

Practical advice about social networking for student nurses and midwives.

The standard of your conduct as a student, within social media sites is important. The way you act online can impact on your suitability for nursing and midwifery. Make sure you read and understand the Nursing and Midwifery Council 'Code of Conduct', our guidance for students, you should think through what this information means for you in practice, and if needed, take steps to change the way you use social networking sites.

- Maintain boundaries between your personal and professional life. For example, keep Facebook for friends and family, use Twitter for sharing information with people you may not know, and use LinkedIn for building and maintaining professional relationships.
- If you identify yourself as a student nurse or midwife on Facebook, you should act responsibly at all times and uphold the reputation of your profession. Even if you do not identify yourself as a student nurse or midwife, be aware that your conduct online could still jeopardise your registration if it calls your fitness to practise into question.
- Protect your own privacy. Think through what kinds of information you want share and with whom, and adjust your privacy settings. On Facebook, you can adjust your privacy settings at group level to share different levels of information with different kinds of friends. Remember that the more your personal life is exposed through social networking sites, the more likely it is that this could have a negative impact.
- Do not use social networks to build or pursue relationships with patients and service users, even if they are no longer in your care. If you receive a friendship request from a current or former patient, Facebook allows you to ignore this request without the person being informed, avoiding the need to give unnecessary offence.
- Do not discuss work-related issues online, including conversations about patients or complaints about colleagues. Even when anonymised, they may be identifiable.
- Never post pictures of patients or service users, even if they ask you to do this. The guidance on record keeping states clearly, "you should not take or keep photographs of any person, or their family that are not clinically relevant" (NMC 2009b). If your mobile phone has a camera, you should not use it in the workplace.
- Social networking sites should not be used for raising and escalating concerns (commonly referred to as whistle blowing). The guidance on raising and escalating concerns (NMC 2010) sets out your professional duty to report any concerns which put the safety of people in your care or the public at risk, and the steps you should take to do this. Remember that everything you post online is public, even with the strictest privacy settings. Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed, and it is easy to lose control of it. Presume that everything you post online will be permanent and will be shared.
- You can take action if you find yourself the target of complaints or abuse on social networking sites. You can remove someone from your friend list and block them from interacting with you, and most sites will include mechanisms to report abusive activity and provide support for users who are subject to abuse by others. If you are concerned about someone's behaviour online, you should take steps to raise your concern, including if necessary with their university or employer. In the most serious circumstances, for example if someone's use of a social networking site is unlawful, you should also report the incident to the police.