

# Social Media or Social Mania?

A parents' guide to social networking



Minnesota Institute of Public Health



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# What is social networking?

For teens, connecting online or by text is a fact of life. Thanks to the existence of social networking sites connecting to someone now even has its own verb: “friending.”

A simple glance at your kids’ Facebook or MySpace page will reveal connections to other kids who, once they are designated “friends” can keep up with each other’s thoughts and activities. So much of “friending” is about fabulous pictures from camp, last minute homework assignment helpers, or birthday greetings from people they forgot about. However, it’s important for parents and kids to remember that although with these social networking sites comes great freedom, it comes at a cost, and that’s responsible use.

It’s up to our teens to self-reflect before they self-reveal and ask themselves, “am I sure I want to post this thought, picture, movie, or activity?” because once something is online in this connected culture, it can travel far and wide.

**It’s up to us as parents to help them think about how they use these social networking sites.**







Responsible use means that teens must understand the concept of privacy so that what they post and create won't come back to haunt them. Because much of digital communication can be anonymous, consequences can be separated from actions, which can lead to irresponsible or disrespectful behavior.

Much of the task of adolescence involves figuring out who you are. But in digital life, anything said or posted can live on indefinitely and create undesired reputations. The truth is that our teens' technological abilities can eclipse their maturity and judgment. The difference between a great experience and an iffy one lies in the decisions they make.

**Those who really know how to use digital tools responsibly will be able to harness their awesome power.**



# What should I look for?

## Texting (SMS & MMS texting)

Billions of text messages are sent every year from our kids' mobile phones. While most kids use messaging responsibly, it's still a powerful and extremely private communication tool that needs to be used responsibly.

Common Sense Media describes the top two reasons for using a cell phone on Texting 101:

- #1: Checking the time**
- #2: Texting**

### SMS Texting:

SMS stands for short message service. It is used to send short messages back and forth and is the most widely used data application in the world.

### MMS Texting:

MMS stands for multi-media messaging service. It is used to send images, video, and sound.



**If you want to know what your kids are saying, learn to text.**



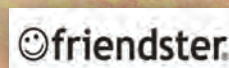
## **Normal lingo to watch out for:**

<b>POS</b>	Parent Over Shoulder
<b>PIR</b>	Parent In Room
<b>P911</b>	Parent Alert
<b>PAL</b>	Parents Are Listening
<b>PAW</b>	Parents Are Watching

## **Social/Sexual lingo to watch out for:**

<b>WYCM?</b>	Will You Call Me?
<b>ASL</b>	Age/Sex/Location
<b>MorF?</b>	Are you a Male or Female?
<b>KFY</b>	Kiss For You
<b>ADR</b>	Address
<b>LMIRL</b>	Lets Meet In Real Life
<b>HAK</b>	Hugs And Kisses
<b>ILU or ILY</b>	I Love You
<b>KOTL</b>	Kiss On The Lips
<b>WUF?</b>	Where Are You From?
<b>WYRN?</b>	What's Your Real Name?

## **Popular networking sites:**





# How can I keep my kids safe?

The Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, urges parents to talk to their tweens and teens about social networking sites, and offers these tips for using these sites safely:

**Remind** them that once they post information online, they can't take it back. Even if they delete the information from a site, older versions may exist on other people's computers and be circulated online.



**Talk** to them about avoiding sex talk online. Recent research shows that teens who don't talk about sex with strangers online are less likely to come in contact with a predator.

**Help** them understand what information should be private. Tell them why it's important to keep some things about themselves, family members and friends to themselves. Information like their full name, Social Security number, street address, phone number, and family financial information like bank or credit card account numbers is private and should stay that way. Tell them not to choose a screen name that gives away too much personal information.

**Read** sites' privacy policies. Spend some time with a site's privacy policy, FAQs, and parent sections to understand its features and privacy controls. The site should spell out your rights as a parent to review and delete your child's profile if your child is younger than 13.

**Tell** your kids to trust their gut if they have suspicions. If they feel threatened by someone or uncomfortable because of something online, encourage them to tell you. You can then help them report concerns to the police and to the social networking site. Most sites have links where users can immediately report abusive, suspicious, or inappropriate online behavior.

