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Social Networking

Helping patients and their parents understand the risks of online communication

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Social networking on sites such as Facebook (www.facebook.com) and MySpace (www.myspace.com) has become a common form of communication among teenagers. Pediatricians must develop an understanding of what occurs on social networking sites in order to communicate with their teenage patients and to provide anticipatory guidance to teens and their families about safety considerations when using these online social sites.

Facebook is one of the most popular sites for social networking. It is based on net-



works of high schools, colleges, workplaces, and geographic regions. Each user's profile can be seen only by members of the same network or by people in other networks who are invited to be a "friend" and whose invitation is accepted. Facebook privacy settings can be customized to restrict access to information.

Facebook users share information about themselves and communicate with friends, or other people in their network. This can be particularly valuable for incoming freshmen

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looking to meet people at their college, or as a way for former members of a school or program to keep in touch. Many teenagers frequently use it for social communication with friends.

On Facebook, each individual has a profile in which they share some personal information. This profile can include the user's name, pictures, personal interests, and phone numbers. Only members of the network can see a person's profile, unless that person adds an outsider as a friend (which must be approved by both people involved). An individual also can adjust privacy settings so that only friends, and not an entire network, can see their profile. Even members of a network must "friend" an individual before they can write on each other's "walls." The wall is a portion of the profile page that everyone with access to the profile can see.

Another form of communication often used by Facebook members is the message, similar to an e-mail. Anyone can send a message to someone on Facebook, but only the individual or individuals receiving the message can see the content. Others in the net-

work would not be able to see messages on someone else's Facebook page. It is not necessary to "friend" the sender in order to read the message they sent and there is an option to block the sender if necessary. Students on Facebook also may communicate via instant messaging, but only with their friends.

Unlike profiles on MySpace, complete Facebook profile pages cannot be accessed through search engines such as Google. Facebook blocks all information except a name, thumbnail profile picture, and limited aggregated data. This gives Facebook an added safety benefit over MySpace, a fact primary care providers should keep in mind when providing guidance to families.

One very important recommendation for all teens and their families is that teens should communicate online only with people they know in person. This rule should be enforced whether they are on Facebook, instant messaging, or e-mailing. On Facebook they should "friend" only people they know and confirm that they know them by looking at their profile. Parents should regularly discuss this with their teens and ensure that they comply with this important safety requirement. An exception to this rule might be made for freshman heading off to college. It can be helpful during this transition to network with other incoming freshman, even those they have not yet met.



Internet Safety

Establishing rules to protect children online

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The Internet is a wonderful tool, appreciated by children and adults alike for its ability to provide information and enhance communication. However, its use is not without risks and there are important safety issues that must be considered. Primary care providers should be aware of these safety considerations in order to provide appropriate anticipatory guidance to their patients and their families.

It is important for parents to regularly discuss the Internet with their children and to develop family rules about acceptable and safe behavior for electronic media use. Just as parents should regularly ask their children where they are going and who they are going out with when they leave home, so should they ask their teens where they are going and who they're communicating with on the Internet. Teens should be encouraged to communicate only with people they know in person and it should be reinforced that people online may lie about their identities.



Parents should explore the Internet regularly and in particular should become familiar with websites frequently visited by their child. Keeping current is important, as technology and websites change rapidly. In addition to educating themselves, parents can encourage their child's school district to provide educational sessions about safe and appropriate electronic media use for children and their families. Parents should also encourage school districts to develop strict policies regarding appropriate electronic media use in school settings.

Filtering or monitoring software is available and can help keep children safe on the Internet. Filtering products can give children access to a pre-approved list of sites and block access to other sites. However, because children may use unmonitored computers in other locations, filtering or monitoring software is only one part of keeping our children safe on the Internet. Education and regular communication are even more important components of the total safety strategy. An excellent source of information for parents and teens is www.Netsmartz.org.

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There are some simple family rules that parents and caregivers can set regarding Internet use.

