

A Parents' Guide to facebook

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
What is Facebook?	2
What do people do on Facebook?	2
Why do young people use Facebook?	3
Is Facebook safe?	3
What are the risks involved in social networking?	4
How do we parent Facebook users?	5
Ways to monitor your child's Facebook activities	6
Safety, privacy and reputation protection in the digital age	6
Digital footprints & good reputations	7
HOW TO OPTIMIZE FACEBOOK SETTINGS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	8
Your children's profiles are a reflection on them	8
Why children should be honest about their age	9
Choose friends wisely	10
Messages, Wall Posts & News Feed	11
To limit what's on your child's profile	12
See what your profile looks like to others	14
Configuring who can see what you post	14
Extra protections for minors	15
Basic privacy controls	15
Customizing privacy settings	16
Limiting who can see your info or search for you	18
Controlling who can see individual posts	20
Lists: A powerful privacy feature	21
Using the Groups feature	22
Photos and tagging	24
Controlling Facebook applications	26
Limiting individual applications	27
Facebook's location-sharing Places	28
Reporting problems	31
Preventing suicide and other self-harm	33
CONCLUSION	34

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our guidebook for parents! It's designed to help you understand what Facebook is and how to use it safely. With it, you will be better informed and able to communicate with young Facebook users in your life. That's important because 1) if something goes wrong, we want our children to come to us and 2) as the Internet becomes increasingly social and mobile, a parent's guidance and support are ever more key to young people's well-being in social media and technology.

Note to readers: Facebook adds new features and updates old ones on a regular basis. This guide has the latest available information at time of publication. If you find anything in the guide that is out-of-date, please send an email to admin@connectsafely.org.

What is Facebook?

Developed in 2004 by then Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook is a social networking site used by more than 500 million people in every country on the planet, so far in 70 languages. The site's minimum age is 13, but teens represent only a minority population on Facebook. It's used by a lot of adults, certainly including parents. But not just individuals – Facebook's also used by businesses, organizations and governments all over the world, to send marketing messages, seek charitable funding and communicate with customers and constituents.

Facebook is certainly not the only social networking site. There are thousands of them, based all over the world, some general-interest social sites for people in a specific country and some for specific interest groups in many categories – students, sports fans, film aficionados, cooks, travelers, gamers, music lovers, etc. Some social sites are designed for use on computers, some just for mobile phones. Facebook is accessed by both.

What do people do on Facebook?

They chat, share photos (more than 100 million new ones each day!), post videos, stay in touch and share personal news, play games, plan meetings and get-togethers, send birthday and holiday wishes, do homework and business together, find and contact long-lost friends and relatives, review books and recommend restaurants, support charitable causes....

In fact, there's very little people *can't* do on Facebook. It's sometimes called a "social utility." Like a power grid, it provides the supporting infrastructure for the constantly changing everyday activities of hundreds of millions of users, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The amount of activity on Facebook is almost inconceivable. Every month, users add more than 30 billion pieces of content (comments, photos, Web links, blog posts, videos, etc.) to Facebook.

In effect, the "product" of Facebook is a living thing that changes constantly. Unlike the media we parents grew up with – books, newspapers, and even radio and television – it's "user-driven," the collective product of its millions of users' lives (not just their social lives), updated spontaneously, moment by moment around the world. It's a large swath of the wired and wireless social Web that increasingly mirrors all of human life.

Why do young people use Facebook?

For as many reasons as adults do. The research of psychologists and sociologists shows us that they use social networking sites for:

- Socializing or "hanging out" with their friends, for the most part friends at school
- Day-to-day news about their friends, acquaintances, relatives, and peer groups
- Collaborating on school work
- Validation or emotional support
- Self-expression and the identity exploration and formation that occurs in adolescent development
- What sociologists call "informal learning," or learning outside of formal settings such as school, including learning social norms and social literacy
- Learning the technical skills of the digital age, which many businesspeople feel are essential to professional development
- Discovering and exploring interests, both academic and future professional interests
- Learning about the world beyond their immediate home and school environments
- Civic engagement – participating in causes that are meaningful to them.