**Require** that the computer remain in a common area in your home rather than in your teen's bedroom.





**Use** privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on your child's website. Some social networking sites have strong privacy settings. Show your child how to use these settings to limit who can view their online profile, and explain to them why this is important.



**Talk** to them about why they are on a social networking site, how they communicate, and how they represent themselves on these sites. Make it clear that any information they post about themselves, their family, or their friends is open for the world to see, including photos and videos.

**Explain** why they should post only information that you and they are comfortable with others seeing. Even if privacy settings are turned on, some, or even all, of your child's profile may be seen by a broader audience than you're comfortable with. Encourage your child to think about the language used in a blog, and to think before posting pictures and videos. Employers, college admissions officers, team coaches, and teachers may view your child's postings. Even a kid's screen name could make a difference. Encourage teens to think about the impression that screen names could make.

**Review** your teen's profile together and make this a regular activity so they aren't tempted to add inappropriate content after the fact.

**Talk** to your kids about bullying. Online bullying can take many forms, from spreading rumors online and posting or forwarding private messages without the sender's OK, to sending threatening messages. Tell your kids that the words they type and the images they post can have real-world consequences. They can make the target of the bullying feel bad, make the sender look bad and, sometimes, can bring on punishment from the authorities. Encourage your kids to talk to you if they feel targeted by a bully.

**Know** how your kids are getting online. More and more, kids are accessing the Internet through their cell phones. Find out about what limits you can place on your child's cell phone. Some cellular companies have plans that limit downloads, Internet access, and texting; other plans allow kids to use those features only at certain times of day.

**Be consistent** with setting rules and consequences pertaining to alcohol and substance abuse references on your teen's social networking pages.

**Search** blog sites they visit to see what information they are posting if you're concerned that your child is engaging in risky online behavior. Try searching by their name, nickname, school, hobbies, grade, or area where you live.





# What does the media have to do with it?

Parents can help their children navigate the constant bombardment of information and media marketing by watching and listening to the messages their children receive online. This critical viewing skill is called media literacy. There are many ways parents can help their kids become media literate:

**Find out** what kinds of media your kids are being exposed to. Have them look or listen for pro-drug or other unhealthy messages and discuss how to resist those behaviors.

**Remind** your child that there are people (actors, producers, songwriters, corporate sponsors, advertising executives, etc.) whose job is to create these messages and there are web sites created to inform or entertain without credible sourcing. Discuss any messages about drugs that are untrue or unfounded.







**Help** your child look for media messages that might not be so obvious. Ask questions like, “Does this song suggest that violence is a good way to solve problems?” “According to this movie, what are women like? What are men like?” “What does this commercial say will happen if you wear those jeans? Is that true?” “Is drug use portrayed as positive or glamorous?”

**Turn** a viewing or listening experience into a teachable moment. For example, if a character on a TV show is using drugs, you could start a conversation with any one of these opening lines: “I wonder what his family thinks about him getting high?” “Where do you think this person would end up in life?” “Why would he do drugs?”





# Internet safety resources

## **Athinline.org**

MTV's A Thin Line campaign was developed to empower youth to identify, respond to, and stop the spread of digital abuse in their life and amongst their peers. The campaign is built on the understanding that there's a "thin line" between what may begin as a harmless joke and something that could end up having a serious impact on them or someone else.

## **Beatbullying.org**

Beatbullying empowers young people to lead anti-bullying campaigns in their schools and local communities, and builds the capacity of local communities to sustain the work.

## **Ceop.gov.uk**

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre delivers a multi-agency service dedicated to tackling the exploitation of children. That means building intelligence around the risks, tracking and bringing offenders to account either directly or with local and international police forces and working with children and parents to deliver their unique ThinkuKnow Internet safety program.

## **Childnet-int.org**

In all its work Childnet seeks to take a balanced approach. On this website you can read about the way they have sought to promote the positive and highlight the creative and inspiring ways children and young people are using the medium for good. You can also read about the ways they have responded to the negative aspects and dangers for children.

