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## Do you know Jack? How to know if your friends online are who they say they are

### Bring the online into real life

It's not unheard of for people to join social networking sites like Facebook and Bebo and create a profile for themselves only to discover that someone already has. It's just one way fraudsters are using the Internet for hurtful purposes.

If a real-life friend has asked you to be a friend online, the simplest way to make sure that friend says who they are is to ask them in person. The next time you see that person, make a point of mentioning his or her profile. Chances are, your real-life friend is your online friend. But it never hurts to ask – you never know, you could be doing your friend a favour.

Your online friend may be someone you don't know all that well in the real-world – like your best friend's cousin from Chicago who you met once the summer they were in town. Find and use real-life connections to make sure that person is who they say they are – in this case, mention it the next time you talk to your best friend.

### Be cautious

Online, you really can't be 100% sure of who you're talking to, so if your online friends have little or no connection to you in the real world, always use caution. The more real-world connections you have with an online friend, the more confident you can be in sharing information with that person. So, while you can be confident in sharing your vacation photos online with your real-life best friend, you might want to think twice about sending those photos to that friend you made at tennis camp last summer, or the friend you met through another friend while chatting online.

### Be a sleuth

You've probably heard the expression "The devil's in the details". Look at your friend's profile closely. Take note of anything you see that doesn't fit with what you already know about your friend, and ask about it. For instance, if you know your friend has two big brothers but online she only mentions having one, you may have stumbled onto a fake profile of your friend. Then again, you could also learn a few things you may have not known – like their love of cheese fries and old video games.