

The Medical Minute: Track kids' social media use

June 24 2010, By Deepa Sekhar

Kids don't just call a friend to say hi anymore. Today, they often log on to social media sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, to touch base with others.

These venues let [children](#) and teens set up a profile page and communicate with the kid next door or the cousin on another continent. But navigating through [social media](#) sites may raise problems for trusting and inexperienced youngsters. To encourage sensible use of these sites, here are some tips:

- Put computers where you can watch them. It's easier to supervise your child's Internet habits when their computers (including laptops) are in a visible spot, such as the family room.
- Learn what your kids are up to. Chat with them about which social media sites they belong to and how often they use them. Ask whether they're following the basic rules of social media etiquette, such as avoiding gossip, rumors and sexually explicit or inappropriate language.
- Emphasize that the world is watching. Sharing information or photos on the World Wide Web enables the whole wide world -- including their grandmother, teachers and even predators -- to view the material. Remind them to include only minimal personal information. That means no last names, addresses or financial details.
- Tell them the Web is forever. Everything children post online remains

there, always. Five years down the road, no one wants a college admissions counselor, scholarship committee or prospective employer to see an unkind message or embarrassing photo on their profile.

- Get kids to put up some walls. Some social media sites offer privacy tools or policies that limit who can visit their page. Make sure your kids use them.
- Accept it, but regulate it. Face it, social media is here to stay. Acknowledge that your children will be part of the trend. Monitor their use as closely as possible, depending on their age.
- Get in on the action. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Become a member of the sites where your children belong. Tell them that you will visit their page often.
- Stay connected. Technological advances happen swiftly, so if needed, brush up on your computer skills to keep up. Visit online groups that aim to educate parents about Internet safety. Among them: ikeepSAFE.org or onguardonline.gov.
- Parents need to teach children to use good judgment in what they say. Discourage gossip, spreading rumors and destroying another child's reputation through electronic media. People often feel emboldened to say inappropriate things on the Internet, which they might not otherwise say in person. The electronic media revolution brings a whole new level of responsibility, which we must teach our children to successfully navigate.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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