

## Safety Tips For Parents With Teenagers

If you have a teenager in your home, you know they are constantly “networking” either by telephone or the computer. There are many social networking websites for people to interact with one another. If used appropriately, they are safe avenues for communication. However, parents and grandparents should be familiar with these types of websites.

Websites such as MySpace, Xanga, and Friendster are social networking websites that are very popular with teenagers. According to Colleen Gengler, Family Relations Educator, University of Minnesota Extension Service, the most popular feature that social network sites provide are personal webpages. These sites include the opportunity for people to create a page that contains pictures, interests, and other information about themselves. Teens have the option of allowing as few or as many people as they choose to view their pages.

It is important for caregivers to check out the above mentioned sites to familiarize themselves with how they work. Be aware that these websites pose risks and sometimes unintended consequences. Safety is the most important issue at hand. Sexual predators have been able to locate and identify children and teens through the personal information that is posted. Sometimes the personal information is used by others who use it to bully or harass that person. Another trend is that potential employers check these pages to get information about a person as they look for a job.

### Tips for Parents

Learn what your teen is doing on the internet. Ask to look at their webpage.

Help teens know what information is appropriate to post.

Be very clear about what they should not post: full name, address, telephone number, specific places they go, and anything else that might help someone locate or identify them.

Establish limits on how much time your child can spend on the computer.

Have the computer located in a family room, so you can monitor your child easily.

Personal websites can be a wonderful, creative outlet for teens when used appropriately. Armed with the right information you can monitor your child so they can use this source of networking safely. For more information on this topic, visit <http://www.mediafamily.org/>, <http://www.netsmartz.org/>, <http://www.parenting.umn.edu>, [www.parenting.umn.edu](http://www.parenting.umn.edu), or [www.webwisekids.org](http://www.webwisekids.org).