



Family Insider—Social Networking

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“If you have never been hated by your child, you have never been a parent.”

~ Bette Davis

MySpace, Xanga, Facebook, Friendster. Just the mention of these words can strike fear into the minds of some parents. But, a word of caution: Don't freak out and yank the plug on your child's computer. Now is the time for education—for you and your child.

Most of us have recently heard news reports about incidents concerning MySpace or Xanga, sites that are collectively called “social-networking” sites. While all age groups use these sites, teens have claimed them as their social playgrounds. Unfortunately, these virtual communities can also serve as a workplace for Internet predators, identity thieves, and cyber bullies.

So what makes social-networking sites so popular with teens? They offer a mode of self-expression, a means of communication with others, and a place to make their voices heard and to hear the voices of other teens. For many teens, social-networking sites offer them a comfortable corner in a world of boundless relationships and possibilities.

Lauren, a 15-year-old from Texas said, “Everyone is on MySpace. I could do a MySpace school Web search for our high school and hundreds of kid's spaces would pop up. Some of the things they put on their pages are crazy, but everyone I know has one.”

“MySpace and other sites like it are cool because they allow a person to get to know the ‘real’ you without really caring what you look like or what group you belong to,” said Chris, a 16-year-old from Texas. “I've searched for people I've met at parties, too, just to see if I might want to date or become their friend. Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone online until you really get to know them.”

Reading about another teen's prob-



lems, thoughts, and desires may allow kids to empathize with others or decide who is a potential friend. However, it gives a false sense of security. The fact remains that someone you only know online is still a stranger, and not everything you read online is true. Predators may also be given insight into the student's life, giving them useful personal information and communication tools that the predator can use to groom the potential victim.

Social networks also offer aspiring musicians, photographers, directors, actors, writers, and artists a place to exhibit their work to an infinite number of viewers who can then post comments and reviews. However, students often do

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NAC Tracks



Do you visit your child's homepage at a social-networking site?

Vote here

Social Networking *continued from page 1*

not take into consideration that photos and videos can be undesirably manipulated, viewed, and/or distributed to a limitless audience online. Photos can also contain identifying information, such as license plates or school names or teams, that put students at risk.

Cyber bullying is one of the greatest problems students face today. The comment and blog sections of social-networking sites are often used by individuals or groups of individuals to verbally assault and defame others; they often even make physical threats to the user. The bullying that takes place online can be especially devastating because of the far-reaching audience and 24/7 access. Students also may not know who the attacker is, resulting in fear and trepidation in their physical worlds.

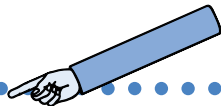
Information posted on social-networking sites can be searched and viewed by anyone who logs on—friends, strangers, teachers, parents, future employers, etc. What a student says on his or her web page today could sabotage his or her chance at college admission or a future job. Many companies recruiting college seniors are also looking to social-networking sites to learn more about their prospective employees. “At New York University, recruiters from about 30 companies told career counselors that they were looking at the sites,” said Trudy G. Steinfeld, executive director of the Wasserman Center for

Career Development in a recent *New York Times* article. “The term they’ve used over and over is ‘red flags.’ Is there something about their lifestyle that we might find questionable or that we might find goes against the core values of our corporation?”

So what do we do to help our kids understand the concerns we have about their use of social-networking sites? First of all, don’t overreact. Overreaction shuts doors of communication. It is vitally important that your child knows that you are his or her greatest advocate in this very public online world. Begin by educating yourself on Internet safety issues by watching the i-SAFE i-LEARN Online videos (<http://ilearn.isafe.org>) or by attending an i-SAFE Virtual Training Academy session (<http://vta.isafe.org>). As part of your training, i-SAFE will also provide tip sheets on social networking and other Internet safety topics. Then engage your child in a discussion about Internet safety and appropriate social-networking behavior, and have your child show you his or her personal web space. Good parenting depends on active participation in your child’s life in both the physical and cyber worlds.

