



The importance of an online community

Being a member of an online community can drastically reduce feelings of isolation. It allows the user to talk with others who may be experiencing similar emotions or physical alterations, reminding them they are not alone.

Being a full-time or part-time carer can make communicating with others difficult, but social media provides them with the opportunity to engage with others and feel connected to family and friends who they previously felt distant from.

Carers need not be isolated because there is help, services and recognition that they are entitled to. Social media can also play a large part in making those in the caring role feel supported.

How social media can help you stay connected

It can be very lonely being a carer and this can stem from feeling unable to talk about the caring responsibilities or share frustrations and fears with others.

There is no easier, or faster way to make a connection with someone than using social media. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are probably the most well-known social networking communities, and once your profile is set up, you will be able to find carer organisations, other carers or other people who are completely separate from the caring world. New websites, organisations and profiles are regularly being launched that allow people to connect and interact over the web.

Connecting with someone online via social media can help you to:

- Get advice on products or service referrals
- Receive support from like-minded individuals
- Make or receive personal advice
- Share stories

A community interested in you

Participating in a social network community means you can choose who you engage with. Try and find individuals whose likes and dislikes are similar to yours and build your network around those commonalities. It can also be a great way to share tips, ideas, thoughts and feelings. Social media groups can become lifelines for those who are unable to get out to socialise or meet new people.

Easy and instant communication

Nowadays most people have access to a laptop, smartphone or tablet device which means it is possible to stay connected wherever we go, 24 hours a day. We no longer have to rely on landline phones or answer machines, we can simply log on to your chosen platform and engage with someone whenever needed.

How to open a social media account

In order to open a social media account you will need access to a laptop, computer, tablet or smart phone.

There are many different social media platforms. It might be useful to ask a friend or relative which platform they would recommend you use.



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Here is also a guide, to help you decide:

- [Facebook](#) – The largest social networking site in the world and one of the most widely used. It allows older people to keep in touch with friends and relatives.
- [Twitter](#) – This social networking site lets users share short posts (tweets) to the world. People can now even shop directly through tweets.
- [LinkedIn](#) – The most popular professional social channel as it is used by professionals from different businesses all over the world. It currently has over 400 million users.
- [WhatsApp](#) – This instant messaging mobile app allows users to communicate and share things instantly and there is a WhatsApp call functionality as well.
- [Instagram](#) – This social site was set-up to share photos and videos and allows users to capture amazing moments in your life.
- [Snapchat](#) – This image messaging social platform enables people to chat with friends by using photos. The app even allows people to explore news and check out live stories.
- [YouTube](#) – The world's largest video-sharing social networking site allows users to upload and share videos, like them and comment on them.
- [Tumblr](#) – This social media cum microblogging platform is used to find and follow things. From posting about things to writing a short-form blog, Tumblr is used by more than 550 million people.
- [Skype](#) – Used by more than 300 million people across the globe, this communication-based network allows people to connect with each other via voice calls, video calls and text messages.

On each website there will be a button to press that will say 'open an account'. Click on this and follow the instructions to opening your social media account.

Reach out

Once you are all signed up, be brave and make your first connection, maybe connect with a friend you haven't spoken to for years or request someone you met at a group.

The most important thing is to connect.



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Some things to bear in mind

Do's...

- **Privacy settings** – make sure you take advantage of the social media's privacy settings to ensure you keep your personal data safe. Facebook, for example, allows you to control who can see your posts and photos.
- **Friend connection** – only connect with people you know in real life on Facebook as many criminals use fake accounts to engage with people. However, Twitter and Instagram work slightly differently and it is ok to connect with people because you are interested in following their content. If people you do not send you personal messages on any of these forums, it is highly recommended you do not respond.
- **Link checking** – only ever click on links that have been sent to you via a bonafide source. Some links that are posted on social media can result in a computer virus or lead to malicious content.
- **Strong passwords** – all passwords to any online platform should be strong and based on a combination of upper and lower case letters, number and symbols.

Don't

- **Overshare** – be careful not to share your personal details online and be cautious of what sort of content you post. For example, do not broadcast the fact your house may be empty or that you are going on holiday.
- **Financial info** – never share any personal information about your banking history or financial situation. Never send any money to people if they request it via social media or email either.
- **Overuse** – be careful not to rely on social media completely and do not use it excessively. Although social media can help ease loneliness and can be a very supportive platform for those in a caring situation it is recommended users do not to replace real-life friendships with online relationships.

What others say about connection, community and support

- "It allows me to connect with others experiencing the same or similar struggles to me."
- "I use my social media to spread my story as well as learn about others. I have formed a community where each person can be their own individual without being judged..."
- "It helps me explain what's going on in my head by seeing other people go through the same/similar things so that I begin to make sense of what's normal and what's not."
- "Sometimes it's seeing your experience in others. I want people to know they're not alone in this."
- "It's like a friendly little escape when life is too much!"