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Going Where the Teens are:
Should parents get their own Facebook or MySpace accounts?

[Connecting to Your Kids Through Their Online World](#); Read what Mark Hall, a youth pastor at Eagles Landing First Baptist in Atlanta, has to say about it.

[When Mom or Dad Asks to be a Facebook 'Friend'](#); By Lori Aratani; Washington Post Staff Writer; Sunday, March 9, 2008.

[Mum, Get Out of My Facebook](#) Half of parents have turned into online spies
Rosemary Bennett, Social Affairs Correspondent for The Times; May 21, 2007

Email questions or comments to:
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Recent Statistics About Teenagers:

1. A study from the American Psychological Association found that Youth who engaged in four or more risky online behaviors were much more likely to report receiving online sexual solicitations. The online risky behaviors

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11th Edition of the Children Online Newsletter.

We are quickly approaching the end of our "season" of school visits, parent workshops and research about children and teens online. However, it doesn't mean we won't be busy! Our first book, an Internet safety curriculum for middle and high schools, is coming out in June. We are also beginning a new book project this summer. We'll keep our readers posted on the publication date.



We recently returned from a school visit which left us energized and very impressed with the teens we met. Their questions and comments were insightful and they clearly "got" the point. We actually had 9th and 10th graders ask us if Facebook was a site they should continue to use. i.e. "Is it safe?" It got us thinking about the way we typically engage teens in particular in conversations around these issues. We know that it is often very difficult to talk to teenagers about their use of the Internet. They feel like we are the foreigners and they are the natives. Adults have little credibility in their eyes when it comes to advice about life online.

However, what parents do have is tremendous credibility about keeping our children safe and growing up in healthy ways. And so we have decided to focus this newsletter on ways to talk to teens, in particular, about difficult topics.

included maintaining buddy lists that included strangers, discussing sex online with people they did not know in person and being rude or nasty online.

2. Cox Communications in partnership with the Center for Missing and Exploited Children found in their 2007 study that:

a) A majority of teens (58%) do not think posting photos or other personal info on social networking sites is unsafe.

b) Nearly half of teens (47%) are not worried about others using their personal information in ways they do not want.

c) About half (49%) are unconcerned posting personal information online might negatively affect their future.

d) 71% of teens have created online profiles such as those in social networks, up from 61% in 2006

e) 69% of teens regularly receive personal messages online from people they do not know and most of them do not tell a trusted adult about it.

f) Teens readily post personal information online. 64% post photos or videos of themselves, while more than half (58%) post information about where they live.

Females are far more likely than male teens to post personal photos or videos of themselves (70% vs. 58%).

g) Nearly one in 10 teens (8%) has posted his or her cell phone number online.

h) Overall, 19% of teens report they have been harassed or bullied online, and the incidence of online harassment is higher (23%) among 16 and 17 year-olds. Girls are more likely to be harassed or bullied than boys (21% vs. 17%). Other studies report online bullying of all children as high as 40% (e.g. Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center)

Statistics from the Cox/CMEC study about parent involvement:

1. Parental awareness of their teens' online activities has risen significantly. In 2007, 25% of teens say their parents know "little" or "nothing" about what they do online, down from 33% in 2006.

2. 41% of teens report their parents talk to them "a lot" about Internet safety (up five points over 2006), and three out of four say their parents have talked to them in the past year about the potential dangers of posting personal information. The level of parental involvement is higher for younger teens and girls, although it has increased across all age groups and both genders.

3. Teens whose parents have talked to them "a

As always, we welcome your comments and questions.

Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman

TALKING TO YOUR TEEN

There is one unchanging truth about life online, whatever teens are doing online today they will be doing it next year at a younger age. It is almost impossible for parents to keep up with their kids. Today's kids see the Internet as a seamless part of their culture, while adults see the Internet as a tool. For teens, cell phone texting and chatting online have become their main forms of communication. Scrolling chat rooms and hanging out in social networking sites have replaced walking through the mall.

While we may not be able to catch up to our teen's technological skills, we are and always will be the keeper of our family values and ethics. Most children and teens forget these values when they communicate across a screen. While they are polite in public and careful about their behavior in school or at home, they are often reckless online. The lure of anonymity allows teens to assume they are safe.

Having worked and lived in high schools throughout my career, I know how hard it can be to talk to adolescents. While teens can be intimidating, there are some tips that can help facilitate communication.

- Ignore the eye rolling. In most teens it is a natural reflex and adults should not take it personally.
- Start conversations with "I" statements. "I am worried about the dangers on social networking sites" is easier to hear for a teen than "Social networking sites are dangerous."
- Explain your job as a parent. When setting rules or structures for teens, tell them why. "It is my job to keep you safe and this is the best way to do that. You might not agree, but I have to do what is best for you and our family."
- Stay calm. Teens can be highly volatile and can change emotions quickly. It is important for parents to stay calm and not get caught up in the moment.

lot" about Internet safety are more concerned about the risks of sharing personal info online than teens whose parents are less involved. For instance, 65% of those whose parents have not talked to them about online safety post info about where they live, compared to 48% of teens with more involved parents.

4. Teens whose parents have talked to them "a lot" about online safety are less likely to consider meeting face to face with someone they met on the Internet (12% vs. 20%).

NOTE: These statistics were copied from <http://www.onlinesafety.com/P1/Teenstats.htm>

- Be consistent. In some ways you can compare teens to 4 year olds. They need constant reminders and reinforcements and will take advantage of any breach in our structure. Let down your guard once and it will take ten more times of being firm to make up for the one slip.
- Look beyond their words. Often teens use dramatic language to express their anger. For example putting time constraints on their online life might elicit the statement "I hate this stupid rule". However, if you look beyond their words, you might discover that they are scared of being left out of their peer group and feeling insecure.
- Validate their knowledge. Teens love to feel that they know everything. Ask them questions about the Internet. Learn from them and let them feel knowledgeable about the technology.
- Remember that you are the expert on parenting. While your teen may think they know it all and may, in fact, know a lot more than you about the Internet, you are the expert on raising your child and keeping them safe.

Sometimes it is important for parents to simply talk and not worry about being heard. For the most part, teens hear us despite their behavior that might suggest otherwise. Keep reminding them that you care, that you are focused on their safety and that you will do whatever you think is best to keep them safe. And ignore the eye rolling every time!

Related Resources for Parents:

- [Most Valuable Parents](#)
- [Parenting Your Adolescents](#)
- [How to Talk to Your Teen](#)
- [Parenting Your Kids](#)
- [Internet Safety and Your Teen](#)

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