

Social Networking Safety

A Guide for Parents

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are all the rage with teens. These sites provide a place for them to express their personal identity and maintain connections with friends. On these sites they can ...

- Create personal profiles.
- Post images and writings.
- Link and communicate with friends.



Why Teens May Not Make Good Choices Online

Didn't Think

Teen's brains are a "work in progress." They are biologically incapable of consistently making good choices ~ even if they want to. Learning to make good choices requires paying attention to the consequences of actions.

You Can't See Me ~ I Can't See You

- The perception of invisibility and the ability to establish anonymous accounts reduces concerns of detection ~ which could lead to disapproval or punishment.
- The lack of tangible feedback about consequences of online activities interferes with recognition that actions have caused harm and empathy for others.

Who Am I? Am I Hot?

Social networking sites have become an important vehicle for teens to explore their personal identity, values, and relationships with others. Unfortunately, this can sometimes lead to ...

- Posting outrageous material to attract attention.
- Posting material that explores emerging personal issues, including sexual identity.
- Preoccupation with the amount of electronic communication with friends.

Everybody Does It

Common online norms include ...

- "Life online is just a game ~ it's not real"
- "It's not me ~ it's my online persona."
- "I have the free-speech right to post anything I want, regardless of the harm it might cause to another."
- "If I can do it, it must be okay."

Doing What They Say

Sophisticated techniques are used online to influence attitudes and behavior. These techniques are used by commercial web sites, as well as dangerous individuals. Common techniques include offering "gifts," encouraging commitment to an individual, group, or product, creating "special" relationships, establishing an image of authority, and threatening a loss if one fails to act.

Looking For Love

Teens who are "at risk" in the real world are at higher risk online. They are ...

- More vulnerable to manipulation.
- More likely to engage in risk taking behavior.
- Less likely to listen to Internet safety guidance.
- Less willing or able to rely on parents.

Help Your Child Make Good Choices

Remain Involved

- Keep the computer in a public area of your house and pay attention to what your child is doing online.
- Keep younger children in safer places by limiting their access to pre-approved sites.
- As your child grows, gradually allow greater freedom online.
- Engage in respectful monitoring.
 - Public online activities are public and always open to your review.
 - Private communications should be reviewed only if there are reasons for concern.
 - Use monitoring software as a consequence to misuse or if you feel your child is at risk and your child refuses to talk with you.

Provide Accurate Information

Provide teens with accurate information about online risks and effective strategies to ...

- Avoid getting into a risky situation.
- Detect if they are at risk.
- Respond.

Focus on Values and Standards

Emphasize important values and standards to guide online choices. Review the Terms of Use for the sites and discuss these terms in the context of your family's values.

Respond Appropriately

Never overreact if your child reports an online concern! Fear of overreaction is the primary reason many teens do not report online concerns to adults. Help your child problem-solve an effective solution. Require your child to remedy any harm caused.

Encourage Peer Leadership

Encourage your child to be a peer leader online.

- Encourage good values in his or her online communities.
- Help friends and others if they are being harmed or are making unsafe choices.
- Report concerns to a responsible adult.

Making Good Choices on Social Networking Sites

Principal Concerns

The principal concerns associated with social networking sites are ...

- Unsafe or inappropriate disclosure of personal information or images.
- Unsafe connections with dangerous individuals or groups.
- Engage in or targeted by cyberbullying or sexual harassment.
- Addictive access.
- Lie about age to participate.

Check It Out

- Do you meet the age requirement?
- Do the Terms of Use prohibit harmful activities?
- Does the site allow you to control who has access to your profile?
- Does the site have a complaint process?

Protect Your Privacy and Reputation

- Use privacy protection features to limit who can view your profile.
 - But remember "private" does not mean PRIVATE!
- Even if you use privacy protection features, don't post material that could ...
 - Allow a stranger to find you in Real Life.
 - Attract a dangerous stranger.
 - Be used by a cyberbully to torment you.
 - Damage your reputation, friendships, or future opportunities.
 - Cause harm or distress to another.
- If someone posts this kind of information or material about you on their profile, demand that it be removed. If it is not promptly removed, tell an adult or file a complaint.
- Recognize that personality quizzes and contests are techniques to obtain your personal information for advertising.

Be Selective

- Be selective about who you add as friends.
 - When starting, limit contacts to friends and "friends of friends."
You should know how to find all of your online friends in Real Life.
- Carefully assess the safety and values of people you meet online by reviewing their profile and communications.
- Have a safe plan, approved by your parent, if you want to meet in person. Meet in a public place with a safe person nearby.
- Block anyone who ...
 - Communicates rudely.
 - Appears to be trying to manipulate you by sending "overly friendly" messages, using excessive compliments, offering you "gifts", or wanting to establish a "special" relationship.
 - Wants to talk about sex or asks for a sexy picture.
 - Does not fit your values.
- File a complaint if you receive harmful or potentially dangerous communications.

Be Responsible

- Do not send rude or hurtful messages or post harmful material.
- Respect the privacy and reputation of your friends.

Be a Leader

Speak up for good values in your online community.

If you see someone who is making bad choices or in danger ...

- Talk with the person about your concerns.
- Report to a responsible adult.

Keep Your Life in Balance

- Communicating with friends online can strengthen your friendships. But make sure you also spend time with your friends in Real Life.

Core Strategies

Effective Problem Solving

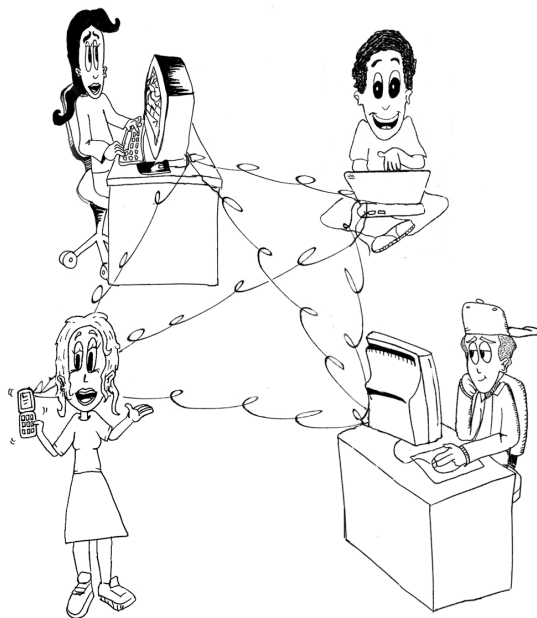
The following questions can help teens engage in problem solving.

- What is the situation?
 - What concerns does this situation raise? What are the risks?
 - What values are implicated?
- Who is involved and what are their personal interests?
 - Does anyone appear to be trying to manipulate someone else?
- What are the possible actions and the possible outcomes for each of these actions?
 - Which choice has the greatest possibility in leading to the best possible outcome for all concerned?

Responsible Decision-Making

These questions can help teens evaluate whether they are making a responsible choice.

- Is this kind and respectful to others?
- How would I feel if someone did or said the same thing to me or to my best friend?
- What would my mom, dad, or other trusted adult think or do?
- Would I violate any agreements, rules, or laws?
- How would I feel if my actions were reported on the front page of a newspaper?
- What would happen if everybody did this?
- Would it be okay if I did this in the real world?
- How would this reflect on me?



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