



Be MediaWise

Don't let technology replace the human connection

Social Networking: Hanging Out Online

A few years ago very few parents had ever heard of social networking. Now web sites like Facebook, Xanga, and MySpace are part of every day vocabulary—not to mention the fact that a growing number of parents are “hanging out” online themselves. News stories about child predators, inappropriate conduct, illegal behavior, cyberbullying, parties gone wild, and Internet sex have elevated concern about social networking sites. The main reason parents are paying attention to the role of the Internet in their children’s lives is simple: it’s where their kids hang out. Media-age youth are redefining for parents what “staying connected with your kids” means—because for this wired generation, online friends, blogs and networks are no less real than “real life.” And just like “real life,” online hangouts are full of both opportunity and risk.

Guide to Social Networking: Risks Parent Guide (adapted) at www.MediaFamily.org



To Cell or Not to Cell?

Today about two million people in the United States own cell phones. Almost three-quarters of American households have at least one, and many have three to five. About half of teens aged 13-16 have one. It’s pretty clear that cell phones aren’t going anywhere. So what does that mean for our kids?



Cell phones have never been more popular with school-aged children. Having the coolest phone is a priority for many kids. Parents also appreciate being able to get in touch with and keep track of their kids—it’s never been easier to communicate with them while on the run.

Despite the benefits, cell phones are also posing new challenges for parents. Some kids run up enormous bills, disturb classes with calls, and use phones to bully other kids. As more forms of media converge in cell phones, perhaps the greatest challenge will be monitoring and keeping track of our kids’ media use. Small, hand-held screens will make it harder to “watch what your kids watch.” That’s why it’s important to stay ahead of the trends and talk with your kids.

www.MediaWise.org

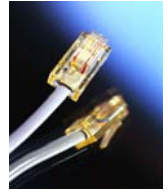
Establish Media Guidelines with Your Kids

- Set media time limits** and stick to them. Experts recommend no more than one or two hours a day.
- Check content and ratings** at www.CommonSenseMedia.org in advance, to choose media that is age-appropriate.
- Keep media out of kids’ bedrooms.** Locate media in a central place where its use can be supervised.
- Make a NO media rule** during mealtimes, while doing homework, and before bedtime.
- Use parental controls**—blocking technology like the V-Chip for TV or filtering software for the Internet.
- Get kids in the habit of **asking permission** to use media.
- Make sure babysitters and other caregivers know** your media guidelines.
- Turn off the remote** and make sure your kids read, exercise, and play every day at least as much as they are using media.

www.CommonSenseMedia.org

Connected and Protected

Is your child plugged in to the Internet, video games, TV, or an iPod? How



about MySpace, Xanga, YouTube, Facebook? Is your child chatting, instant messaging, or gaming? While all of these forms of media can be fun and even beneficial, studies have proven that there are serious risks, too. These risks include childhood obesity, reduced self esteem, underage drinking, lower IQ, aggression, and sexual activity. If your children are plugged in you need to protect them. Visit www.MediaWise.org for helpful and informative Parent Guides to learn more about the risks and benefits.

Vocabulary Corner



Do your kids’ electronic messages look like Greek to you? Do you wonder and worry about what they mean? Here are some common phrases to help you be aware of what’s being communicated:

- BBL** be back later
- BF** boyfriend
- CUL8R** see you later
- GF** girlfriend
- GRRRR** growling
- IOH** I’m outta here
- KIT** keep in touch
- NW** no way
- OMG** oh my gosh
- P911** my parents are coming!
- Peeps** people
- RLF** real life friend
- RUT?** are you there?

See f@stcht1/A Quick Guide to the Abbreviated Language of Instant Messaging for more chat abbreviations.

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Benefits



There are plenty of benefits associated with being a “connected kid.” As “digital natives,” this next generation has the incredible opportunity to hone a set of social and

technological skills that will give them an edge in school and the job market. Online social networking allows kids to connect with peers and family members in new ways, find others who share specialized and niche interests, explore self-directed learning opportunities, gain access to networks that help them apply to college, find jobs, and otherwise connect with people who have similar interests.

Extending Friendships

Most youth see social networking as a way to strengthen relationships with friends they already know in the “real world.” In addition, kids tend to be “super communicators,” meaning that they use social networking to complement (rather than replace) more traditional forms of communication in order to:

- ◆ Gain new forms of technological and media literacy while they socialize
- ◆ Engage with a broader spectrum of people
- ◆ Be exposed to new ideas and a diversity of opinions and perspectives
- ◆ Find support and community
- ◆ Feel more secure entering new situations

Extending Interests

Many youth are using online social networking to explore interests and find information beyond what is available to them at home and at school, and look towards each other for expertise, advice, and encouragement in interest-driven networks. Especially for kids who struggle in traditional educational settings, finding something online they are “expert” at can be especially rewarding.

Networked Schools

Schools are connecting peer-based and interest-based networks to formal learning. Teachers are leveraging the media expertise of youth to create school blogs, classroom videos, podcasts, and more. Digital learning has the potential to help kids attain critical 21st century skills including:

- ◆ Competency in core subjects
- ◆ Learning skills (decision-making, leadership, collaboration, responsibility)
- ◆ Orientation toward lifelong learning
- ◆ Civic engagement

“Guide to Social Networking: Rewards,” at www.MediaWise.org (Adapted)

Risks

For many parents, kids’ immersion in online social networks and digital spaces is concerning—especially when you consider that we don’t fully understand the potential long-term effects of decreased face-to-face interaction and communication. Here are some tips on helping your child navigate cyberspace in order to maximize its benefits and minimize its risks.



Online Profiles

Sharing identifying information such as full birthday, address, phone number, school, favorite hangouts, schedule, or anything incriminating or sexually inappropriate leaves young people vulnerable to online predators and identity theft—so make sure it’s excluded from their online profiles.

“Friends”

If your child approves a friend request or vice versa, s/he is added to each other’s friends’ lists and can see profiles, look at pictures, share music and videos, post messages, and more. For many young people, friend lists become a popularity contest. This can create hundreds of online “friends,” increasing the risk that predators can join their network.

Walls, bulletins, blogs, and boards

More and more youth are chatting, and writing and publishing online blogs ranging from personal reflection to political commentary. Remind them that these forums are public (even if online friends are the only ones with access), and that making poor decisions can have “real world” consequences leading to embarrassing or vulnerable situations (including college applications and future employment). Encourage them to keep deeply personal information in a “real life” journal that is truly private. Talk to them about appropriate online conduct, and lay serious ground rules about cyberbullying.

Cell Phones

Internet compatible cell phones are often problematic in the classroom. Find out what your child’s school’s policy is and support it. Think hard before enabling Internet access on your child’s phone, and be sure to talk about time limits and consequences for infractions.

General Guidelines to Minimize Risks

Privacy settings only work if your child uses safe judgment. A limited friend list, respectful language, not sharing personal information, and staying away from risky online activities is the first line of defense.

“Guide to Social Networking: Risks,” at www.MediaWise.org (Adapted)