Contact us at parents@isafe.org for more information on how to educate yourself and others about social networking and other online safety topics. 

Internet Safety Tip



Let your kids know responsible adults do not pursue relations with minors.

They need to know that this applies to all adults no matter when their age is revealed. All too often predators lie about their age at first, and then, once they become “best friends” with your child, they will reveal their true age (or at least an age closer to the real thing). At this point, will your child be ready to dump his or her “best friend”?

Think it won’t happen to you? Think again. A recent i-SAFE survey revealed that between 14% and 17% of youth have been fooled by the age of someone they met online. Check out these numbers:

Picture almost six out of 10 students in your child’s class chatting with someone at least three years older than what they first admitted. So your kid’s new “best friend” is 18. Or wait, is it 21? Or worse, is it 28? Nearly a quarter of students chatted with someone 10 years older than they first said they were.

Again, 22.4% were lied to about someone’s age by 10 or more years. That’s nearly one in four kids. Is your child the one, or among the other three? If your kid is not the one, which of his or her friends is? Make sure every child you know is aware that adults do not pursue relations with minors.

Difference Between Actual Age and Age Given

Younger	15.4%
1–2 years older	26.7%
3–4 years older	22.4%
5–9 years older	13.0%
10+ years older	22.4%




Ask an Expert

Q: *I'm concerned that my child may be posting personal information online. How can I find out if he or she has a site like MySpace or Xanga, or has been giving out personal information on the Internet?*

A: It's always a good idea to be involved in your child's online world. Ask your child if he or she has a profile on a social-networking site or has given out any personal information online. If he or she admits to having a social site, ask him or her to show it to you. You can then walk through the site with your child to discuss the information he or she has online and ensure that he or she is acting responsibly. If the answer is "Yes," yet you are still concerned that personal information may have been made available online, you may decide to do a bit of investigative work.

To search many of the social-networking sites, such as MySpace or Xanga, you may have to register on the Web site and create an account for yourself before you are allowed to do a search. Ensure that you do not reveal any of your own personal information with the creation of your own account. Use the "Search" tool to search for your child's name, screen name, school, or e-mail address. Also, try using the "Schools" search to find students who have your child's school listed in their profiles. You can then select the profiles of your child's friends to see if your child or your child's information is listed on any of his or her web pages. You may also want to search for your child's information by conducting a Web search using a search tool like Google or Yahoo.


If your child's information is found on a social-networking site and he or she chooses not to assist you in removing it, or if information is found on other Web sites online, contact the Web site's "Contact Us" or "FAQ" page for more information on how to have the site or information removed.

Regardless of the personal information that you do or do not find, educating your child about the dangers associated with revealing personal information online is absolutely essential. Log on to i-LEARN Online (<http://ilearn.isafe.org>) or the Virtual Training Academy (<http://vta.isafe.org>) to learn more about Internet safety for your family and how to educate other parents about online dangers. Then direct your children to the i-MENTOR Training Network to watch the mentor training videos to learn more about Internet safety and how they can get involved. 



Tech Tip—Wireless Protection

Q: *We just finished installing a wireless network in our home. We have taken all the recommended steps to ensure that we have locked access to our wireless access point to only the computers in our home. But I'm still not sure if it is safe to use my credit card for shopping or accessing my bank account across the wireless network. I mean: If it is wireless, how safe is it? Can anyone view my data and steal my info?*

A: Wireless Internet access, or Wi-Fi, can offer convenience and mobility. But there are things you should know before trusting your sensitive data to the wireless network. Although you have "locked" access to your wireless access point, you should use WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access) over the older WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy). Although both provide encryption of your data, the WEP protocol uses plain text and a repeating key that makes it easy for hackers to "guess" the right combination to allow them to capture and decrypt your data. WPA rotates the encryption key far more rapidly, which makes guessing the right key far more difficult. It also has the added feature of Message Integrity Code (MIC), which detects if a data packet has been tampered with. If it detects a problem with packet integrity, it immediately discards the key and generates a new one. You also want to ensure that any Web site from which you are accessing sensitive data uses Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption. This will show up as a lock icon in the bottom of your web browser window and should have a URL that starts with <https://>, not <http://>. The added "s" is for security. 

