What is a Digital Footprint?

A Digital Footprint is the information that exists online about a person as a result of their online activity. It includes our profiles, photos, comments, tags, vlogs, videos and emails that we post on social media websites. Our Digital Footprint begins the moment something is shared online about us. Search for yourself or your child online and see what others can find out about you. Does it include photos or videos?

A picture is worth a thousand words

Does your child's image appear publicly online? It can tell others a lot of information – age, sex, race, interests. If tagged or geo-tagged, it might also reveal their name and address.

What do I need to know?

Users typically share quite a lot of personal information on their social network profiles, making it easy for groomers to contact them and strike up a relationship, claiming similar interests, problems or locations or offering emotional support to those who reveal vulnerabilities online. Children are particularly at risk. Groomers may contact many different accounts or mobile numbers at the same time, in the hope they will get a response. Flattery or tempting offers may be used to begin the grooming process. The anonymity of the internet and the ease of creating fake profiles make social networks popular places for child predators to operate. It is wise to respect the age restrictions on games and social media, to avoid using photos, real names or dates of birth on gaming or social media profiles (use a nickname and avatar instead) and to secure privacy settings to an agreed group of friends or family.

What to talk about with your child

- **Discuss** the games and apps and platforms that your child uses and check that they are age-appropriate. Check their profiles only reveal basic information and use an avatar.
- **Ask** who they play or communicate with and how they know them.
- **Encourage** them not to over share and to consult you before sharing photos, videos or other personal information online. Live-streaming can be particularly problematic as things done on the spur of the moment may lead to embarrassment or bullying.
- **Discuss** how thoughtless or unkind posts can damage their reputation.
- **Check** and secure the privacy settings and Friends Lists on your child's devices.
- **Discuss** how easy it is for people to lie online: they are not always who they say they are.
- **Empower** them to say 'no' and to tell you if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable.
- **Remind** them never to meet up with anyone they have met online.