

Social Media and Internet Safety

13 Tips for Monitoring Kids' Social Media

1. **No Underage Facebooking**

Did you know that no one under the age of 13 is permitted to join Facebook? However, there is no real way for Facebook to truly enforce it, because anyone can lie about their year of birth. As a Parent make sure that your child stays away from Facebook until 13 AND until you are comfortable with him or her having an account.

2. **Check Privacy Settings**

Check that your privacy settings for the Internet and Facebook are set to the strictest levels. Depending on which browser you are using, you can adjust the settings directly from the options tab and adjust levels around cookies, third party sites and more. This not only protects the computer user, but also the computer from the threat of viruses.

3. **Use Filtering Software**

There are software suites you can purchase to monitor your child's Internet usage; many even enable you to view the exact keys that were typed, time spent online and all computer activity in general. Popular programs such as Net Nanny and PureSight PC let you monitor social media sites, block chats, filter content and much more. You can even monitor your child's cell phone with a software program like My Mobile Watchdog.

4. **Create Ground Rules**

If your kids are old enough to be using the computer on their own, they are old enough to understand that there are rules they need to abide by. Breaking them should not have a lesser consequence than if they broke a rule in the offline world. The best way for families to agree on ground rules is to create a contract that all parties must sign.

5. **Get To Know What Your Child's Habits Are**

You don't need to be a super sleuth and spy on your kid's every online move, but it is important to be aware of the kinds of sites he is frequenting and the people he/she is associating with. You get to know the friends he's hanging out with at school, and his online friends shouldn't be any different. One of the contract rules should be that you have full access to his/her Facebook friends and can take a look whenever you wish.

6. **Keep the Computer in a Central Location**

It's much easier to keep tabs on any online activity when the computer is located in a high-traffic zone than if your child is using a computer in the privacy of her own room. Place the computer in a central location like your kitchen or family room so that everything is out in the open.

7. **Urge Your Kids to Avoid Questionnaires, Free Giveaways and Contests**

A pop-up ad appears and tells kids they can win a free iPad by simply clicking the link. Anyone would be tempted by this kind of offer, but kids are particularly susceptible, so it's important to warn kids against falling for this kind of Internet trick. Many of these ruses are attempts to glean personal information. Inform kids that even if they are forwarded a fun questionnaire from a friend, it's best to close the window and not participate.

8. Monitor the Pictures Your Child Posts Online

In an ideal world, your child would never post a photo of herself online, but that might not be entirely realistic. If she wants to share photos with her friends via email or a social networking site, be sure you know exactly which pictures are being posted. Make sure the content of the photo is completely innocuous and that no identifiable locales in the background are noticeable.

9. Be a Good Example of How to Use Social Media

If you are tweeting and updating your Facebook page at a stop light and taking every opportunity to “just check something,” you’re setting a poor precedent for social media usage that your child will surely follow. Always remember to ask yourself if you’re setting a good example and demonstrating proper technology etiquette as well.

10. Limit Cell Phone Use

Just as you would limit use of a computer, TV or gaming system, you can do the same with a cell phone. Set rules for the device, only allowing cell phone usage at certain hours in the evening or after homework has been completed. If you have teens of driving age, the most important rule to enforce is that under no circumstances should cell phones ever be used while driving. Phones should be kept off so incoming text sounds aren’t a distraction or should be kept in the glove compartment, out of reach.

11. Teach Kids about an Online Reputation

Many kids don’t seem to understand the permanence of the online world. Make sure to stress to your kids what a digital footprint is and the impact inappropriate messages or images could have if a future college administrator or employer were to stumble upon them.

12. Talk to Kids about Online Dangers

You may feel like you’re scaring your kids when talking to them about the dangers of being online, but it’s better for them to be scared than to be unaware. Having an open line of communication is crucial the minute your kids start using the Internet more independently. “Who’s a stranger online? Everyone is! You need to remind your children that these people are strangers and that the standard rules always apply.”

13. Get to Know the Technology

Kids have gained a mastery of technology so quickly and can easily pick up on the nuances that any new gadget has, far more easily than we can in some cases. It is every parent’s responsibility to know exactly which key features are included in the gadgets our kids are using. “This can be a humbling experience. You may find that you had no idea that the Sony Playstation Portable that you bought your 11-year-old last Christmas had a web browser.