Is Facebook safe?

Just like communities in the physical world, no social networking site, virtual world, online game, or any other social-media service can provide a guarantee of 100% safety, Facebook included. Why? Because this is the social Web, and safety depends a great deal on users' behavior toward one another. Facebook provides safety and privacy features and education for its users. Parents would benefit from visiting Facebook's Safety Center, a comprehensive resource in the site with information for Teens, Parents, Educators, and Law Enforcement. That in-site safety information and this guidebook are important for the very reason that Facebook's "product" is produced by its users. Parents need to know that, on the social Web, safety is a shared responsibility – a constant negotiation between users (for example, all the friends in a photo being shared with other friends on the site), between users and the site, and between teen users and their parents.

So the short answer to that question is that, in this new, very social media environment, a user's safety depends on the user as much as on the site. That's why parents need to be informed and keep communication lines with their children wide open – because youth, like all Facebook users, are constantly communicating, posting, and sharing content in the site.

What are the risks involved in social networking?

Youth-risk research has recently made five important findings:

1. Young people who behave aggressively online are more than twice as likely to be victimized online, so children's own behavior in Facebook or any social site is key to their well-being on the social Web.
2. The most common risk young people face online is peer harassment or aggression – in other words hurtful, harassing, or defamatory behavior.
3. A child's psychosocial makeup and environment (for example, home and school) are better predictors of risk than any technology that the child uses, so...
4. Not all children are equally at risk online, and the children who are most at risk online are those who are most at risk in "real life," or offline.
5. Although, for the vast majority of youth, online social networking is largely a reflection of offline life, it can also amplify, perpetuate and widely distribute real-life problems or conflicts – very rapidly. Something posted in anger or on impulse is extremely difficult to take back, so it has never been more important for users (of any age) to think before they "speak," post, or send a text message.

Specific social networking risks include...

- Posting information about themselves that: a) could help strangers determine their physical location; b) could be used to manipulate them; or c) whether posted by them or others, could cause psychological harm or jeopardize reputations and future prospects
- Harassment or online bullying ("cyberbullying") on the part of your children or others'
- Spending too much time online, losing a sense of balance in their activities ("too much" is subjective, which is why parents need to be engaged)
- Exposure to inappropriate content (this too is subjective), although typically worse content can be found out on the Web at large than in Facebook or other responsible social networking sites
- Potential for inappropriate contact with adults (parents need to ensure that social networking does not lead to offline contact unapproved by them and other caring adults in their children's lives)

- Damage to reputation or future prospects because of young people's own behavior or that of their peers – unkind or angry posts, compromising photos or videos, or group conflict depicted in text and imagery.

How do we parent Facebook users?

Just as in your child's offline life, you are key to helping him or her form a positive identity, maintain good relationships, and create a positive reputation on the social Web. We'll get specific in the how-to section, but here are a few basic social-Web parenting tips that would be very helpful to keep in mind:

Facebook use is very individual, which is why the No. 1 safety tip is "Talk with your child." Don't believe everything you read or hear about youth in Facebook, including in the news media, which often present a very negative picture. Adults who don't understand social media sometimes think of using Facebook as a single activity to which young people can get "addicted." If they're addicted to anything when using Facebook, it would be to their school friends or social experience. But even two children of different ages in a single family can use Facebook very differently. A recent study found that 1) even for avid young Facebook users, its use hasn't replaced their offline interests, such as sports or music, and 2) even when young people leave Facebook "on" all the time, it's often just "running in the background" as they do other things. If they're using Facebook while doing homework, parents may want to address the possibility of too much distraction from academic work.

As a parent, you are part of the solution when negative things happen, which is why you need to be informed not just about Facebook or social networking but also (and especially) about your children's use of them. They need your back-up.

Try not to overreact if something negative happens – another reason why it helps to be informed. An informed parent is a calm parent, and children are more likely to go to their parents when the conversation can stay calm and thoughtful. You can help them more when they choose to come and talk to you, so you'll want to maximize those opportunities for communication and support.

