Social Networking Tips for Parents

i-SAFE Inc. has created this list of social-networking tips and reminders that can be used to help avoid potentially hazardous situations and to respond appropriately.

- **Set rules concerning social-networking sites.**

  Never reveal personal information online. Educate your child on the dangers of revealing personal information online. Ensure that your child knows not to post any personal information in his or her profile or in the content of his or her Web space. Other than the obvious, this includes e-mail address, instant-message (IM) contact information, sports teams, places frequented, or any other information that could allow a stranger to identify or contact them.

  Follow Web site age restrictions. Most sites require users to be 13 and older. If your child is younger than the age limit, do not allow them to use the site.

  Activate security settings on the Web site. Have your children password-protect their web pages and set permissions to allow only persons they know to view and post to their bulletins.

- **Discuss the dangers of communicating with strangers online.**

  Online friends are strangers, not "real" friends. Remind your child that he or she is never to meet an online friend in person, and if asked to do so, to notify you immediately.

- **Evaluate the Web site.**

  Read the Web site's privacy policy and code of conduct. Find out if the site monitors and removes inappropriate content posted on user pages.

- **Spend time online with your child.**

  Ask your child to show you his or her social-networking page. Unfamiliar friends and inappropriate content can factor into a dangerous equation.

- **Establish rules for posting pictures online.**

  Posting photographs openly online is dangerous. Details in photos could provide predators with identifiable information, such as street signs, license plates, and school or city locations. Photos can also be inappropriately altered. When sharing photos online, use password-protected online photo sites, and only reveal the password to persons you actually know.

- **Talk with your children about the power of words.**

  Remind your child that anything posted online has the potential of being read by anyone, including parents, principals, bosses, school officials, or friends. The things they say could be copied and passed around, or discovered by someone using a search engine. Cyber bullying often starts and continues on social-networking sites. Businesses and universities often perform Web searches on potential employees and students.

- **Restrict children from joining public groups.**

  Public groups require identifiable information, such as specific interests like groups of students that go to a specific school or live in a specific city.

- **Report cyber bullying, or inappropriate or dangerous content.**

  Notify the Web site by clicking on the "Report Abuse" link. If there is no link, look for a "Contact Us" link to obtain contact information. If you suspect someone is a criminal or predator, print out a copy of the communication and Web site address, and report it to your local law-enforcement agency.

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