Com Networks

Watch out **Speak out** **Get out**

The Dark Side of Online Communities

Some strangers online can seem like your best friends when really, they could be part of a dangerous network who use fake friendships and profiles to target you, gain control and cause harm.

What are Com Networks?

Com Networks (sometimes called "The Com") are online groups that look harmless from the outside, chatting in public spaces about gaming, music, memes or digital art. Then things get darker as you're added into private group chats, where status is everything. Members compete for power and respect and in the worst groups, that means doing or sharing harmful or illegal things.

How They Work

The Com members hang out on popular platforms - Discord servers, Roblox games, fandom chats, comment sections, social media messaging and platforms you wouldn't even think of - **looking to recruit.** They find common ground, start a 'friendship' and gain your trust. They may make you feel important, special or understood. **The people who run these groups know exactly what they're doing**

You get invited into more private chats where, over time, the tone starts to change. Jokes start to get darker. Rules get established. Fitting in starts to mean doing dares, sharing harmful content, or proving your loyalty. What felt like a friendly chat can quickly lead to real harm, including sextortion, cyber-attacks, radicalisation, extremist views, even inciting violence.

Who is Affected?

These groups often target young girls but the reality is anyone could be targeted. By the time something feels wrong, victims might already feel close to the people in the chat and under pressure to comply - and that's exactly what they want, because it makes **leaving feel impossible.**

Red Flags

- Someone you've met online wants to **chat somewhere more private.**
- Jokes, dares or content **keep getting darker** and chats get deleted.
- **Platform hopping** - a backup platform is lined up in case of bans, often somewhere adults don't monitor (e.g. Spotify, Pinterest).
- There's a **clear hierarchy** in the group and lots of slang and in-jokes.
- You're pressured into sending **personal information or pictures of yourself.**
- **You worry about your status in the group**, stepping out of line or getting kicked out.
- Someone you barely know is gift bombing you – often used to **pressure you into repaying them** in harmful ways.
- You're **pressured to prove yourself** - sharing something private or hurting yourself or someone else.

These signs don't always mean you've been targeted but they're all worth talking to a trusted adult about.

If you're asked to do something you know is wrong - Pause. Stay Calm. Don't do it. Speak to a trusted adult ASAP.

Are They Really Your Friends?

Members might feel like the closest friends you've ever had. The only ones who 'get' you, encourage you and never judge. This is exactly what the members want to do. Build 'friendships' to gain control, inflict harm and earn clout in the group. Real friends don't ask you to prove yourself in harmful ways, keep secrets from your family or get angry when you're offline. **If any of that sounds familiar, what you're in isn't a friendship.**

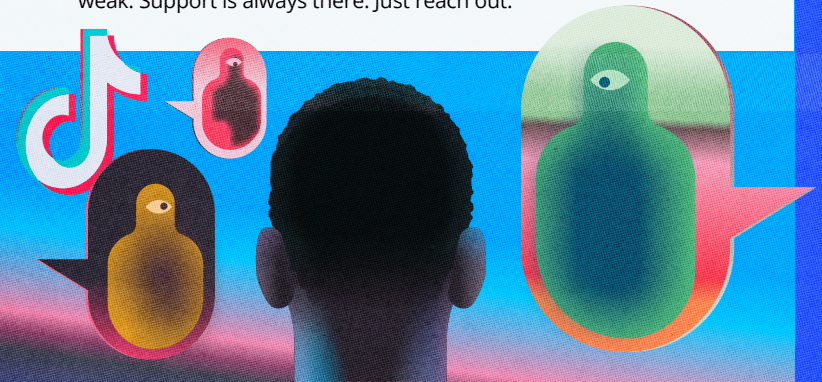
Leaving safely

Trust your gut early - if something feels off in a new group, block the people involved and step away.

If a group has gone too far - stay calm, there's always a way out. Tell an adult you trust (a parent/carer or professional) so they can help plan a safe exit.

The Police Advise:

- **Screenshot threatening messages** as evidence (but never screenshot any nude/semi-nude images).
- Consider **deactivating, not deleting** - it's helpful to show some information to a trusted adult.
- The slow fade - **gradually reduce contact** before leaving to avoid retaliation.
- **Report abusive users on the platform before blocking them.** Remember - being targeted isn't your fault and doesn't make you weak. Support is always there. Just reach out.



Getting Help

Speak out - Talk to a trusted adult immediately

childline - 0800 1111 - free, confidential, under-19s

CEOP - report online sexual abuse or grooming

IWF / Report Remove - if you're under 18, get a nude or semi-nude image or video of yourself taken down from the internet

999 - immediate danger

101 - non-emergency police reports

Helping a Friend

Listen and support them but remember you don't need to know all the details. Always encourage them to speak to a trusted adult and never add, follow or confront any of the members.

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V: 2.0.0 p:24.07.26

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