The well-stocked toolbox of today's parenting includes your family's values, household policies and rules (about, for example, how children use their time and when it's best to have digital devices turned off), and sometimes technology, or "parental control" tools, such as filtering and monitoring software products. If your child is uncommunicative about his or her online time, sometimes it helps to use monitoring software to know what kids are up to. It's usually best to be open with them about your use of a monitoring product, because if you do discover inappropriate Internet use, they won't be surprised that you know and turn the conversation into an argument.

Facebook itself can be a great parenting tool. It can give you a rare window into your children's social lives as well as help you stay informed about their use of the site. In fact, ask your kids to show you how to set Facebook's privacy and safety features. Not only will you learn more about Facebook, you'll see how much they know about using the site wisely. If they haven't thought much about the privacy settings, use this guide to go through them together. After that, consider creating your own account on Facebook so you can "friend" your child. That's probably the best "monitoring tool" you could use. Many parents do. But do be careful about writing on their "wall" (Facebook page) or commenting on what they post; that might embarrass them, which can create an unnecessary unwanted communication barrier between you and your child.

Ways to monitor your child's Facebook activities

One way to monitor your child's Facebook activities, as we mentioned above, is to "friend" them and get them to friend you – then you can establish a family rule that says something like, "No one can block other family members from content any of us posts in Facebook." For parents' part – if you and your kids do become Facebook friends – resist the temptation to make public comments on their pages. Family members can always send each other messages, which are private (like email messages).

Some kids might be willing to have their parents friend them but are embarrassed to have their parents' names show up on their friends list. Some parents solve this by creating an account under a different name, although it is a violation of Facebook's terms of service not to use your real name. Another approach some parents take is to require that they know all their children's passwords (email, instant messaging, social networking, etc.). We suggest this works better with younger children, because many teens would rather "go underground" (use other sites secretly) than allow parents that level of monitoring capability. The level of privacy a child has depends so much on the child and on a family's own policies and values.

It can also be helpful to type your child's name, address and phone number into a Web search engine such as Google or Bing to see if anything is being said about him or her on the Internet.

Another option is to subscribe to one of the new online reputation-monitoring services such as SafetyWeb or SocialShield, which can help you find out what your teen is posting online without your having to friend them in Facebook. These services charge a monthly fee.

Safety, privacy and reputation protection in the digital age

Before we go into detail about Facebook settings, some context on what it means to socialize and share personal information in a digital media environment might be helpful. In this section, we'll provide a bit of that background. And throughout this guidebook, we'll highlight some key parenting points for guiding young social networkers.

The meaning of privacy seems to be changing in today's *very social* media environment, and different from when we were children. Researchers say that people want to control their level of privacy rather than to be either entirely private (which defeats the whole purpose of socializing online) or entirely public online.

Sharing photos and information online has become part of how people stay in touch all over the world. Because using media is now a social experience, it's not a solitary activity, it's a shared or interactive one. And since photos and videos often depict groups of people, and one person's content and photos often appear on other people's pages and vice versa, safety and privacy in social media are also a shared experience – a negotiation. One person (your child or *you*) simply can't have complete control over anything he or she posts online, even when employing the strictest privacy settings.

Safety and Reputation Point: *Whatever you post, positive or negative, can affect your relationships with people, how they feel about you and what they might say about you to others. We all need to remember that we're interacting with people in social networking sites – not text and images – even though the text and images are much more visible than the people.*

Young people's information-sharing in Facebook is very grounded in their "real world" relationships, peer groups and school life, research shows – is rarely with strangers. While that's very good, sometimes they're so focused on friends and peers that they don't think about how their content can be seen by or distributed to a much broader audience and be very difficult to take back. They may need their parents' help in understanding that it's almost impossible to control digital text, photos, video, etc., once it has been shared via phones and online.

