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SECURITY / POLICE INFORMATION NETWORK



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Help Your Kids Socialize Safely Online (SOURCE: ikeepSAFE.org)

OnGuard Online urges parents to talk to their tweens and teens about social networking sites, and offers these tips for using these sites safely:

- **In some circumstances, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act and Rule require social networking sites to get parental consent** before they collect, maintain, or use personal information from children under age 13.
- **Keep the computer in an open area**, like the kitchen or family room, so you can keep an eye on where your kids are online and what they're doing.
- **Use the Internet with your kids.** Be open to learning about the technology so you can keep up with them.
- **Talk to your kids about their online habits.** If they use social networking sites, tell them why it's important to keep information like their name, Social Security number, address, phone number, and family financial information — like bank or credit card account numbers — to themselves. Remind them that they should not share that information about other people in the family or about their friends, either. Your children should be cautious about sharing other information too, like the name of their school, sports teams, clubs, where they work or hang out, or any other information that could be used to identify them or locate them offline.
- **Make sure your kids' screen names don't say too much about them.** Explain why it's inappropriate — even dangerous — to use their full name, age, or hometown. Even if your kids think their screen name makes them anonymous, it doesn't take a genius to combine clues to figure out who your kids are and where they can be found.
- **Use privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on your child's website.** You may approve of their friends from school, clubs, teams, community groups, or your family being able to view your kids' website, but not strangers from a neighboring town or school.
- **Your kids should post only information that you — and they — are comfortable with others seeing — and knowing.** Many people can see their page, including their teachers, the police, a college admissions officer, or a potential employer.
- **Remind your kids that once they post information online, they can't take it back.** Even if they delete the information from a site, older versions exist on other people's computers.
- **Warn your kids about the dangers of flirting with strangers online.** Because some people lie online about who they really are, no one ever really knows who they're dealing with.

- **Tell your children to trust their gut if they have suspicions.** If they feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online, they need to tell you and then report it to the police and the social networking site. You could end up preventing someone else from becoming a victim.
- **If you're concerned that your child is engaging in risky online behavior, you can search the blog sites they visit** to see what information they're posting. Try searching by their name, nickname, school, hobbies, grade, or area where you live.
- **Check site privacy policies.** Some sites may share information like your child's email address with other companies, which could generate spam and even spyware on the family computer. Sites' privacy policies or other posted links for parents also may contain contact information for you to ask about your child's personal information.