



SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: A Parent's Guide

“It’s 10 p.m. Do you know where your children are?” Remember that phrase from your own childhood? It’s still a valid question, but now, it comes with a twist: “Do you know where your kids are — and who they’re talking to online?”

Social networking sites are the hippest “meet market” around, especially among tweens, teens, and 20-somethings. These sites encourage and allow people to exchange information about themselves, and use blogs, chat rooms, email, or instant messaging to communicate with the world-at-large. But while they can increase a person’s circle of friends, they also can increase exposure to people who have less-than-friendly intentions, including sexual predators.

Help Your Kids Socialize Safely Online

OnGuard Online urges parents to talk to their tweens and teens about social networking sites, and offers these tips for using these sites safely:

- **In some circumstances, the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act and Rule require social networking sites to get parental consent** before they collect, maintain, or use personal information from children under age 13.
- **Keep the computer in an open area**, like the kitchen or family room, so you can keep an eye on where your kids are online and what they’re doing.
- **Use the Internet with your kids.** Be open to learning about the technology so you can keep up with them.
- **Talk to your kids about their online habits.** If they use social networking sites, tell them why it’s important to keep information like their name, Social Security number, address, phone number, and family financial information — like bank or credit card account numbers — to themselves. Remind them that they should not share that information about other people in the family or about their friends, either.

Your children should be cautious about sharing other information too, like the name of their school, sports teams, clubs, where they work or hang out, or any other information that could be used to identify them or locate them offline.

- **Make sure your kids’ screen names don’t say too much about them.** Explain why it’s inappropriate — even dangerous — to use their full name, age, or hometown. Even if your kids think their screen name makes them anonymous, it doesn’t take a genius to combine clues to figure out who your kids are and where they can be found.



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- **Use privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on your child’s website.** You may approve of their friends from school, clubs, teams, community groups, or your family being able to view your kids’ website, but not strangers from a neighboring town or school.
- **Your kids should post only information that you — and they — are comfortable with others seeing — and knowing.** Many people can see their page, including their teachers, the police, a college admissions officer, or a potential employer.
- **Remind your kids that once they post information online, they can’t take it back.** Even if they delete the information from a site, older versions exist on other people’s computers.
- **Warn your kids about the dangers of flirting with strangers online.** Because some people lie online about who they really are, no one ever really knows who they’re dealing with.
- **Tell your children to trust their gut if they have suspicions.** If they feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online, they need to tell you and then report it to the police and the social networking site. You could end up preventing someone else from becoming a victim.
- **If you’re concerned that your child is engaging in risky online behavior, you can search the blog sites they visit** to see what information they’re posting. Try searching by their name, nickname, school, hobbies, grade, or area where you live.
- **Check site privacy policies.** Some sites may share information like your child’s email address with other companies, which could generate spam and even spyware on the family computer. Sites’ privacy policies or other posted links for parents also may contain contact information for you to ask about your child’s personal information.



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For More Information

To learn more about staying safe online, visit the following organizations:

Federal Trade Commission — www.OnGuardOnline.gov

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

The FTC manages OnGuardOnline.gov, which provides practical tips from the federal government and the technology industry to help you be on guard against Internet fraud, secure your computer, and protect your personal information.

GetNetWise — www.getnetwise.org

GetNetWise is a public service sponsored by Internet industry corporations and public interest organizations to help ensure that Internet users have safe, constructive, and educational or entertaining online experiences. The GetNetWise coalition wants Internet users to be just “one click away” from the resources they need to make informed decisions about their and their family’s use of the Internet.

Internet Keep Safe Coalition — www.iKeepSafe.org

iKeepSafe.org, home of Faux Paw the Techno Cat, is a coalition of 49 governors/first spouses, law enforcement, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and other associations dedicated to helping parents, educators, and caregivers by providing tools and guidelines to teach children the safe and healthy use of technology. The organization’s vision is to see generations of children worldwide grow up safely using technology and the Internet.

i-SAFE — www.i-safe.org

Founded in 1998 and endorsed by the U.S. Congress, i-SAFE is a non-profit foundation dedicated to protecting the online experiences of youth everywhere. i-SAFE incorporates classroom curriculum with dynamic community outreach to empower students, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and concerned adults to make the Internet a safer place. Join them today in the fight to safeguard children’s online experience.



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National Center for Missing and Exploited Children —
www.missingkids.com; www.netsmartz.org

NCMEC is a private, non-profit organization that helps prevent child abduction and sexual exploitation; helps find missing children; and assists victims of child abduction and sexual exploitation, their families, and the professionals who serve them.

National Crime Prevention Council — www.ncpc.org; www.mcgruff.org

The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) is a private, nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to enable people to create safer and more caring communities by addressing the causes of crime and violence and reducing the opportunities for crime to occur. Among many crime prevention issues, NCPC addresses Internet Safety with kids and parents through www.mcgruff.org and public service advertising under the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign — symbolized by McGruff the Crime Dog® and his "Take A Bite Out Of Crime®."

National Cyber Security Alliance — www.staysafeonline.org

NCSA is a non-profit organization that provides tools and resources to empower home users, small businesses, and schools, colleges, and universities to stay safe online. A public-private partnership, NCSA members include the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Trade Commission, and many private-sector corporations and organizations.

staysafe — www.staysafe.org

staysafe.org is an educational site intended to help consumers understand both the positive aspects of the Internet as well as how to manage a variety of safety and security issues that exist online.

Wired Safety — www.wiredsafety.org

WiredSafety.org is an Internet safety and help group. Comprised of unpaid volunteers around the world, WiredSafety.org provides education, assistance, and awareness on all aspects of cybercrime and abuse, privacy, security, and responsible technology use. It is also the parent group of Teenangels.org, FBI-trained teens and preteens who promote Internet safety.

**OnGuardOnline.gov provides practical tips from the federal government and
the technology industry to help you be on guard against Internet fraud, secure your
computer, and protect your personal information.**

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