

### How to Respond to Online Bullying if it has already happened

- Encourage your child to spend less time online, but consider carefully before banning the computer
- Look up and review the hosting site's policy. Send them a copy of the webpage and a copy of their own policy. Demand that they remove the page.
- Should you call a lawyer? First give others time to react before you consider legal action.
- If the child who posted online is under 13, then under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), the host MUST remove their site IMMEDIATELY.
- Always monitor your child's site, and the sites of any friends on which they may be posting.

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### Should I monitor my child's online activity?

Although kids today are comfortable about using computers, they are not aware of the dangers that computer use can entail. For that reason going on the internet is like driving a car: no one should do it alone, as a child, without parental supervision and training.

At MARC we recommend that parents inform all children that they *will* be watching what they do and where they go online. Make sure your children know in advance that the internet is never private and that you will be monitoring. Then, utilize software or web-based services which allow you to monitor your child's activities online.



## Social Networking Online: A Guide for Parents to Xanga, MySpace, and Similar Websites



- What are Social Networking sites?
- Why are these sites so attractive to teens?
- What are the dangers associated with these sites, and how can we avoid them?

Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center

## What are Social Networking Sites? (MySpace, Xanga, etc.)



In today's world, children interact in the virtual world as often as they do in the "real" world. Although this trend often concerns parents and other adults, the Internet has many positive aspects. It offers many opportunities for education, and in a number of ways makes life easier for all of us.

However, children and teens utilize the Internet for socializing as well as for the more utilitarian aspects noted above. This tendency to socialize "virtually", or online, is likely to continue to grow as generations pass. While parents can limit the amount of time that children spend on the Internet, children today need to learn to be "net-smart" just as much as they need to learn more traditional life skills (such as balancing a checkbook).

Virtual socializing often takes place on sites such as MySpace, Xanga, Facebook, or other similar websites. On these websites, kids can sign up for free and put up a profile of themselves. In addition, they can also post comments on other people's profiles. They can "meet" people online, have discussions, and share interests. While much of this is innocent socializing, there are real dangers associated with these sites. Some of these dangers involve what other people can do, and some of them involve your own child getting into trouble inadvertently. The goal is simple: we want to let you know the dangers, so you can teach your child about them — the same way you teach your child about the dangers of the road when they learn to drive a car!

### 6. Your personal information can be used to bully or harass you.

Personal Information means any information that can be used to identify you: your name, photo, phone number, address, town, the name of a team you play on, etc. Undercover online police have successfully tracked down kids based only on their first names and athletic team names! Sensitive Information is anything you don't want everyone to see — embarrassing or dumb things you've done or said. The more you put on the Internet, the more vulnerable you are to bullying, abuse, or other dangers— period.

### 7. Online friends are strangers, no matter how long you've

"known" them. It's easy to pose as someone else online. No matter how many years you've corresponded with someone online, they are a stranger. They may not feel like a stranger, but you don't really know them. Never agree to meet them or call them. Tell your parents if they want to meet you.

8. Even a "private" profile is not really private. Kids often believe that by setting their profiles to "private" this makes the information truly secure. But it doesn't. The default picture and some of the identifying information is always available to anyone, and security flaws are common which can give anyone access. Nothing that is truly private should be put on a social networking site.

*As with most things....*

- **Prevention is easier than reaction!**
- **Just talking about these issues will help your child a lot**
- **If you have further questions, contact us or:**

[www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org)  
[www.cyberbully.org](http://www.cyberbully.org)  
[www.cyberbullying.ca](http://www.cyberbullying.ca)

## What principles & guidelines should parents communicate to their children?

### 1. The Internet counts.

Just because you know you're joking, doesn't mean they will. Joking or not, threats are illegal & posing as someone else is illegal! If you wouldn't put it on a billboard, don't put it on the Internet.

### 2. Yes, adults see what you're doing.

If you don't want your parents/boss/teachers to see it, then don't put it online. Even a "private" profile can *easily* be copied & sent to an adult. In many cases, you can and will be traced—the Internet is not as anonymous as you may think, & police respond to illegal postings online every day.

### 3. Don't let your emotions rule your typing.

If you're upset or mad, log off for a while. Never respond to a message or a posting if you are upset or mad. It may be tempting to take revenge, but don't give in to that temptation! Even if you were originally the victim, if you take revenge, *you* could be the one who gets prosecuted or in trouble.

### 4. Posing as someone else online could result in criminal charges.

Putting up a fake profile by using someone else's name, photo, or identifying information (no matter what the content of that fake profile); using someone else's name or username or password; using a very similar screenname, plus that person's real name (posing as that person online using their information) can easily result in your being charged with **identity theft**. That is a serious crime.

### 5. If someone bullies you online...

NEVER respond. Save the message. Tell an adult. If physical threats or violence are part of the message, tell the police.



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## Questions you may have before you sit down to have "The Talk"

**"Why are teens so attracted to Social Networking Sites?"** Part of adolescence is trying on different identities, and these sites make this easy & fun. Also, kids generally think that these websites are a world uninhabited by adults!

### **"Do Kids really post Personal Information?"**

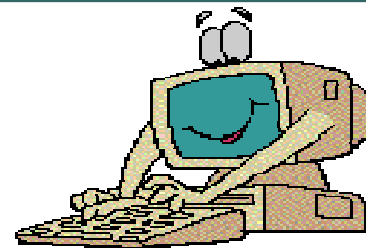
A Northwestern University study in 2005 found that more than two-thirds of children and teens posted personal information in their profile.

**"What else do kids do on these sites?"** Sometimes as a joke, kids may post cruel or unflattering things about other teens, or personal information about other children. Sometimes they pose as other people online by using their name, screenname, photo, or other identifiers. Even kids who are excellent students sometimes do this and they're often totally unaware of the very serious repercussions.

### **"Why is posting personal information a risk?"**

1. It can be used by pedophiles to track down, find, and pursue your child
2. It can be used by other teens or adults to stalk, harass, or bully your child
3. It can be used to steal your child's identity, or even *your* identity.

**The internet is A WRITTEN RECORD. It is exactly the same as publishing an article in a newspaper. Your words can be forwarded, re-posted, blogged, listed anywhere, a million times over.**



**Nothing you post online is "private" in any sense.**