- Just like time spent watching TV, time spent on the Internet should be considered “screen time,” and should be limited during the day. It should not take the place of homework, playing outside, activities, or time with friends.
- Children need to be taught that the people they talk to on-line may not be who they say they are. Adults may pretend to be young people.

- Children should also know that the information they share may not be private.

Parents must teach their children the following essential rules about Internet communication.

- **NEVER** give out personal information or a credit card number without adult supervision.
- **NEVER** share passwords or arrange a face-to-face meeting with someone they meet online.
- **NEVER** respond to messages that make you feel confused or uncomfortable, use bad or inappropriate language, or send hurtful messages. Tell a parent or trusted adult if you receive any messages that make you feel uncomfortable.

The Internet is a tool that provides a wealth of information and extraordinary opportunities for communication. Primary care providers and parents need to stay informed and educate children so they can remain safe when using this valuable resource.

Additional resources and information on Internet safety can be found at:

www.Netsmartz.org

<http://safetynet.aap.org/internet.pdf>

http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/net_safety.html





Internet safety tips for parents

- ☐ Simple, easy-to-read house rules should be posted on or near your computer monitor. Create your own computer rules or use the Internet Safety Pledge (on page 6 or online at www.netsmartz.org/resources/pledge.htm). The pledge can be signed by adults and children and should be periodically reviewed.
- ☐ Look into safeguarding programs or options your online service provider might offer. These may include monitoring or filtering capabilities.
- ☐ Always read a web site's privacy policy before giving any personal information. Also make sure that a web site offers a secure connection before giving credit-card information.
- ☐ Web sites for children are not permitted to request personal information without a parent's permission. Talk to children about what personal information is and why you should never give it to people online.
- ☐ If children use chat or e-mail, talk to them about never meeting in person with anyone they first "met" online.
- ☐ Talk to children about not responding to offensive or dangerous e-mail, chat, or other communications. Report any such communication to local law enforcement. Do not delete the offensive or dangerous e-mail; turn off the monitor and contact local law enforcement.
- ☐ Keep the computer in the family room or other open area of your home where there is adult supervision, not in your child's bedroom.
- ☐ Become informed about computers and the Internet. Learn to use the programs your child is using. Visit www.netsmartz.org/index.aspx for additional information on Internet safety.
- ☐ Let children show you what they can do online, and visit their favorite sites.
- ☐ Have children use child-friendly search engines when completing homework.
- ☐ Know who children are exchanging e-mail with, and only let them use chat areas when you can supervise. NetSmartz recommends limiting chat room access to child-friendly chat sites.
- ☐ Be aware of any other computers your child may be using.
- ☐ Internet accounts should be in the parent's name with parents having the primary screen name, controlling passwords, and using blocking and/or filtering devices.
- ☐ Children should not complete a profile for a service provider and children's screen names should be non-descript so as not to identify that the user is a child.
- ☐ Talk to children about what to do if they see something that makes them feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. Show them how to turn off the monitor and emphasize that it's not their fault if they see something upsetting. Remind children to tell a trusted adult if they see something that bothers them online.
- ☐ Consider using filtering or monitoring software for your computer. Filtering products are available that use whitelisting, which only allows a child access to a pre-approved list of sites.
- ☐ Visit www.netsmartz.org/index.aspx for web sites that provide information on filtering or blocking software. Filters are only one element of Internet safety, however. Education is a key part of prevention.
- ☐ Report any obscene messages or images to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's CyberTipline at 800-843-567 or www.cybertipline.com.

Adapted from NetSmartz® Workshop (www.netsmartz.org) and Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation Missing Person Information Clearinghouse (www.state.ia.us/missing).

Internet Safety Pledge

for middle and high school students

I WILL TALK WITH MY PARENTS OR GUARDIAN ABOUT THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND GROUND RULES FOR GOING ONLINE

- I will talk with my parents or guardian so that we can set up rules for going online. The rules will include the time of day that I may be online, the length of time I may be online, whom I may communicate with while online, and appropriate areas for me to visit while online. I will not break these rules or access other areas without their permission.
- I will never download anything from anyone I don't know. In addition to offensive content, spam or junk e-mail may contain viruses that can damage my computer.

