



Social Networking

Whether doing research for school projects and homework, chatting with friends or playing games, your child is likely to spend even more time on the computer as they get older. While they may understand computer programs, surfing the internet, chat rooms and multi-player games better than you do, they still need your guidance to steer them clear of the dangers which exist from a small minority of people who misuse the internet.

Does your child belong to a social networking site?

These days, children draw little distinction between real life and online life. They may use social Web sites designed for children such as Webkidz or Club Penguin, or social Web sites designed for adults such as Windows Live Spaces, YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, Twitter, Bebo Facebook, and others. Whatever they're doing, they should understand that many of these Web pages can be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet.

Children can use these sites to:

- Chat
- Play games
- Post and browse through photos and videos
- Blog.
- Post an online profile

Unfortunately, some of the information children post on their pages can also make them vulnerable to phishing scams, cyber-bullying, and Internet predators. Here are several ways you can help your children can use social Web sites more safely.

Communicate with your children about their experiences. Encourage your children to tell you if something they encounter on one of these sites makes them feel anxious, uncomfortable or threatened. Stay calm and remind your children they are not in trouble for bringing something to your attention.

Set your own house Internet rules As soon as your children begin to use the Internet on their own, it is a good idea to come up with a list of rules for using the Internet that everyone can agree on. These rules should include whether your children can use social Web sites and how they can use them.

Ensure your children follow age limits on the site. The recommended age for signing up for social Web sites is usually 13 and over. If your children are under the recommended age for these sites, do not let them use the sites. It is important to remember that you cannot rely on the services themselves to keep your underage child from signing up.

Educate yourself about the site. Evaluate the sites that your child plans to use and make sure both you and your child understand the privacy policy and the code of conduct. Find out if the site monitors content that people post. Also, review your child's page periodically.

Insist that your children never meet anyone in person that they've communicated with online only, and encourage them to communicate only with people they've met in person. Children are in real danger when they meet strangers in person whom they've communicated with online only. You can help protect your children by encouraging them to

use these sites to communicate with their friends, but not with people they've never met in person. It might not be enough to simply tell your child not to talk to strangers, because your child might not consider someone they've "met" online to be a stranger.

Ensure your children don't use full names. Have your children use only their first names or a nickname, but not a nickname that would attract inappropriate attention. Also, do not allow your children to post the full names of their friends.

Be wary of other identifiable information in your child's profile. Many social Web sites allow children to join public groups that include everyone who goes to a certain school. Be careful when your children reveal this and other information that could be used to identify them, such as their school mascots, their work places, or the name of the towns they live in. Too much information can make your children vulnerable to cyber-bullying, Internet predators, Internet fraud, or identity theft.

Consider using a site that is not very public. Some Web sites allow you to password-protect your site or use other methods to help limit viewers to only people your child knows. With Windows Live Spaces, for example, you can set permissions for who can view your site, ranging from anyone on the Internet to only people you choose.

Be smart about details in photographs. Explain to your children that photographs can reveal a lot of personal information. Encourage your children not to post photographs of themselves or their friends with clearly identifiable details such as street signs, licence plates on their cars, or the name of their school on their sweatshirts.

Teach your children about cyber-bullying. As soon as your children are old enough to use social Web sites, talk to them about cyber-bullying. Tell them that if they think they're being cyber-bullied, they should share this information right away with a parent, a teacher, or another adult that they trust. It's also important to encourage children to communicate with other people online in the same way they would face-to-face. Ask children to treat other people the way they would prefer to be treated.

Removal of your child's page. If your children refuse to abide by the rules you've set to help protect their safety and you've attempted to help them change their behaviour, you can contact the social Web site your child uses and ask them to remove the page. You may also want to investigate Internet-filtering tools) as a complement to, not a replacement for, parental supervision.

CEOP, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, sent this e-mail recently.

Every young person on Facebook needs the ClickCEOP app – this is why

If you work with teenagers, then you'll know most of them will be using Facebook. You might even be using it yourself... if so, you will want to know about a new, free application in Facebook that is designed to keep young people safe while they are having fun networking online.

ClickCEOP is a new 'app' launched today (Monday 12 July) which links the young user directly from their Facebook profile to help, advice and reporting facilities of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre – the police agency set up to tackle child abuse.

By adding the app, young people and parents can get support from CEOP on a range of issues – viruses, hacking, dealing with bullying online and they can report someone who is acting inappropriately towards them online.

If you have a Facebook profile, app and bookmark the app. If children in your care are on Facebook, get them to search 'ClickCEOP' in Facebook and give them the chance to be one click away from help – if they should ever need it.

www.facebook.com/clickceop