

TEENS WHO SELF-MANAGE ONLINE

Keeping your Kids Safe

So what can be done to keep your kids safe online? Restricting your child from using any social networking site is impractical and perhaps a little excessive. Computers are available almost everywhere now, so an alternative approach would be to educate your child about the potential risks these sites pose, and about how to stay safe when using them. Some simple yet effective ways to let your child safely socialize online include the following:

- **Carefully select which social networking site your child wants to join.** Most social networking sites will allow anybody to create a profile, but most have age restrictions that do not allow anyone under the age of 14 to join. If your teen's sole purpose is to keep in touch with friends, chances are all her friends will be on the same networking site.
- **Monitor your child's network usage.** It is not unreasonable to insist on knowing your child's password for logging onto any social networking site. This will help you keep track of whom she is talking to and the kind of information she is posting on her profile. If you feel this is too invasive, create your own profile and request your child as a friend. That way you can still monitor her profile without being overbearing or nosy. It is also reasonable to set limits on how much time your child spends on the sites each day.
- **Keep your child's personal information private.** There is no need for your child to post his address, phone number, or any other personal information on his profile. Posting personal information makes it easier for online predators to learn your child's identity and to find him offline. If your child is going to post personal information, make sure that he posts only those facts that he is comfortable with everyone knowing. Also remember: Once he posts information online, he can't take it back. Even deleted information may still exist in older versions of the site on others' computers.
- **Set the privacy settings to restrict access to your child's page.** Your child's friends will still be able to access and view her whole profile, but outside users and anyone who is not on her friend list will not.
- **Reject friend requests from anyone your child does not know.** Even if the requestor claims to be a friend of a friend, be wary of anyone your child has never met.
- **Be wary of strangers who want to meet in person.** The simplest solution to this issue is to refuse to let your child meet in person anyone she met online, unless you are present.
- **Report any suspicious behavior.** If you or your child feels threatened by or uncomfortable about something online, report it to the social networking site and, if necessary, to the police.

Source: <http://life.familyeducation.com>

Fostering self management

How do you build an atmosphere of trust with your teenager so that he or she learns to open their heart? The collective wisdom on this topic includes: emphasise the positive; share one on one time weekly in something you both enjoy; have a sense of humour; know how to tell a good story; know when your child has suffered a disappointment and be available that night without fail; listen; broaden the conversation... don't nag or harp on the same issues; look to your spouse for feedback about your efforts to connect; and above all, keep at it. Keep showing affection and interest. Never respond to negative emotion with more negative emotion.

Let's look in detail at a number of these issues.

Talk with your son or daughter with clear guidelines about social networking sites such as Facebook and Myspace. The bottom line is that the same key rules of **respect and courtesy** apply just as much in cyberspace as they do in daily life:

- Tell the truth (but don't post personal details where they can be read by strangers).
- Respect others' privacy.
- Keep all comments and graphics positive. Never write or place something that could cause personal offence. Never write something that is abusive or derogatory.
- Never post a picture of another without permission.
- Avoid the bad manners of talking about oneself, of offering opinions on anything and everything, and of posting photos of oneself for everyone to see.

Help them see that the net is a public place and the written word is permanent. Once a comment is posted, the damage is done. We must not write things impulsively or without reflection. Careless words hurt others and ultimately hurt the person who writes them. How do you or I fix things up when we have shredded a person's reputation? It is very difficult. A person's reputation is precious and very hard to restore once damaged. Find various ways to explain this.

Explain too that the government has toughened laws relating to misuse of the Net. Identity theft, posting abusive or derogatory text, causing others grief when they read personal references posted without their consent, use of another's log in details: these can all be crimes and lead to a criminal record.

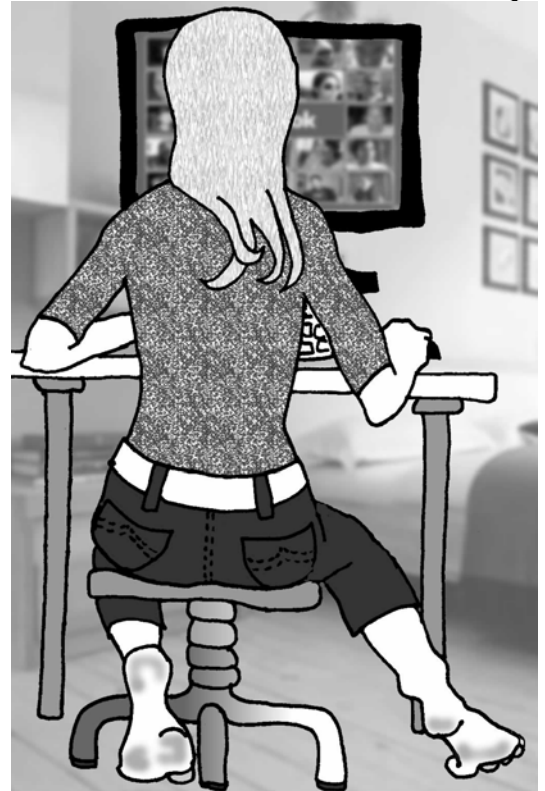
And there is the sheer wastage of time. Too often poor marks are linked to compulsive use of chatrooms and networking sites. This can be a real addiction. What are the signs of obsessive usage?

- When cyber relationships take priority over interaction in the home.
- When Net usage comes before work.
- When we think we can multitask... working on assignments and interacting with friends on line the same time.
- When Net usage interferes with sleep.

All this can sound very familiar to parents.

At this more serious level, it is damaging for children to want to live in worlds apart from their family. This is true for afternoons hanging out at the mall, for harmful Friday night social environments, for all-comers parties, and it is also true for aspects of the on-line world. A good starting point is for parents and children to agree on family standards of commonsense Net use that *everyone* conforms to... no Net in the bedrooms, a readiness to share what we are doing with other members of the family, no chatrooms open during work, etc.

It is less a question of more rules and better surveillance programs, and more about the quality of family relationships... of being in a position to share the life of one's fellow family members. Talk deeply and often with children about online activity, helping to self manage. Talk also about cyber bearpits. To enjoy an open, no-secrets, relationship is a big challenge. It is too easy to surrender the high ground to the peer culture. It takes a great deal of parental initiative and affection to stay in the game.



Brit understood that Facebook was not a remote dumping site - the rules of respect & courtesy should still apply.

Source: *Kairos*

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