How to safely start and manage online friendships

A definition

In this day and age, many relationships are formed and/or maintained through social media.

Why is this important?

Beyond the difficulty of long-distance relationships, there are various risks when meeting people online: harassment, identity theft, scamming, catfishing and even abductions. According to an NSPCC study, online grooming crimes have risen by more than 80% in four years due to the rise of social media platforms, such as Snapchat, used in 33% of the cases.

Tips and tricks

→ Pay attention to various criteria before accepting a friend request on social media: if a profile is brand new, has very few photos, rarely posts, etc.

→ To verify the person's identity, ask them for a picture or video of themselves holding a specific object or saying a chosen sentence or word out loud or on a piece of paper.

→ To keep a friendship healthy, be true to yourself, respect expectations and boundaries, and maintain a social circle outside of the virtual space as well.

Useful resources and tools

Regain, "Are Online And Real Life Friendships The Same? How The Internet Makes A Difference", explains the pros and cons of online friendships and how to maintain them.

Degges-White on Psychology Today, "Do Online Friendships Differ From Face-to-Face Friendships?", explains the differences and risks between real and online friendships.

Glum on International Business Times, "Online Safety For Teens: Are Internet Friends A Good Thing?", explains why teenagers develop an online social life and its dangers.

Get Safe Online (UK internet safety), "Making online friends the safe way", gives a series of advice on how to safely meet people online and what to share.

Lenhart & Madden on Pew Research Center, "Friendship, Strangers and Safety in Online Social Networks", provide data and testimonials on teenage online friendships.