



How to Protect your Teen on Social Networks

Privacy Tips for Parents

Most parents know it's hard to get kids to share. But when it comes to social networking, do your kids share too much? TRUSTe recently conducted a survey of the privacy habits of teens and parents on social networks and found that 84 percent of parents believe their teens know how to keep personal information safe on social networking sites. In many regards, the survey confirmed this belief—a majority of teens not only use privacy controls on social networks, but also recognize privacy risks on these sites. However, our survey did uncover some troubling teen privacy behaviors on social networks.

What are kids doing to expose themselves to danger on social networks? We found that 42 percent of teens 'sometimes' or 'always' accept social networking friend requests from strangers. This practice can give unsavory characters access to personal information such as home addresses and cell phone numbers. It's not just your teen's privacy and safety that is at stake: their reputation is also on the line. In 2009, two independent studies found that nearly 50 percent of employers and 70 percent of college admissions officers use social networks to screen applicants.

Top Ten Ways to Help Protect Teen Privacy Online

You can help your teen better protect their privacy on social networking sites by following these 10 tips:

1. Talk, chat, and email with your teen about privacy

Online privacy is like sex, drugs, academic achievements or any fundamental issue with your kids—you have to stay engaged. Talk with your teen about privacy and be frank about the dangers of letting personal information fall into the wrong hands.

TRUSTe Survey: 70% of parents have discussed social networking privacy with their teens.

2. Enter their world

Join the social networks that your teen uses. It's the best way to educate yourself so that you can protect your kids. Better yet, ask them to show you how to join. Going through the sign-up process together and discussing your own privacy needs will provide the perfect opportunity to talk with your teen about the concerns that you have for their privacy. If you already have a social networking account then ask your teen to help you adjust your privacy settings. This will give you a good sense of how savvy they are about privacy features on the site.

TRUSTe Survey: 1 in 3 teens report that they helped their parents get on Facebook.

3. Use/encourage privacy controls

Does your teen know what they can and can't control on a specific site? Help them establish boundaries, such as who can see their personal photos and written communications. Should it be only their friends, anyone on the Internet, or somewhere in between? Most social networking sites offer privacy controls but, left untouched, these controls often default to settings that are more public than private.

TRUSTe Survey: 64 percent of teens use privacy controls on social networks.

4. 'Friend' or 'follow' your teen

Forming a direct digital connection with your teen on social networks encourages them to be conscious of privacy issues. After all, they'll know you might happen upon what they or their friends are posting. It also gives you a direct view into what they might be doing on and off a social network. While your teen may know how to hide certain parts of their social networking profile or activity from you, your digital presence alone on their network is a powerful reminder that social networking sites are not parent-free zones.

TRUSTe Survey: 86 percent of parents with a Facebook account are Facebook friends with their teens.

5. Don't lurk

The fastest way to have your teen hide info from you or "unfriend" you online is to invade their digital space. As your teen gets older and feels the need for independence, they will push for their own space. You may also be tempted to friend or follow your teen's friends on social networks. Think carefully before doing this as it might trigger an overly protective response. However, you should feel free to friend their parents, which is a good way to build a community around your teen where you can share your privacy concerns and other parenting issues.

6. Remind them: the Internet never forgets

If your teen uses Twitter, for example, and chooses not to make their tweets private then this information can be indexed and recorded on the public web by various third parties and search engines. As a result, it may be visible later to teachers, employers or potential employers, or college admissions officers—even if your teen has deleted the original tweets and the Twitter account itself. Online it's very hard (if not impossible in some cases) to put the cat back in the bag and things your teen posts online today could come to haunt them years down the road.

7. Discourage over-posting

Remind your teen that they don't have to tell everything to the whole world. Discourage your teen from sharing physical addresses, phone numbers, or any information about their location. Discuss the impact that sharing too much information could have on jobs, colleges, and friends. Be sure that they understand that the information they post on social networking sites can't always be taken back.

Remind your teen that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. If they have hundreds of online friends or followers on a social networking account any one of those people could easily copy the information they publish on their account and share it with literally anyone else such as a teacher, a classmate, or a parent.

TRUSTe Survey: 18 percent of teens have been embarrassed or disciplined as a result of posting inappropriate information on social networks.

8. Teach them to resist over-friending and to never friend strangers

By allowing a stranger to friend or follow them on a social networking site teens give these people access to their personal information and open a direct—and often confidential—line of communication. Online predators pose an especially serious risk to younger teens. Also, fraudulent social networking accounts masquerading as legitimate users can end up bombarding people who accept their contact with spam or malicious content. This “malware” can infect your teen's account or computer. A good rule of thumb for your teen is to only accept friend or follow requests from individuals they have met in person.

Also point out to them that a high rate of online friending on social networks (typical of many teens today) could amount to literally thousands of friends by the time they start their first job. Encourage your teen to consider “culling” their social networking friends to better focus on the people with whom they want to engage in life-long relationships.

TRUSTe Survey: 42 percent of teens 'sometimes' or 'always' accept social networking friend requests from strangers.

9. Remind them that the golden rule applies to privacy

Your teen wouldn't want someone to upload an embarrassing or compromising photo of them online so they should respect the privacy rights of others on social networks as they would their own. Remind your teen that just because it's their personal account it doesn't mean activity there can't directly affect other people. On a social network, sensitive, scandalous and hurtful information can spread to a teen's entire class or even school in a matter of hours. This makes gossip on social networking sites especially dangerous and something to be avoided.

TRUSTe Survey: 56 percent of teens believe their friends on social networks shouldn't be able to share their personal information with other people.

10. Check the social networking website your teen uses for sound privacy practices

Look at the website's privacy policy: what promises do they make about protecting your teen's personal information and how will they use that information? Is the site certified by a reputable third-party like TRUSTe? Do they have contact information or an FAQ section if you or your teen has questions about the site and privacy?

Bonus Tip: A little hands-on parenting isn't necessarily a bad thing

Parents have a responsibility to keep a watchful eye for unsafe behaviors. Checking in on your teen's social networking activity unannounced from time to time, as you might do in any number of offline situations, can keep them honest—and safe.

TRUSTe Survey: 72 percent of parents already monitor their teen's social networking account.

Additional Resources:

Federal Trade Commission:

[Social Networking Sites: A Parent's Guide](#)

McAfee

[A Parent's Guide to Social Networking Sites](#)

Connect Safely

[Social Tips for Teens](#)

Connect Safely

[Social Tips for Parents](#)

TRUSTe/Symantec/iKeepSafe

[Online Privacy: A Tutorial for parents and teachers](#)

Learn More

For more information about Teens and Social Networking privacy, visit www.truste.com/2010-survey.