Did You Know—i-SAFE and Law Enforcement Join Forces to Protect the Nation's Children

Recognizing the growing threat posed by online sexual predators, child pornography, and other crimes against children through the Internet, U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales recently announced the Project Safe Childhood Initiative. To assist the Justice Department's grassroots effort, i-SAFE has made available the "Project Safe Childhood Toolkit." This toolkit provides law-enforcement officials and prosecutors across the country i-SAFE materials so they can take a proactive approach in preventing online crimes by educating and empowering their communities on how to respond to these growing threats. Through i-PARENT programs for parents, Certified Mentor Trainings and Assembly Experiences for students, and other i-SAFE community-outreach programs, the "Project Safe Childhood Toolkit" will be used by law enforcement and prosecutors to increase awareness about the dangers children face while online and to promote responsible and safe Internet use.

At the same time, i-SAFE's Operation i-SHIELD brings together the nation's law-enforcement community and pros-

ecutors to help proactively fight Internet crimes against children. Regional i-SHIELD Task Forces develop strategies to educate their local communities to raise awareness and promote Internet safety. While each i-SHIELD Task Force acts independently, it is part of a cooperative network of Task Forces across the United States that shares information about crime trends, data, and strategies through an interactive e-bulletin board set up just for them. i-SAFE provides training through our i-LEARN Online training program (<http://ilearn.isafe.org>), along with resources and materials that a Task Force needs to accomplish its community-education and outreach strategies.

i-SAFE believes that when we help provide the law-enforcement community the educational and outreach tools needed to proactively prevent Internet crime, their own resources can be re-allocated to crime-fighting and catching criminals who victimize children online. Interested law-enforcement officials can sign up to be on an i-SHIELD Task Force at www.isafe.org.

Our New Virtual Training Academy

Have you ever asked your children what they were doing on the computer, only to get the response, "Nothing"? As parents, you may find yourself wondering how your child does "nothing" for hours upon hours. Perhaps your child likes to play games on the Internet or chat with his or her friends in a chat room. You begin to realize that for your child, the Internet is a virtual playground. i-SAFE offers a Virtual Training Academy (VTA) to help you learn how to teach your child to be safe on the Internet while he or she is busy doing "nothing." The Virtual Training Academy allows you to listen to and speak with a live i-SAFE presenter from the comfort of your own home in any session you choose. Others just like you will also be in on the session. You can collaborate with them and share ideas. Invite your child to attend a session, too! Upon completing a VTA session, you will be i-SAFE certified to train other parents!

Here's How to Sign Up for a VTA Session . . .

1. Log in to i-SAFE's Web site (www.isafe.org) with your user name and password. Click "Return to Home."
2. Go to "Choose a PC" on the upper right, and click on the "Virtual Training Academy" PC.
3. Click "Calendar" at the bottom of the page.
4. Choose the event you would like to attend, and click under "Sign Up."
5. Click "Confirm."

When you register for a VTA session, you will receive an e-mail with the information needed to attend that session and a reminder e-mail the day before your event with any materials you will need to download for your session.

Upon completion of your session, you will be i-SAFE certified and have access to free resources to empower other parents and students to become safe on the Internet. It's that easy!



The Power of One—Socializing Online

The good, bad, and ugly on the World Wide Web are oftentimes hard to visualize. The Internet offers so much—you have the ability to chat with your friends, learn new things, exchange ideas with different types of people, even meet new people and have tons of fun. But many times when someone is online, he or she doesn't really know who is on the other end. Just as there are positives, there are also negatives to the Internet. You should be aware that there are risky situations and dangers that you should avoid. If there were a way for the "Social Internet" to identify itself and let people know about the ups and downs, things would be easier. But because it's not clear, here's an inside look at the impact that social networking on the Internet has had on my friends, including a couple of tips I think could help.

