

Cyber Safety and Social Networking Sites

Just as we prepare our kids for life in the real world, we are preparing them for life in the online world too. Teen development is, in large part, about separating from parents and gaining peer acceptance, and social networking sites allow them to do both. But if online harassment or rejection occurs, such as “de-friending”, symptoms of depression such as sadness, anxiety, pessimism, difficulty concentrating, a drop in grades, insomnia, loss of appetite and irritability may be the result and will need further investigation by a health professional. Social networking also has many advantages for kids. In addition to strengthening connections with friends and family, social networking encourages participation in community service activities, the sharing of musical and artistic achievements, communication with sports teammates, and that’s just the beginning.

This week we thought we would help you with some tips and some websites which provide you with reliable information on how to keep your children safe when using technology and in particular when using Facebook and other social networking sites. Parenting is particularly challenging when faced with issues which were not prevalent when we were teens ourselves, that’s for sure!

You can help your children to be physically, emotionally and socially safe when using Facebook (remembering 13 years is the minimum age for an account) by explaining:

- the importance of setting strict privacy controls as FB’s default settings tend to keep information public until a user makes it private - “Friends Only” is a good choice
- what constitutes smart judgment when posting. These include being positive when making any comments about others, uploading appropriate photos only, being mindful about status updates, posting anything which could be harmful now or in the future as once something is posted it can be sourced in the future
- that settings can be chosen which allow you to see everything you’ve been tagged in (including photos) before the tag links to your page
- you can tell FB through notification settings that you want to be notified of any activity performed in your name including photo tags
- that if in doubt, don’t post! Teach your teens to ask themselves why they're posting something, who will be able to read it, and whether it could be misunderstood or used against them later.
- only to friend people you know ie. ignore requests from strangers
- the importance of logging off after use so that their profile cannot be tampered with by another user of that computer
- that anything put online can potentially be misused

Here are four easy to navigate sites we have found which provide valuable information on cybersafety:

<https://www.facebook.com/help/parents>

<https://www.facebook.com/safety/groups/parents/>

http://www.communications.gov.au/easyguide/social_networking

<http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Parents/Resources/Educate%20yourself.aspx>

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