

# March 2025 Online Safety Update

This Month's Online Safety Theme is: 'Catfishing'

Catfishing is the act of creating a false identity online to deceive others, often for romantic or financial gain. This can be particularly harmful to vulnerable individuals, including children with SEND, who may have difficulty recognising manipulation and deceitful behaviours. People who catfish others can sometimes do it for the thrill of deceiving someone – and they are highly skilled at creating a fake life, and pretending to be romantically interested in someone. Others do this purely in order to get someone to give them money or sexual photos for example.

The emotional toll of catfishing can be profound, leading to feelings of betrayal and isolation. This is true for adults but even more serious for young people – particularly those who have not had a close friendship or relationship before. Finding out you've been tricked and someone does not, in fact, have feelings for you – and may even have been mocking you, can feel devastating and humiliating.

There are lots of things we can do to support our children to recognise and understand catfishing. Firstly, monitoring our children online including who they are talking to and gaming with is helpful, as we can then ask questions if there seems to be a new person on the scene.

Secondly, depending on your child's level of understanding, we can explain to them that some people are not who they say they are.

Talking about famous examples or film characters can be useful – such as Ursula The Witch pretending to be someone else, in Disney's The Little Mermaid or the Marvel character Emma Frost who shapeshifts and reads minds.

Setting up privacy controls on social media platforms can also help protect children from potential predators.

At The Meadows, we have an acceptable use agreement for the students to sign when they use school devices.

These are also just good sense, and you can talk them through with your child. You can read these at the bottom of the Online Safety policy which is available on the website.

As always, if you are worried about online safety issues affecting your child, you can always contact us for support.

The pastoral team at The Meadows can be contacted on 0121 569 7089.