Johnny, a young teenager and former member of a social-networking group, admits that he first joined the site to meet girls his age and because all of his friends from school belonged to it, too. He acknowledges that initially, he began to:

- spend more than four hours a day on the Internet
- lose interest in things other than the Internet
- become distracted while on the Internet
- become obsessed with the Internet

Now, Johnny says he regrets joining the site, saying: "It was a waste of time; I could have been doing my homework or trying to raise my grades up. I could have been doing something productive." But not all situations end in disappointment. For example: One of my friends took all that social networking on the Internet had to offer and used it to



better herself and her life. Anna was never known to be fun or outgoing—she was the girl who was too shy to even have fun. When she ventured onto the Internet and into a social-networking site, it opened up a whole new world. Being able to have fun online and meeting new people ultimately gave her the confidence to act the same way in the real world.

- She learned to speak her mind.
- She became more confident.
- She was able to talk to all types of people.

After hearing my friends' experiences, I hope you have a better understanding about what and how the "Social Internet" really works. Here are some tips I think could help anyone who wants to surf the Internet more safely.

1. Keep your personal info private.
2. Never meet with anyone you meet on the Web in person.
3. Be careful what you write.
4. Don't be too trusting.

Leslie Medina, i-SAFE i-MENTOR Coordinator

Site Spotlight

The "Family Education" Web site offers parents practical parenting advice and grade-specific information on their child's learning and social experiences. It also includes resources and ideas for family fun and activities.

Check it out at www.familyeducation.com.

www.familyeducation.com

In Your Neighborhood

Everyday there are many i-SAFE events going on across the country. We've made it easy for you to get involved and help spread the message of Internet safety to your peers and your community. Simply check our "Calendar of Events" at http://www.isafe.org/channels/sub.php?ch=ai&sub_id=3 to find an event near you.



Team Up With i-SAFE

Currently, i-SAFE has reached more than two million students with Internet safety information. By providing free materials, programs, and educational videos, students are learning how to make positive choices when challenged with today's technology. Not only are students learning to protect themselves against predators, they are also learning how to make decisions regarding intellectual property, identity theft, and more.

i-SAFE strives to provide your family with the most current information regarding the issues youth face today on the Internet. In order to bring our programs and materials to your community and your home, we rely upon donations.

We would be grateful if you, or perhaps someone you know, could assist i-SAFE in educating as many children as possible. Since i-SAFE is a 501(c)(3) corporation, your donations are fully tax deductible.

To donate, e-mail donations@isafe.org or go to www.isafe.org/donations.



We Value Your Input

Do you have a question or a comment about an article? Perhaps you have a story you wish to share with other readers. Do you know somebody whose story will inspire others to get involved? Whatever the case, we would like to know. Please e-mail us at editor@isafe.org with questions, comments, or contributions. If snail mail is your preference, **send written correspondence to:**

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The series of i-SAFE newsletters also includes the *i-EDUCATOR Times* and *Kewl Timez* (for students). We encourage you to read the others and ask you to use the main article to initiate discussion and action with your students and your community.

About i-SAFE

Founded in 1998 and active in all 50 states, i-SAFE Inc. is the leader in Internet safety education. i-SAFE is a nonprofit foundation whose mission is to educate and empower students, parents, seniors, and community members to safely and responsibly take control of their Internet experiences. i-SAFE provides knowledge that will enable them to recognize and avoid dangerous, destructive, or unlawful online behavior, and to respond appropriately. This is accomplished through dynamic K through 12 curriculum and community-outreach programs to students, parents, law enforcement, and community leaders. i-SAFE is the only Internet safety foundation to combine these elements. www.isafe.org

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