

BLOG BEWARE



**ADOLESCENTS ON THE INTERNET CAN
BE NAVIGATING DANGEROUS WATERS**

Desktop and laptop computers, cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), gaming systems and other electronic devices offer unprecedented ways for people of all ages to interact, learn and entertain. What we consider ordinary today was unimaginable only a decade ago. Social networking sites, “blogs” and text messaging so heavily relied on by so many now, either did not exist or was not widely used. At the same time it has become as easy to interact with someone in distant nation, as with a next door neighbor. An online “friend” is not necessarily a friend and often is a “stranger!”

The unprecedented amount of personal information available on blogs and social networking sites makes them a perfect place for people who would harm children – and adults - to identify their victims and gain their trust. This trust can be used to lure children and teens into a false sense of security, making them vulnerable to enticement to meet in person, which can have serious consequences. Other dangers include exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying or identity theft.

Children and teens often are not aware that their words and photos - which may have been intended for a single person or small audience – sometimes find their way to a much larger one. This can be especially bad if a “friend” has harmful intentions. Increasing numbers of students who have posted threatening messages against classmates or school personnel, have been disciplined or even prosecuted criminally. Also, keep in mind that many universities and employers are now searching for and viewing online postings to find out more about the character of potential candidates.

Good Advice for Your Children

- ✓ Never post your personal information, such as cell phone number, home address or the name of your school.
- ✓ Be aware that information you post in blogs could put you at risk of victimization. People looking to harm you could use the information you provide to gain your trust. They also can deceive you by pretending they know you.
- ✓ Never give out your password(s) to anyone other than your parent or guardian.



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- ✓ Only add people as “friends” to your site if you know them in real life - and then only if you trust them.
- ✓ Never meet in person with anyone you first "met" on a social networking site. Some people are not who they say they are.
- ✓ Think before posting your photos. Personal photos should never portray you in a way that could embarrass you if publicly circulated. Also, they should not have revealing information, such as school names or locations. Look at the backgrounds of the photos to make sure you are not giving out any identifying information without realizing it. The name of a mall, the license plate of your car, signs or the name of your sports team on clothing are all types of information that can give your location away.
- ✓ Never respond to harassing or rude comments posted on your profile. Delete friends who continuously leave inappropriate comments. Save unwanted messages as they may be needed to take action if harassment continues or escalates.
- ✓ Check the privacy settings of the social networking sites that you use. Set them so that people can only be added as your friend if you approve it and view your profile if you have approved them as a friend.
- ✓ Remember that posting information about your friends could put them at risk. Protect your friends by not posting any names, ages, phone numbers, school names or locations. Refrain from making or posting plans and activities on your site.
- ✓ Consider going through your blog and profile and removing information that could put you at risk. Remember, you are visible to everyone on the Internet, not just people you know.

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