What is Facebook

Facebook is a profile-based social media app and website, launched worldwide in 2006, which allows you to share pictures and videos with your friends. Every month over 2 billion users log in, making it the largest social network on the planet. Facebook also owns Instagram and WhatsApp.
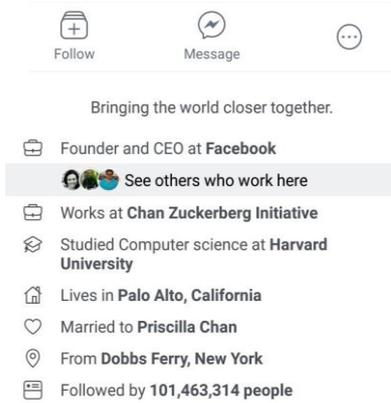
Facebook offers many different features once you have created a profile, including:

Private Messaging - You can interact privately with other users by using the Facebook Messenger App. It will allow you to send pictures, links, emojis and video chat through your mobile device.

Groups - Groups can be used to create public or private spaces to discuss common interests, hobbies or family groups. They can be set to 'public' (anyone can join) or 'private' (by invitation or request only).

Pages - Pages are used by businesses and celebrities to promote their products or services - very similar to a page on a website. Any user can create a page and other users are often invited to like them in order to see new posts on their news feed.

Location services - Like most social media apps, Facebook offers a GPS-based location service that allows users to 'check-in' to locations.

You can share items found online such as news articles, videos and pictures that can be posted directly to your profile without even opening the app. Friends can then comment on, 'like' or share your content for their friends. Friends' posts show on the 'News Feed', together with the content Facebook believes is most relevant to you including posts from pages you have liked, groups you are part of and digital adverts.

Do age restrictions apply?

Yes. All Facebook users should be over the age of 13, and the app will ask you to enter a valid date of birth before you can create your profile. However, there are no checks to check that a user is actually 13 and not younger. Underage profiles can be reported to Facebook and they have a duty to remove them in order to comply with data protection legislation in the US.

Are there any privacy settings?

Yes. Facebook has a range of privacy controls to enable its users to choose the 'audience' for their posts. This can include all your friends, friends of your friends or 'public', meaning any Facebook user can see them. Unlike other social media apps, Facebook gives you a huge amount of control over what people can see so it's vital to look at the privacy controls before posting anything. It's also important to regularly check your privacy settings as Facebook adds new features on a regular basis that may impact on what information can be seen.

There is also a blocking system to stop users from accessing your account or contacting you. To block a user you should visit their profile, click on the 3 dots (as shown opposite) and then click the 'Block' option. You can unblock users if you want to by visiting the Blocked list under settings. Once unblocked, you won't be able to block them again for at least 24 hours.
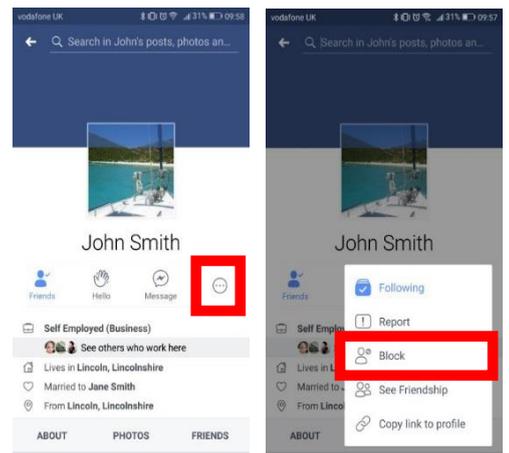
Things to think about:

Personal Information
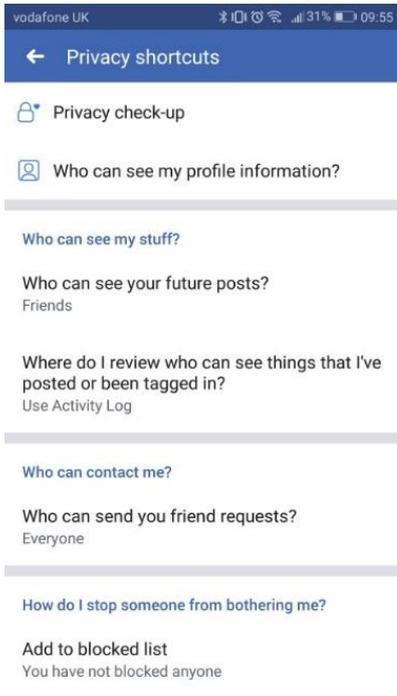
Unlike apps such as Instagram and Snapchat, Facebook gives you the ability to share a large amount of personal information with friends or complete strangers. While the use of privacy controls are vital to safeguard personal information, so is being mindful of the information shared with others. If they are going to be allowed Facebook accounts, children should be encouraged to keep personal information such as their location, holiday dates and pictures to a minimum.

Recent studies conducted with children and young people have found that many children feel uncomfortable with the level of personal information shared about them by their parents, many feeling unable to raise their concerns with the adults in their life. It might be worth discussing the sharing of appropriate information, and then leading by example to encourage children to assess the level of personal information they feel comfortable sharing.

Children and young people can also be much more fearless when posting information online and often don't understand how this can be used. There are many videos online that show how quickly and easily your information can be found and used. Children should be encourage to keep their account private, but also to think about what is and isn't safe to share.

Fake News

While fake news articles can appear anywhere, Facebook seems to be a place where they can be spread to a much larger audience of your closest friends. Recent studies have found that we are much more likely to share a story (regardless of how reliable the source is) if we trust the friend who shared it - sometimes without even reading the article in question! Young people should be encouraged to fully read everything before they share it and to look past the headlines that are often deliberately shocking and misleading (known as 'clickbait').

Many fact-checking websites, such as Snopes.com, now exist to help users identify fake or misleading stories.

Want to learn more?

Digital safety video from Barclaycard: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2tW50CD6Aw

Facebook Safety Centre: https://www.facebook.com/safety

Simplified Terms and Conditions for Facebook: http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publications/growing-digital

If you have concerns about the immediate safety of a child, you can call the Police on 101 or, in an emergency, 999