



STOP THINK CONNECT

## Kids and Socializing Online

*Social networking sites, chat rooms, virtual worlds, and blogs are how teens and tweens socialize online; it's important to help your child learn how to navigate these spaces safely. Among the pitfalls that come with online socializing are sharing too much information or posting comments, photos, or videos that can damage a reputation or hurt someone's feelings.*

*Applying real-world judgment can help minimize those risks.*

### **Remind Kids that Online Actions Have Consequences**

The words kids write and the images they post have consequences offline.

#### **Kids should post only what they're comfortable with others seeing.**

Some of your child's profile may be seen by a broader audience than you — or they — are comfortable with, even if privacy settings are high. Encourage your child to think about the language they use online, and to think before posting pictures and videos, or altering photos posted by someone else. Employers, college admissions officers, coaches, teachers, and the police may view your child's posts.

#### **Remind kids that once they post it, they can't take it back.**

Even if you delete the information from a site, you have little control over older versions that may exist on other people's computers and may circulate online.

#### **Tell your kids not to impersonate someone else.**

Let your kids know that it's wrong to create sites, pages, or posts that seem to come from someone else, like a teacher, a classmate, or someone they made up.

## Tell Kids to Limit What They Share

### Help your kids understand what information should stay private.

Tell your kids why it's important to keep some things — about themselves, family members, and friends — to themselves. Information like their Social Security number, street address, phone number, and family financial information — say, bank account or credit card numbers — is private and should stay that way.

### Talk to your teens about avoiding sex talk online.

Research shows that teens who don't talk about sex with strangers online are less likely to come in contact with predators. In fact, researchers have found that predators usually don't pose as children or teens, and most teens who are contacted by adults they don't know find it creepy. Teens should not hesitate to ignore or block them.

## Encourage Online Manners

### Politeness counts.

You teach your kids to be polite offline; talk to them about being courteous online as well. Texting may seem fast and impersonal, yet courtesies like "pls" and "ty" (for *please* and *thank you*) are common text terms.

### Tone it down.

Using all caps, long rows of exclamation points, or large bolded fonts are the online equivalent of yelling. Most people don't appreciate a rant.

### Cc: and Reply all: with care.

Suggest that your kids resist the temptation to send a message to everyone on their contact list.

## Limit Access to Your Kids' Profiles

### Use privacy settings.

Many social networking sites and chat rooms have adjustable privacy settings, so you can restrict who has access to your kids' profiles. Talk to your kids about the importance of these settings, and your expectations for who should be allowed to view their profile.

Set high privacy preferences on your kids' chat and video chat accounts, as well. Most chat programs allow parents to control whether people on their kids' contact list can see their status, including whether they're online. Some chat and email accounts allow parents to determine who can send messages to their kids, and block anyone not on the list.

**Create a safe screen name.**

Encourage your kids to think about the impression that screen names can make. A good screen name won't reveal much about how old they are, where they live, or their gender. For privacy purposes, your kids' screen names should not be the same as their email addresses.

**Review your child's friends list.**

You may want to limit your children's online "friends" to people they actually know.

**Talk to Kids About What They're Doing Online****Know what your kids are doing.**

Get to know the social networking sites your kids use so you understand their activities. If you're concerned about risky online behavior, you may want to search the social sites they use to see what information they're posting. Are they pretending to be someone else? Try searching by their name, nickname, school, hobbies, grade, or community.

**Ask your kids who they're in touch with online.**

Just as you want to know who your kids' friends are offline, it's a good idea to know who they're talking to online.

**Encourage your kids to trust their guts if they have suspicions.**

Encourage them to tell you if they feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online. You can then help them report concerns to the police and to the social networking site. Most of these sites have links for users to report abusive, suspicious, or inappropriate behavior.

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