

# RCPsych guidance: staying safe online and reducing the risks

March 2024

## 1. Purpose of the document

This document is intended to provide advice and guidance to online safety and reducing risks for all College members, including pre-membership psychiatry trainees and retired members.

This guidance has been created to focus on staying safe online and sit alongside the [College social media policy](#).

Nothing in these policies is intended to suppress or prevent open, respectful discussion and debate. The College is a democratic organisation that embraces diversity of thought and believes that as an organisation with many members who have a variety of different views, we should create the opportunity for a sharing of opinions.

## 2. Who this guidance applies to

All College members, including pre-membership psychiatry trainees and retired members.

## 3. What do we mean by social media

By 'social media' we mean X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr, WordPress or any other online platform where comments can be published to a network of people, which can be viewed publicly, shared and/or commented on. It also includes your responses to other people's content.

## 4. How to mitigate some of the risks on social media

Disagreements are inevitable, especially across social media platforms where so many opinions can be shared.

If you receive a message that you do not like, think before you post a response – it is a universal platform where people across the world engage with threads as they develop, regardless of the purpose of the original tweet/post.

Posting and responses can sometimes lead to unintended consequences, be frustrating and harmful.

If you do want to reply, resist the temptation to immediately reply. Think again before you post and question your reason for responding – for example, do you want to continue engaging with this discussion? Will engaging help or hinder the situation?

If you want to respond – for example, to correct a factual inaccuracy or if someone has said something untrue about you – use a neutral tone, with no emotion and quote facts to correct misinterpretations.

Do not publish inappropriate content or comments.

Do not publish content or images which: are defamatory or disparaging, harassing, or bullying, discriminatory, false, or misleading, or impersonate colleagues or third parties.

Please avoid responding to negative comments about the College on behalf of the College. If, in the context of content or a post relating to the College or its work, you feel provoked by what you consider to be a negative or personal comment, please try not to respond, and contact the RCPsych Digital Team at [socialmedia@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:socialmedia@rcpsych.ac.uk).

If you are trolled – which is where someone is seeking to provoke negative responses from others online by criticising or disagreeing with you and will likely be personal about you immediately – do not respond! It is exactly what they want and feeds their objective to create negative noise about you/what you stand for/what you have posted.

We encourage you to screenshot/screengrab anything you deem problematic, but please remember not to repost this, as it can escalate situations. In serious cases this can be used as evidence.

You can mute or block the accounts you no longer want to engage with.

Do not post online that you are being targeted, this can create further negative responses.

If it is feeling too much, take some time out of social media.

Again, we recommend familiarising yourself with [College's social media policy](#).

## **5. What is doxing and how to protect yourself**

Doxing is the act of publicly providing personally identifiable information about an individual or organisation, usually via the Internet.

Once people have been exposed through doxing, they may be targeted for harassment through methods such as harassment in person, fake signups for mail and pizza deliveries, or through swatting (dispatching armed police to their house through spoofed tips).

It's advisable to keep things such as contact details off your social spaces, and if you do need to have them for things such as presentations, please keep a log of where you have provided said details to aid any investigation.

Other steps you should take include adjusting your social media settings, varying your usernames (if you can), having a public and private profile (with the private profile being restricted to just friends), varying your logins, and avoiding posting information surrounding your present or future whereabouts.

If you feel you have been a victim of doxing, immediately contact the College's Social Media team on [socialmedia@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:socialmedia@rcpsych.ac.uk) cc-ing in the Head of Digital Communications, Peter Markham at [peter.markham@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:peter.markham@rcpsych.ac.uk). Depending on the facts and circumstances of the case, doxing may amount to an existing criminal offence, such as threatening and abusive behaviour, and stalking. Should the College deem it severe enough, it can be escalated to the police.

If the abuse you receive makes you feel threatened, harassed, or is otherwise unlawful – report it to the social media platform and the police.

With the surge in use of AI, you may also be at risk of doxing via deepfakes. A deepfake is an image or recording that has been convincingly altered and manipulated to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something that was not actually done or said.

The Online Harms Bill is due to come in law in England and Wales and will protect you from illicit images of you being created. Current law is still struggling to keep up with the pace of AI technology, so you may not be protected in some respects. Please ensure that you both report and document any instances where you believe you have been subject to deepfakes. Contact the College immediately and we will ensure we follow the appropriate process.

## 6. College events and using social media

### Ahead of the event:

If the event subject includes an area viewed as socially controversial, the College event organiser will alert the College social media and press office teams to agree support for the event which can include:

- Offering advice to the speakers of the event about public communication regarding their topic and discuss what the College have chosen to do/not do on the College social media platforms before, during and after the event.

- Sharing with the speaker(s) the guidance on how to protect yourself on social media, this guidance applies to before, during and after an event.

### **During an event**

- During the event, the chair should remind people that it is an expectation of a College event that all members are given the opportunity to hear the viewpoints of the speaker(s), even when those viewpoints are controversial and contrary to your own views.
- The chair of the event should request the speakers/audience/event organisers and anyone else using social media adhere to the values and Codes of Conduct, as set out in the College social media policy, whenever posting content which relates to the event.
- Monitor social media during the event – this can be done by the RCPsych Digital Team on request.
- If during an event a situation is urgent – raise it with your event organiser who will follow the College’s Early Warning System.

### **After an event**

If a situation occurred during the event and your event organiser has activated the Early Warning System Plan – the College will advise on next steps and the RCPsych Press team will monitor social media.

If a situation did not occur during the event, event organisers will make it clear that the speaker(s) can ask for help, should any issues arise and provide the speakers with their contact details so they can connect with on anything not urgent.

If the speaker needs to contact the College urgently, out of hours (evenings and weekends) the press office out of hours number is [07860 755896](tel:07860755896).

## **7. Useful links**

- [Help Center \(twitter.com\)](#)
- [Facebook Help Centre](#)
- [Help Center \(instagram.com\)](#)
- [LinkedIn Help](#)
- [Snapchat Support](#)
- [TikTok Help Center](#)

- [Help Center \(tumblr.com\)](#)
- You can also find some useful information about harassment and your rights on the Citizen's Advice website [Check what you can do about harassment - Citizens Advice](#)
- UN #pledgetopause: [Verified | #Pledgetopause \(shareverified.com\)](#)
- RCPsych: [Social media policy](#)
- GMC: [Doctors' use of social media \(gmc-uk.org\)](#)
- BMA: [Ethics of social media use for doctors \(bma.org.uk\)](#)
- AMA: [2020 AMA Social Media Guide.pdf](#)
- [Squash Social Media Trolls With These 9 Tips \[Guide\] \(hootsuite.com\)](#)