## **Commonsense.org**

Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology.

## **ConnectSafely.org**

ConnectSafely is for parents, teens, educators, advocates; everyone engaged in and interested in the impact of the social web. The user-driven, all-media, multi-platform, fixed and mobile social web is a big part of young people's lives, and this is the central space linked to from social networks across the web for learning about safe, civil use of web 2.0 together.



**FOSI.org**

The Family Online Safety Institute works to make the online world safer for kids and their families by identifying and promoting best practice, tools and methods in the field of online safety that also respect free expression.

**NCMEC.org**

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's® (NCMEC) mission is to help prevent child abduction and sexual exploitation; help find missing children; and assist victims of child abduction and sexual exploitation, their families, and the professionals who serve them.

**NetSmartz.org**

The NetSmartz Workshop is an interactive, educational safety resource from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC) and Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) for children aged 5 to 17, parents, guardians, educators, and law enforcement that uses age-appropriate, 3-D activities to teach children how to stay safer on the Internet.

**OnguardOnline.gov**

OnGuardOnline.gov provides practical tips from the federal government and the technology industry to help you be on guard against Internet fraud, secure your computer, and protect your personal information.

**WebWiseKids.org**

Web Wise Kids is about empowering today's youth to make wise choices online. Through state-of-the-art Internet Safety computer games (based on real-life scenarios) as well as Internet Safety tips for kids, teens and parents, Web Wise Kids creates a safer, friendlier Internet experience. These, coupled with involvement of community, youth leaders and parents, provides an environment where your child's Internet Safety becomes their first line of defense while navigating through cyberspace.



# Using social media in your prevention program

**Feel overwhelmed by social media tools? Not sure how to get started?**

We offer a full day and a 3-hour customized training for your school or organization.

## **A 3-HOUR Training covers:**

- Concept of Social Media
- Why should we care about it?
- Examples on how other organizations and prevention/coalitions are using it
- Benefits of Social Media

## **A FULL DAY Training covers:**

- Concept of Social Media
- Why should we care about it?
- Examples on how other organizations are using it
- Benefits of Social Media
- Case study activities of different scenarios on how and when to use Social Media
- How to get started with Social Media
- Measuring Social Media strategies
- How to develop a Social Media plan strategy



**For more information or to schedule a training, contact:**

Mike Coyne  
763-427-5310 x 182  
mcoyne@miph.org

or

Carlos Morales  
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# Additional resources for parents



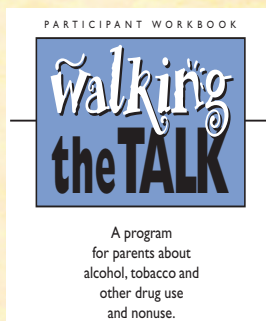
## Shoulder to Shoulder Booklets

This booklet is dedicated to helping make the difficult job of raising teens easier by connecting parents and caregivers to one another and sharing insights from those who have been there before. Whether you're looking to help fellow parents or want help from parents and organizations, you've come to the right place. You'll also find ideas you can use. They come from real parents who survived their teens' teenage years. You know your teen best. The information in this handbook can affirm your wisdom and support you as you guide your teen into young adulthood. Welcome to the ride, and buckle up! (13pp). **Also available in Spanish.**



## Shoulder to Shoulder Trainings

Our trainings provide an excellent "Parent Night" presentation for any community organization. The training is very interactive, encouraging discussion among parent participants. It's about connecting with other parents, exploring parenting styles, and learning from one another. **Trainings are also available in Spanish.**



## Walking the Talk Parent Program

Walking the Talk is a program designed to assist parents and other adults in answering questions and how to initiate discussions with young people on topics about alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use. Walking the Talk can be offered in 1, 2, or 3 hour sessions. **Also available in Spanish.**



## See It, Say It DVD

This DVD includes 3 dramatizations for school staff, parents, and youth and provides information on a 6-step process that helps people discuss difficult issues with youth. Includes 30 wallet cards and a facilitator's guide. **Also available in Spanish and Hmong.**

Visit our online store at: [www.miph.org/store](http://www.miph.org/store)





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