

What you need to know about...

LIFESTYLE SITES

Part of our Online Identity & Self Image Series



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What are they?

Lifestyle Sites

'Lifestyle sites' is a bit of a catch-all term because, unfortunately, much of the internet is built to take advantage of human psychological weakness. Essentially, lifestyle sites are websites, apps and social media platforms that use underhand tricks to keep people hooked in and to sell products. They can also be sites which are set up by online communities experiencing issues around topics such as physical and mental health, but which are unregulated, unlike more established and verified agencies which can offer similar support.

Know the Risks

Click bait and fake news

The internet economy is extremely competitive. Due to this, sites are getting increasingly desperate for attention and have learned that pushing hyperbolic, exaggerated, or made-up news is a way of drawing clicks and enticing users in.



Psychological tricks

App and website designers are clever and have learned how to use our brains' weak spots against us. A like on social media gives us a dopamine hit, apps hammer us with notifications to keep our attention, websites scroll forever, and even typefaces can make a difference. They're deliberately addictive and can be damaging.



Damage self-esteem

Social media can be especially damaging. Instagram, a site designed for beautiful photography, is awash with flattering (and often heavily filtered) selfies that can impact on children's self-worth or opinion of themselves and provide them with an unrealistic view of the world.



Unregulated advice

Websites which are set up by users with the intention of providing an online community sharing similar experiences can shape and influence children's thoughts and behaviour. As these are often unregulated, they could receive advice which is unhelpful, thoughtless or even dangerous.



Safety Tips

Talk about the risks

Like with much of internet safety, the first step involves talking directly with children about the risks of the internet. Explain the financial incentives for sites to be untruthful and push products for financial gain. Advise them to only listen to official advice and be wary of what is published online.



Teach cynicism

Remind children that the lives they see on social media can be flatteringly edited highlights and unrepresentative of real life. Teach them to be cynical and remember that much of what they see and read online is only a snapshot and isn't always true.



Limits and settings

Try to encourage children to take up other activities and spend less time online. You can also set time limits on usage, either under your own supervision, or with the help of parental control software that limits hours that certain sites can be accessed.



Negative Effects

Increased time online

It's tricky to define an unhealthy amount of time to spend online as the internet has become a huge part of socialising now for adults and children. However, if you have noticed your child's internet use going up, then it may be time to step in and discuss their usage habits.



Interest in fringe theory

Be on the lookout for behavioural changes in your child following too much time spent online. Children can be easily targeted and influenced by other people's opinions which could impact on their own mental health and wellbeing and encourage them to reject official sources of support or advice.



Body conscious

Some children who use the likes of Instagram and TikTok may develop body image issues, by comparing themselves to the heavily filtered people posting selfies. Be on the lookout for tell-tale signs such as being overly concerned about how they look, wanting to cover up body parts, avoiding PE, and refusing certain types of food.



Our Expert Alan Martin



Alan Martin is a highly respected technology journalist and former acting editor who has written for a number of major publications including Wired, TechRader, Stuff, PC Pro, Gizmodo and CNET. He has also contributed work to Business Insider and MSN and created content for tech giants Microsoft, Currys, LG and OnePlus.