Reputation Point: *Even if your child's privacy settings are specifically set to Friends Only, there is a possibility that a friend can become an ex-friend or just try to play a prank on your child by copying and forwarding information that was meant only for friends. For this reason, it's important for users to be extremely careful about what they post online, even among their friends.*

Digital footprints & good reputations

Type in someone's name in a search engine and there is a chance you'll find out something about that person. That, along with the comments, photos, or videos they or others may have posted about them on a social networking site, are part of their "digital footprint." It's the accumulation of what we've left on the Internet from our online activities, including text messages on mobile phones, emails, online chats and even Web surfing.

Some people worry that *any* information posted about a young person online is bad, but positive posts can actually enhance teens' reputations – as long as

they don't include information that is not safe to share, such as their home address. Web pages, blogs, photos or status updates about their accomplishments in school or sports, for example, could actually improve their image. And, if someone does post something negative about your teen which can't be erased, it helps to have positive information out on the Net to counter-balance it.

Reputation Point: *There is nothing wrong with having a digital footprint – hundreds of millions of people do now – but parents want their children's digital footprint to be a positive reflection on them. It's vitally important to be aware that we're leaving a trail of information and careful about what we say online. It's also good to be aware of what others are saying about us. The key to having a positive reputation online is being a good digital citizen: behaving civilly and respectfully toward others online and sharing positive information about oneself in blogs, social networking sites and other social media.*

HOW TO OPTIMIZE FACEBOOK SETTINGS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

This section is a how-to guide for settings that help protect children in three key areas: safety, privacy and reputation. If you have any questions about specific settings or features, ask young Facebook users at your house! It's a great way to start a conversation (or have another) about how they're using the site.

Please don't be put off when we say "you" rather than "your teen" as we go through the settings. This is a parents' guide aimed mostly at helping you guide your child, but because so many parents now use Facebook themselves, this is for you too.


Your children's profiles are a reflection on them

More than the clothes you wear, the music you like, or the company you keep, your Facebook profile is a representation of you. Along with your profile photo or image and the photos of you that are shared by friends, your profile puts all the key information about you and your life in one place for an at-a-glance key to who you are. It's a little like a resume that is constantly being updated, but it's about all aspects of your life, it's multimedia, and it's updated by your friends too, not just you.

So it's very important to help our kids think carefully and often – really as often as they post photos and information – about what their profile says about them and who sees it. Working through the following how-to's for Facebook privacy will help you and your children think this digital self-representation through right now, but it's also a good idea to revisit those settings as kids mature and get ready for new phases of their lives.



Safety, Privacy & Reputation Point: What you say reflects on you. It always helps to think about the impact and audience when you post on someone's wall, "Like" or comment on someone's update or even support a cause. What might this say about you? If you just want to say something to a single friend, just send a private message or use Facebook chat. But remember that even that can be copied and posted somewhere else if the person didn't like what you said (or did)!

Cary Smarteen
🏠 Clerk at Burger King 📍 Goes to Grant High School 🏠 Lives in Des Moines, Iowa ❤️ It's Complicated 📍 From New York, New York 📅 Born on March 1, 1995



Education and Work

Employers

-  **Burger King**
Clerk • Feb 2009 to present • Des Moines, Iowa
Works there
 - **Eating Burgers** with Larry Magid (remove) and Anne Collier
Feb 2010 to present
-  **Starbucks**

Sample profile of "Cary Smarteen" shows her name, school, city, home town, relationship status, birthdate and 5 most recent photos – but "Cary" doesn't have to include all that!

Why children should be honest about their age

Birthday: Jun 11 1995

Why do I need to provide this?

Sign Up

Facebook requires users to enter their real birthday. If they're under 13, they won't be allowed to sign up. If they're between 13 and 18, they will have some special protections just for minors.

