

SAFE AND RESPONSIBLE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Tips for Adolescents

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Social networking web sites such as **myspace** and **facebook** are useful Internet tools to keep in touch with friends and family, and can be used to meet new people with similar interests. These sites have become very popular among teens 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, adolescents 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. We have heard a number of stories of youth who have been cyberbullied using information found on social networking web sites. Follow these guidelines to use social networking web sites safely and responsibly:



- **Assume that EVERYONE has access to your profile** (parents, teachers, future employers, and law enforcement) even if you have your profile restricted to "friends only." Don't discuss things you wouldn't want them to know about. Don't use language you wouldn't use in front of your parents. Even so, make sure you set your profile to "private" so that you can control who has easy access to your information.
- **USE DISCRETION when putting pictures (or any content for that matter) on your profile.** Your friends might think that 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 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 you wouldn't want your worst enemy to find out about. Also, don't add people to your friend or contact network 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 a million "friends." 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, where you live? Never post this kind of information anywhere online. Your friends know how to find you.
- **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) 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 wrote the content at home from your own computer.