Tips on Using Twitter

What is Twitter?

It is a ‘microblogging’ platform which allows you to update your ‘status’ in messages of up to 140 characters. Think of it like the Facebook status message but shorter and more public.

Why use Twitter?

There are a number of reasons. Some people use it to keep updated with the news and information as it happens in ‘real time’ – there are accounts for BBC News [(@bbcnews](http://twitter.com/#!/BBCNews)) Breaking News ([@breakingnews](http://twitter.com/#!/BreakingNews)) The Guardian [(@guardiannews )](http://twitter.com/#!/guardiannews) etc – Some use it to contact or share news with friends/family in a similar way to facebook and others use it to share information with people who have similar interests.

It is a good way to share ‘short form’ information – maybe a link you find is useful from another website or a nugget of information that you see someone else has shared. It is very dynamic and that is it’s charm

How to use Twitter

There are a few ‘syntax’ and basic rules. When you choose a name, think about whether you want to use your real name or not. There are advantages or disadvantages to both.

Remember it isn’t just the user name that is visible to others but also the name you put in your profile.

As above, the way that people tend to refer to others is by their twitter ‘username’ with an @ before it.

@(name) is used to reply to messages so for example or to have conversations with people

D(name) is used to send ‘direct messages’ or private messages to others but in order to do that you have to be ‘following’ each other.

Everything except a D message is in the public forum unless you lock your Twitter account. It’s probably best just to assume everything you write can be read by anyone. Much safer.

Start by following a wide range of people. You might want to start with [Community Care’s top 100 social care twitter accounts](http://twitter.com/#!/CommunityCare/social-care-100) but also add people who seem interesting to you and news sources – anything you like

There are a few other things you might see like # or the ‘hashtag’. # + topic is used to tag a ‘post’ and you can search by hashtags. You might want to start with a search for [#twittertips4sw](http://twitter.com/#!/search/%23twittertips4sw) where you will see suggestions of ‘twitter tips for social workers’ given by a range of people, including those you don’t follow.

When you start, think what you want your ‘voice’ to be – do you want to be serious or playful, to use the service for professional development or for more personal reasons. There is no reason that you can’t do both simultaneously, indeed, some of the best feeds combine the serious with the personal and give the reader an understanding of personality.

Other Twitter ‘language’ you might come across:

RT (re-tweet) = when you share a Tweet that someone else has ‘tweeted’

FF or #FF or #FollowFriday = it has become a tradition to share your favourite ‘tweeters’ with your followers on Fridays

MT (modified tweet) = like a re-tweet but when you have changed some of the wording so it’s not an exact replica.

Hashtag use develops quickly. While it is used for tagging some people use it for comic effect but it’s something you will pick up quite quickly if you look at how others use them.

Some Tips

Never forget that this is a public platform and even if you are anonymous (as I am on Twitter) remember your manners and your professional ethics.

If you want to share some details about your work, never be disrespectful of service users or the client group you work with.

Many people use Twitter from many different backgrounds and experiences and some have had very negative experiences and/or assumptions about social workers. Take that into account, show sensitivity and remember that even if you are anonymous you ‘represent’ the profession(if you have specified it) and have an opportunity to show some real humanity and empathy.

e.g I had a rough day at work, all day in court – is ok.

I hate working with parents who are alcoholics - is on dodgier ground

Don’t be afraid to start conversations and don’t worry if no one responds.

Try and follow a wide range of people – not just social work and social care related but maybe people who are representative of carer groups or who use the services you provide.

Beware of spammers – there are some dodgy links out there that can be tempting so don’t click on a link you don’t trust.

There’s a difference between personal and private. Give yourself some character but never break confidentiality.

Enjoy and learn from it.

It’s fun but it can take a bit of time to ‘get into it’. It is worth perservering with because it is a great way to connect with people in different areas and to broaden your mind.