I WILL KEEP MY IDENTITY PRIVATE

- I will never share personal information such as my full name, my mailing address, my telephone number, the name of my school, or any other information that could help someone determine my actual identity.
- I will also not reveal any personal information about

my friends or family. I will never send a person my picture or anything else without first checking with my parents or guardian.

I WILL NEVER RESPOND TO ANY ONLINE COMMUNICATION THAT MAKES ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE

- I will tell a trusted adult if I come across any information that makes me feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused.
- I will never respond to any messages that are rude or offensive in any way. I will show the message to a trusted adult right away so that he or she can decide if it's necessary to contact the online service or other authorities.

I WILL NEVER MEET IN PERSON WITH ANYONE I HAVE FIRST "MET" ONLINE WITHOUT DISCUSSING IT WITH MY PARENTS OR GUARDIAN

- Since the biggest danger to my safety is getting together with someone I have first "met" online, I won't meet in person with anyone unless my parents or guardian agrees to the meeting, they will go with me to the meeting, and the meeting will be in a public place.

I WILL RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE'S RIGHTS WHILE ONLINE

- The Internet is a large community; therefore, my behavior while on it affects others. I will always treat others the way I would like to be treated.
- I will respect copyright laws and check on sources. When writing reports I will make sure that the online sources of information are credible, and I will always cite my sources.

Piracy is illegal and keeps authors, artists, and others from getting paid for their work. I will never download things such as pictures, games, music, or movies that have not been given to the public for free.

Signed (student):

Signed (parent):

Courtesy of NetSmartz®.

Adapted from *Teen Safety on the Information Highway* by Lawrence J. Magid. Copyright © 1994, 1998, and 2003 National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. For more information on Internet safety, visit www.NetSmartz.org.

How to select the right monitoring software

Monitoring software can help protect children on the Internet. Choosing the right monitoring software can be difficult as there are many available and each one works differently. Here are some things to consider.

Ease of use: Is it easy to install and monitor? Is it easy to tell if it is not working?

Effectiveness: Is it effectively monitoring a child's activities?

Recording: Does it record keystrokes, Internet surfing, chat, and file transfers?

E-mail logging: Does it log a child's e-mails and e-mail attachments?

IM logging: Does it log all programs a child uses?

Visuals: How does it show a child's activities?

Customization: Can it be customized to fit a family's needs?

Management: Can it be monitored from other computers?

Product reviews: Reviews of monitoring software are available at www.getnetwise.org.

For a list of top ten monitoring software products, go to <http://monitoring-software-review.toptenreviews.com>. You may also check local electronics or computer stores, use online search engines to look for software, or check with your Internet provider for suggestions.

Remember, monitoring software is only one part of protecting a child. Education, communication, and understanding of technology are key components, as well.

Coming Your Way

Identifying and assisting young Iowans at risk for suicide

*Carol Hinton, nurse clinician
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This month, four or five young Iowans will end their lives. And next month, five more will die by suicide. This pattern has existed for the last seven years.

Each year since 2000, an average of 56 young Iowans between the ages of 10 to 24 have killed themselves. And thousands more tried to end their lives and were hospitalized for life-threatening injuries.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among the

youth of Iowa. This pattern of death, injury, and hospitalization will likely continue month after month, year after year, unless Iowa makes some drastic changes in the way it approaches mental health services and addresses some of the root causes of suicide.

In the next issue:

- Find out how Iowa is addressing this public health problem in the schools with a mental health screening

and early identification tool called TeenScreen.

- Learn about the barriers that prevent youth (as well as adults) from addressing and seeking help for their mental health problems.
- Find out about resources available for pediatric offices, student health centers, and other medical providers to help identify mental health problems in youth and prevent suicide.



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