

Safer social networking

Older children

Social networking describes a variety of online services like Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, online games such as World of Warcraft and Moshi Monsters and virtual worlds such as Club Penguin. Some social networking sites targeted at children claim to moderate or check communication to provide greater protection for children.

Social networking services let children and teens communicate with other people online. This can enable young people to stay in touch with friends and family and join in fun fantasy worlds and games. However, children may forget who they are communicating with online and disclose too much information. They may also behave in ways that they wouldn't offline.

The following tips can assist in managing children's social networking interactions

- If your child is using social networking services check the website age guidelines and terms and conditions. In general it is useful to consider whether you are comfortable with the content and the potential for contact with others including teens and adults. Is your child socially ready to manage contact from potentially ill meaning strangers?
- Help your child set up their profile to make sure that they don't put too much personal information online. Help your child to create screen names or IDs that do not communicate their gender, age, name or location and are not sexually provocative.
- Set rules—make sure your child knows what information they can share or post online. Ask them to tell you before joining new websites and before they post any personal information online, including their full name, address or school.
- Advise your child not to respond to any negative messages and to report any negative messages they receive to you or another trusted adult.
- Establish rules around the type of contact they should report to an adult. For example, one rule may be 'tell Mum if somebody asks you about your underwear or private parts'.
- Reassure your child that you will not deny them access to the internet if they report feeling uncomfortable or unsafe when online. This is a very real concern for children that may stop them from communicating with you openly.
- Advise your child to check with you before clicking on links sent by others on social networking websites. These may lead to adult content.
- Remind your child to communicate appropriately with others online, and to report any bullying of themselves or others to you or another trusted adult.
- Talk to your child about the use of location based services. These services enable social networking users to report their physical location to other users by 'checking in'. Some services let people report their friends' locations and have location based functions turned on by default. Your child can review their settings and block this function or limit

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who sees their location based information. Remind your child that allowing strangers to see where they are, or where their mates are, is a risky behaviour.

- You may also like to contact your mobile phone company for assistance with blocking internet, Bluetooth and GPS functionality on their child's mobile phone to limit their ability to notify others of their whereabouts.
- Consider using filters, labels and safe zones to help manage your child's online access

More information

The Cybersmart program provides a range of cybersafety materials for parents and their children. For more information, resources, advice and tips, visit the Cybersmart website at www.cybersmart.gov.au. Encourage your children and teens to take a look around the website. If you have young children, you may like to explore it together to help them understand how to protect themselves against online risks and make the most of their experiences online.