Part of our Online Relationships Series

NOS
Online Relationships

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What you need to know about...
CATFISHING

What is it?

'Catfishing'

Catfishing is when someone creates a fake online profile to trick people into thinking they are somebody else. They assume a fake identity and go the extra mile to make their victim believe that they are exactly who they say they are. Catfishers make up life stories and use photographs of unsuspecting victims to create fake identities. They will share life experiences, jobs, friends, and photographs to their fake accounts.

Know the Risks

Build Relationships Fast

Catfishing can escalate very quickly. As someone executing a catfishing scam is looking to achieve a goal – whatever that may be – they are likely to want to get things moving as quickly as possible and may seem desperate or want to push a relationship without even meeting.

Fraud and Identity Theft

Catfishers are people who create fake identities and could be taking other people's photos and pretending to be them. It is common for fraudsters to post pictures stolen from social media sites, including Facebook and Instagram. Catfishers may try to limit chat to text-based messaging and anything involving video is likely to be shunned for fear of revealing their true identity.

Online Grooming

Catfishers can be anyone and target anyone of any age. They may target children and aim to lure them into a sexual relationship or trick them into sending nude or inappropriate images of themselves.

Requesting Money

Catfishers may also try to trick children out of money. After building up trust and developing an online relationship, a catfisher may use an elaborate story to request money urgently. They may ask for cash for a loan, money for travel, or some other form of payment.

Safety Tips

Set profiles to private

Go through children's security and privacy settings thoroughly to ensure that their online profiles are set to private. This means that only friends can see their profile and can contact them. It may also be a good idea to check through children's friends list with them and closely monitor their usage, especially if they are being secretive.

Be alert

In some cases, it's difficult to stop young people from talking to new people. In these circumstances, encourage children to be curious and ask lots of questions rather than rely on the information given in someone's online profile. Through the course of conversations, there may be inconsistencies with what is said and catfishers may be vague in response to specific questions about themselves.

Never meet

It's vital that children know never to arrange to meet up with people they meet online, and never to send money to them. Tell them to always speak to a trusted adult if they are being pressured into doing something they are not comfortable with.

Have honest conversations

Have regular and honest conversations with your child about what is safe to share with people online. Discuss the importance of keeping private information private and that anything that could identify them should not be shared online.

How to respond

Offer support

Always encourage children to talk to a trusted adult about anything that has made them feel uncomfortable online, particularly if someone they don't know has contacted them.

Report and block

Make sure that children are aware of how to report and block accounts on all platforms that they use. You can report fake accounts and block users to prevent them from viewing a child's profile.

Check with Google

If you are concerned that someone is using a child's photographs for their own benefit, use a Google image search to check. After uploading a photograph, use related images to see if anyone else is using photos that the child has previously shared online. If this is the case, report the user directly to the platform.

Report to authorities

If you suspect that a child has been the victim of any fraudulent, illegal or inappropriate activity, then you should immediately report it to the local police or authority.

Our Expert
Pete Badh

Pete Badh is a writer with over 10+ years in research and analysis. Working within a specialist area for West Yorkshire Police, Pete has contributed work which has been pivotal in successfully winning high profile cases in court as well as writing as a subject matter expert for industry handbooks.