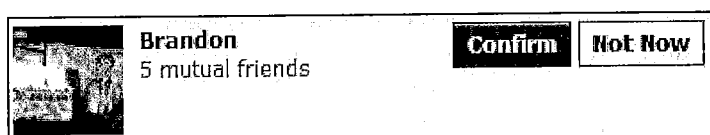
When someone sets up a new Facebook account, one of the first things they're asked to do is enter a date of birth. One of the main reasons for this is so the site knows if the user is under 13 or under 18. If under 13, children are not allowed on Facebook. If they're aged 13-17, they are allowed on the site, but – because they're still minors – there are certain additional protections in place for them.

We strongly recommend against anyone lying about his or her age. There are both legal and child-development reasons why Facebook restricts membership to people 13 and older. In addition to complying with U.S. law (called the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, which requires verifiable parental permission before a child under 13 can disclose personally identifying information), Facebook has created an environment designed only for teenagers and adults. The site's rules and policies are aimed at teens and adults, and the protections and safety education that Facebook has in place are designed for people 13 and older.

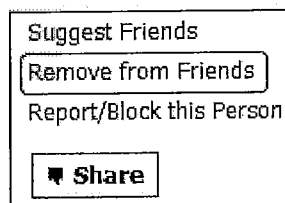
Having said that, we need to face reality. A July 2010 survey found that 37% of U.S. 10-to-12-year-olds were on Facebook, which means that every one of these children had to lie about their age to get on the service. Adults can discuss how good or bad this is for children, but it has become a fact of life we all face. If you have children under 13 who are on the service, we recommend that they cancel their accounts and that you encourage them to use more age-appropriate services. But if they are going to continue despite the site's restrictions, it's even more important to help them configure their privacy settings to the most restrictive level possible, and be sure to "friend" them or otherwise monitor their online use. Read on for how you can do that.

Choose friends wisely

After you or your teen has been on Facebook awhile, you will likely get friend requests. These are messages asking permission to be a Facebook "friend" with that person. Once you accept that request, you can see what they post and they can see what you post, subject to the privacy settings we cover later. If the request comes from someone you want to stay in touch with, you'll probably want to Confirm the person as a friend. But if you don't know that person from the real world or if you have any reason not to want to communicate with them on Facebook, you can click Not Now, and they will not be added. And if you choose never to add them, don't worry, they won't get a message saying you've rejected them.



Just as you can add friends, you can easily remove them by going to the bottom of their page and clicking Remove from Friends. Here, too, they will not get a message saying that they have been removed.



Safety Point: Research shows that aggressive behavior online increases the aggressor's risk. Bullying behavior can incite retaliation; online bullies and targets can switch roles in an instant – by typing comments or posting embarrassing photos in a chain reaction. So being kind or civil online isn't just a nice idea: it's also protective.

Messages, Wall Posts & News Feed

There are several ways Facebook users can use the service to communicate with other people. One option is to send a Message that's basically like email (only the recipient sees the message). Another way is to write on someone's "wall," which can be very public. Depending on your privacy settings, what you write on a person's wall can be seen by all of your friends and possibly even a wider audience. Be careful not to make the fairly common mistake of using a wall to leave a private message.

Facebook has what it calls a News Feed, which is a stream of posts that users see on their Home pages – including posts from friends or in some cases friends of friends. Not everything that people post shows up in the News Feed, but a lot does. Posts can appear in the News Feed, subject to your privacy settings.

Facebook's 'email' service

In November 2010, Facebook introduced a change in its messaging system that enables users to get their own @Facebook.com email address. Called "Messages," this service, as it becomes available around the world, will make it possible for Facebook users to send or receive messages to or from anyone's email address. There will also be an option to send messages to friends' mobile phones, whether you're using your mobile phone or a computer.

The new service features a single mailbox called Messages, where all of your conversations (private messages, chat, text messages and, optionally, email) are sorted by person, so that all the communications you have with a single person are together. If it's available you'll find Messages right under News Feed in the left-hand column under your Profile photo.

For adults, the default setting is for everyone to be able to send you messages but, as with other aspects of privacy, "Everyone" is defined differently for minors. Only Friends and Friends of Friends can send messages to users under 18. Everyone else will get an automatic bounce-back reply. Both adults and minors can limit who can send messages to Friends Only.

