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SECURITY / POLICE INFORMATION NETWORK



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Online Safety on MySpace and Other Social Networking Sites

(source: safefamilies.org)

WHAT IS SOCIAL NETWORKING ?

Social Networking is a term used to describe the fairly recent breed of websites, also referred to as online communities. These sites generally enable their subscribers to post a journal and various forms of media content, to generate and maintain relationships with other participants, and to engage in discussions around common interests with others. Some of the most popular social networks are in the U.S. are MySpace, Xanda, LiveJournal, BlackPlanet, MiGente, AsianAvenue, Bolt, Hi5, Facebook, and Friendster. These sites are immensely popular with teens and young adults and have become an integral part of their lives, much like television was for their parents. Social networks or online communities offer great opportunities for self-expression, relational support, new experiences, helpful information and just plain fun.

WHAT ARE RISKS?

Objectionable Content: On many online communities, users post material that is not appropriate for children or that many parents would find objectionable. This can include obscene language, racist or violent text or images, and a wide range of sexual content including pornography.

Overexposure: Parents need to be concerned not only with what their children might see and hear, but also what they may present. Teens can make unwise decisions about what they post online. This includes posting pictures of himself or herself or of friends in a sexually provocative or incriminating manner, publishing personal information that sexual predators could use to learn more about a child or their friends; or bragging about exploits (real or made-up) or making threatening and harassing remarks that could have negative consequences.

Contact with predators: Much publicity has been generated around sexual predators (mainly adults) looking for minors to exploit. There are such individuals who frequent online communities that teens use. Sometimes, these adults will pretend to be teens themselves, but often they will be quite clear about their age and intent.

Contact with other inappropriate adults and businesses: Various segments of the sex industry (legal and otherwise) have a presence on social networking sites, often to recruit customers and workers. Minors should not have direct contact with such sex professionals and organizations, but it does happen. In some cases, teens could become victims of sex-trafficking or be persuaded to provide sexually explicit pictures or video for pay.