

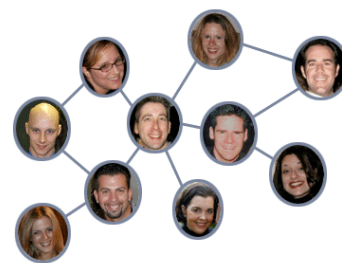


Social Networking Sites

Quick Tips

While social networking sites can increase your circle of friends, they also can increase your exposure to people with less-than-friendly intentions. Here are some things you can do to socialize safely online:

- Think about how different sites work before deciding to join a site. Some sites allow only a defined community of users to access posted content; others allow anyone and everyone to view postings.
- Keep some control over the information you post by restricting access to your page.
- Keep your full name, Social Security number, address, phone number, and bank or credit card account numbers to yourself.
- Make sure your screen name doesn't say too much about you. Even if you think it makes you anonymous, it doesn't take a genius to combine clues to figure out who you are and where you can be found.
- Post only information that you are comfortable with others seeing and knowing.
- Consider not posting your photo. It can be altered or broadcast in ways you may not be happy about.
- Flirting with strangers online could have serious consequences. Some people lie about who they really are.
- Be wary if a new friend wants to meet you in person. If you decide to meet them, meet in a public place, during the day, with friends you trust. And tell a responsible adult where you're going.
- Trust your gut if you have suspicions. If you feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online, tell an adult you trust, and then report it to the police.



You've probably learned a long list of important safety and privacy lessons already: Look both ways before crossing the street, buckle up, hide your diary where your nosy brother can't find it, don't talk to strangers.

OnGuard Online is urging kids to add one more lesson to the list: Don't post information about yourself online that you don't want the whole world to know. The Internet is the world's biggest information exchange. Many more people could see your information than you intend, including your parents, your teachers, your employer, the police--and strangers, some of whom could be dangerous.

Social networking sites have added a new factor to the "friends of friends" equation. By providing information about yourself and using blogs, chat rooms, e-mail, or instant messaging, you can communicate either within a limited community or with the world at large. But while the sites can increase your circle of friends, they also can increase your exposure to people who have less-than-friendly intentions. You've heard the stories about people who were stalked by someone they met online, had their identity stolen, or had their computer hacked.

Your safety is at stake

OnGuard Online suggests these tips for socializing safely online:

- **Think about how different sites work before deciding to join a site.** Some sites will allow only a defined community of users to access posted content; others allow anyone and everyone to view postings.
- **Think about keeping some control over the information you post.** Consider restricting access to your page to a select group of people: your friends from school, your club, your team, your community groups, or your family.
- **Keep your information to yourself.** Don't post your full name, Social Security number, address, phone number, or bank and credit card account numbers--and don't post other people's information, either.

Be cautious about posting information that could be used to identify you or locate you offline. This could include the name of your school, sports team, clubs, and where you work or hang out.

- **Make sure your screen name doesn't say too much about you.** Don't use your name, your age, or your hometown. Even if you think your screen name makes you anonymous, it doesn't take a genius to combine clues to figure out who you are and where you can be found.
- **Post only information that you are comfortable with others seeing--and knowing--about you.** Many people can see your page, including your parents, your teachers, the police, the college you might want to apply to next year, or the job you might want to apply for in 5 years.
- **Remember that once you post information online, you can't take it back.** Even if you delete the information from a site, older versions exist on other people's computers.
- **Consider not posting your photo.** It can be altered and broadcast in ways you may not be happy about. If you do post one, ask yourself whether it's one your mom would display in the living room.
- **Flirting with strangers online could have serious consequences.** Because some people lie about who they are, you never really know who you're dealing with.
- **Be wary if a new online friend wants to meet you in person.** Before you decide to meet someone, do your research: Ask whether any of your friends know the person, and see what background you can dig up through online search engines. If you decide to meet



the person, be smart about it: Meet in a public place, during the day, with friends you trust. Tell an adult or a responsible sibling where you're going and when you expect to be back.

- **Trust your gut if you have suspicions.** If you feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online, tell an adult you trust and report it to the police and the social networking site. You could end up preventing someone else from becoming a victim.

Source: Federal Trade Commission (FTC), OnGuard Online. (May 2006). Social networking sites: A parent's guide. Retrieved June 19, 2007 from <http://onguardonline.gov>

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