

CHILD PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

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SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE SOCIAL NETWORKING Tips For Kids

Social networking sites are useful Internet tools to keep in touch with family and friends, and can be used to meet new people with similar interests. These sites are very popular with kids as they seek to explore/define who they are and connect with others like themselves. If used responsibly, these sites can be a positive and beneficial resource for youth. Too often, however, kids include too much personal information, discuss inappropriate behaviors that could get them into trouble, or otherwise place themselves at risk by what they share on their online profiles. Often, kids are cyberbullied when others use information from their profiles or online accounts to embarrass, harass, or humiliate. Here are a few guidelines to follow in learning how to use social networking sites safely and responsibly:

- **Assume that EVERYONE has access to your profile.** This includes parents, teachers, future employers, and law enforcement and is the case even if you have your profile restricted to “friends only” (or something similar, depending on the site). Don’t discuss things you wouldn’t want anyone in those groups to know about. Don’t use language you wouldn’t use in front of your parents. Finally, make sure you set your profile to “private” so that you can control who has easy access to your information.
- **USE DISCRETION when posting pictures and content on your profile.** Your friends might think a picture of you acting silly at the party last night is hilarious, but how will your parents or a potential employer react? Also remember that when your friend (or a stranger) takes your picture, it may end up on their profile for all to see.
- **Assume people WILL use the information on your profile to cause you harm.** Don’t put anything online that you wouldn’t want your worst enemy to know. Also, don’t add people as “friends” or “followers” unless you know them in real life. Even if you think you know them, be skeptical. Kids often think it is cool to accumulate and have thousands of “friends” or “followers.” Just remember that these people have open access to all of your posted content and information.
- **Assume there are predators out there trying to find you based on the information you provide on your profile.** Think like a predator. What information on your profile identifies who you are, where you hang out, and where you live? Are the location services turned on in the settings on your phone? Never post information that would allow someone to track your movements or know where you spend time.
- **You may be held responsible for inappropriate content on your profile** that is in violation of the Terms of Service or Acceptable Use Policies of the Internet Service Provider or web site(s) that you use. Moreover, school districts across the country are revising their policies to allow them to discipline students for online behavior that can be linked to a disruption in the classroom environment – even if you posted the content at home from your own computer.