Keeping Teachers Safe Online

A guide by Virtual College

Introduction

As a teacher, separating your professional life from your personal one is much harder to do in the modern world. Whereas previously teachers only really had to worry about awkwardly bumping into students outside of school, nowadays it is easier for students to find you online.

Social networks and online searches can reveal a lot about you that you might want to keep hidden from pupils you teach. Whether it's embarrassing photos you'd rather they not see, information about your friends and family or even things like your address.

This is why it is important to understand how to keep your information safe online, even from the most determined pupils. Here are some ways that you can do this:

Understand your school's policies

Many schools now have their own set of rules and policies when it comes to teachers' online presence. These are designed to protect staff so it is important that you understand them.

Not only can failing to adhere to your school's guidance mean that your information is not as private as you might like, it could also put you at risk of disciplinary action. You should behave online in a way that meets with an institution's rules, as well as Teachers' Standards, copyright, confidentiality and child protection rules.

Learn about privacy features

There are a number of ways that you can protect the information you post online, so it is important that you familiarise yourself with these. Each social media platform has different privacy features to get to grips with, so you should learn about and test these before posting anything.

Actions like setting your Twitter account to private, limiting what information is visible to the public on your Facebook account and avoiding public posts can all help to keep you safe online. Knowing exactly what is and isn't visible to anyone searching your name will allow you to remove anything you'd rather not be seen and address any problems with privacy settings.

Of course, if you want to add an extra layer of protection, avoid using your full name on social media, as this can be searched easily. Instead, use something like a middle name as your last name on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, which will allow friends and family to find you but limit who else does.

SET TWITTER ACCOUNT TO PRIVATE

LIMIT WHAT INFO IS VISIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

AVOID PUBLIC POSTS

Think about what you post

Even if you make all your posts private, it is important to remember that anything you put online can be copied, screenshotted or even misinterpreted. Each of these could very well cause problems with your school, parents or pupils.

You need to make sure you are staying professional and are considering what you are posting or sharing carefully before doing so. Failing to do this can harm your personal, professional and digital reputations.

It is also important that you don't post any personal information regarding students, their parents or other members of staff. Much of this type of information is confidential and sharing it is not only unprofessional, but can also result in disciplinary action.

Mind your location settings

Some social media platforms will share your exact location at the time of posting if you have not disabled this setting. This can be dangerous as it tells people where you are at any given time. Not only does this mean they can see where you are when you're out and about, it can also allow them to pinpoint your home location, even though you don't post your address online.

It is important that you turn this setting off and double check posts to ensure your location is not included, as turning your GPS on can sometimes mean this happens automatically.

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If you don't know them, don't add them

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Improve your security

You may have every other part of your online presence locked up tight, but if you haven't got a strong password, it could cause you issues. A weak password increases the chances of your accounts getting hacked, as does using the same password for each profile. If you do get hacked, someone will have access to all of your personal information and could make it public.

As well as using strong passwords that don't contain personal information, such as a pet's name or your date of birth, you should ensure you don't share these passwords with anyone. You should also avoid clicking on any suspicious links as this can lead to information on your device being captured.

Being smart with your online presence and accounts could help you avoid a lot of situations you could do without.

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