

A child's guide to social media privacy

These days, children are glued to their social media. Whether tweeting between lessons, or updating their Facebook status on a smartphone at lunch, the younger generation is in constant communication with their peers. That's why addressing the issue of privacy on social media sites should be a priority for all parents. As the definition of "privacy" changes in the modern age, it's more important than ever to ensure your child is posting safely and responsibly on social networks. Take the time this month to address these issues with your child.

According to Pew Research, nearly 72 percent of young adults and teens use social networking sites. Most sites require users to be at least 13, but a May 2011 Consumer Report found 7.5 million children age 12 and younger are on Facebook, meaning social media is becoming a larger presence in the lives of our younger generation.

This also means children need to understand how to behave appropriately and know what information is OK to share. With the threats of online predators, hackers, or cyber-bullies being very real and very relevant, it's important to prevent them from accessing your child's personal information, including phone number, home or email address, or personal photos, for malicious reasons. Review the following issues with your child to ensure they know what is and isn't OK on their social media profile.

Everything you share is permanent. Anything you post online can potentially live on the Internet permanently. Even when you delete a photo or message, it can be screen-captured, copied, forwarded, shared, or stored on other people's computers. Therefore, you must carefully consider everything you post.

Don't share personal information. This means don't post your phone number, email address, home address, or "tag" your city of residence on sites that allow you to do so, such as Facebook. Also don't share information about your school or schedule.

Only communicate with people you know. Your social networks should be comprised of people you know personally. If a stranger contacts you trying to get personal information, details about where you go to school, etc., let an adult know.

Carefully select the photos you post. It's best to have a profile photo that isn't a photo of you (which can attract unwanted attention). Ask a parent to approve all photos you post, and carefully consider what you would want your friends to see. Remember, too, that any photo you post could also be altered to embarrass you or make you look bad.

Do not share mean posts or pictures about other people. If you see a mean comment, forward, tweet, or other social media communication, you should never share it with your friends. This is cruel behavior and can be legally unsafe for both you and the person who shared it. Make an appropriate screen name. If your social media site requires you to make a screen name, make one that doesn't personally identify you—and make it appropriate.

Report anything that makes you uncomfortable. If someone is making you uncomfortable or hurting your feelings via social media, report it to your parents.

Social networking is not a bad thing. The □□American Psychological Association□, for instance, points out that shy teens and pre-teens can better learn how to socialise behind the safety of computer screens and mobile devices. But if your child accidentally exposes too much of his or her personal information, they could be asking for serious trouble.

Fonte: APA, 23 Mar. 2012 [Portal]. Disponível em: <<http://www.apa.org>>. Acesso em: 26 Mar. 2012.