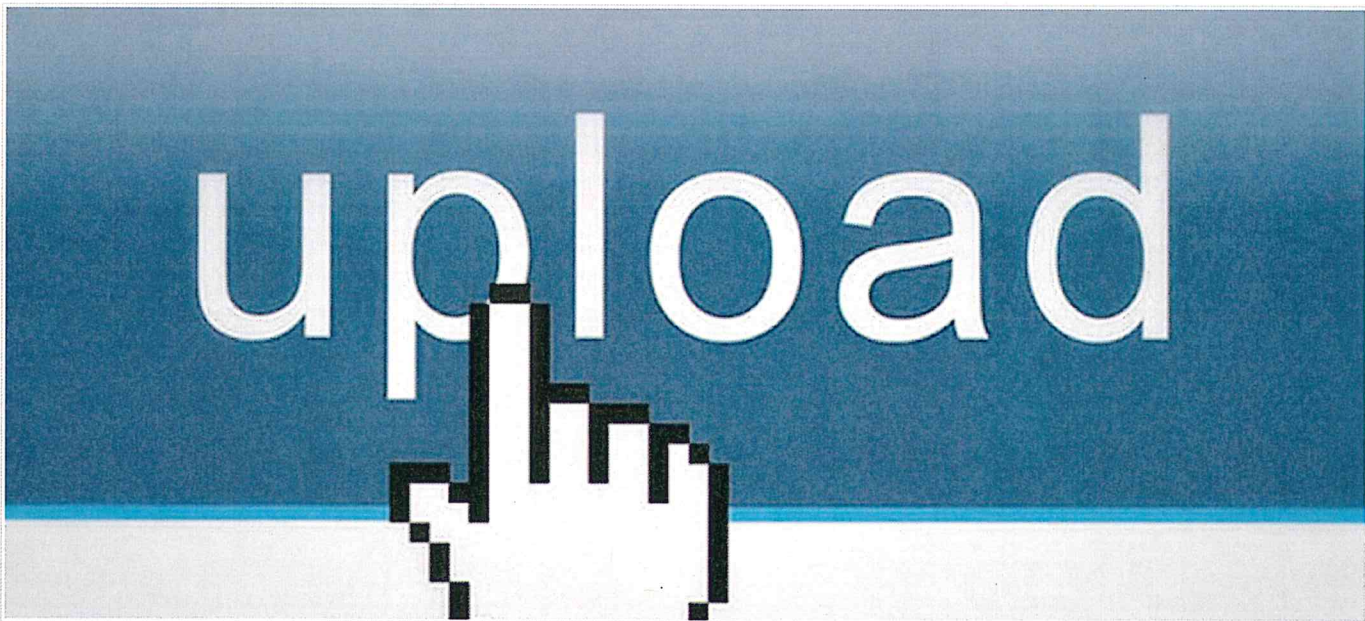


## What is a digital tattoo?



Cover image: Tinkerbrad

A tattoo is permanent, much like the information we post online. The photos we share, the comments we write, the videos we 'like'. Even if we delete them, they may still be out there – saved and shared by others, or even kept by the site or app itself.

### What does the content you post online say about you?

As adults, this may have less of an effect on our futures, the people we meet online and the relationships we build, but for your child, the consequences could be far reaching.

Having been brought up in a digital world, your child's 'digital tattoo' is likely to be much larger than yours. Most of us did things as teenagers that we wouldn't want people to know about today. Our youthful indiscretions were probably not recorded at the time and so are, happily, now long forgotten. But today, young people's lives are documented daily, by them, their friends and even their family, sometimes even before birth. (Ever seen a proud friend or relative share their ultrasound scan image on social media?!)

How much room does this leave for children to make developmental mistakes, without having lasting proof and possible longstanding embarrassment?

### Why should I be concerned?

Embarrassment is one thing which young people may face but it's also possible that the things they post, or are posted about them, could have a negative effect on their reputation, education or future employment.

Things that happen online, but involve fellow students, can be brought to the attention of their school, and children may be sanctioned as a result of their actions, even if they were not directly involved in wrongdoing. They may have been a bystander who allowed bullying to take place, or perhaps liked or shared something they thought was funny, but which then caused harm or upset to others.

In extreme cases, if your child has posted or shared sexual content, there is a possibility that they have shared this with strangers online without realising it. This could lead to them being pressured into continuing contact, or even being threatened into taking more images or meeting face to face.

## **Can a digital footprint be a good thing?**

Very possibly. Your child can have a positive reputation online and there will be things that they do, such as volunteering or achieving in sport or the arts, they will want people (or future employers) to know about. The key is to have control over who and what people can find about them.

## **What advice can I give my child to think before they post?**

It is never too late for your child to take control of their online reputation and there are things you can do to help.

The National Crime Agency's child protection command CEOP, has an education programme called Thinkuknow.

Thinkuknow offers top tips to teenagers on this topic, such as 'things to think about before you post' and advice for 'after sharing'. Relaying these tips to your child is important.

If you'd like your child to read these tips for themselves, ask them to visit the [thinkuknow site \(https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14\\_plus/Need-advice/Digital-footprint/\)](https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/Need-advice/Digital-footprint/) directly, maybe even sit with them while they do so and answer any questions they may have.

## **Thinkuknow tips for young people in relation to 'digital tattoos'**

### **Five things to think about before you post:**

1. What do I look like?

If you didn't know you, what would you think about this post? What impression would you have of the person who posted it? Things that we might share with friends as a joke can look very different to someone else, and that might be someone you're trying to impress – a girl, a boy, even an employer or a university recruiter.

2. Is this 'ink' permanent?

When you share something online, you can lose control of it. Even if you delete a photo or post you can't guarantee that it hasn't been copied or downloaded by someone else. Think about how many people you're sharing with and whether they'll be responsible with what you share. Don't forget it's easy for other people to copy what you share online, change it and share it without you knowing.

3. Am I giving away too much?

The more you share, the more people can learn about you. Could they use your posts to bully you or to trick you into sharing something you may not want the world to see?

4. Would I want this shared about me?

It's important to think about the impact what you post online might have on others. Do you have your friend's permission to share that funny picture of them? Could that jokey comment you posted hurt someone's feelings?

## 5. Does it pass the billboard test?

Before you post something online, think: would you be happy to see it on a billboard where the rest of your school, your parents, your grandparents and neighbours could see it? If not, do you really want to share it?

## After sharing

If your child still want to share something online, what can they do to make sure they still have control over who sees it?

### *Mind your privacy*

Most websites, apps and social networks you can share information on have 'privacy settings'. These help you control what you share, and who you share it with. So it's your choice whether your friends, friends of friends or everyone, can see a photo or comment. Find out how here (link is external).

### *Choose your friends wisely*

It's always best to share only with friends you know in the real world. Remember too that what your friends share about you and their privacy settings online will also affect you and your digital tattoo.

### *Remove and report*

Think you shouldn't have made that comment? Make sure you know how to remove anything you regret posting from any sites you use. If someone's posted something about you that you're worried about and refuses to take it down, make sure you know how to report it. Find out how here (link is external).

### *Know what you look like online*

It can be hard to keep up with the things we've done online so it's a good idea to Google yourself now and again, and review your profiles on any social networks you use. That way you'll know what other people can find out about you, as well as things others might have posted about you.

### *Shut down or delete*

If you stop using a social network, remember to shut down your profile or delete your account.

### Footnote:

Main image: Public Domain

**Author:** [Marie Smith \(/author/marie-smith\)](/author/marie-smith)

**Experts:** [CEOP \(/node/29\)](/node/29)

**Creative Commons license:**  ([//creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/))

Tweet

