Internet Safety for Kids & Families

Privacy & Security on Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are now extremely popular among people of all generations. And while they are heavily used by millions to keep relatives up-to-date, find lost friends, or make new ones, they are also now very popular places for people who have bad intentions.

These sites require you to provide personally identifying information to fully realize their benefits, so be prepared to use them safely and securely. Risks such as unwanted contact, scams or identity theft, computer security issues, and harming your own or another's reputation are things to watch out for.

What you can do:

- **Keep it private.** Use the site's privacy settings provided and review their privacy and security policies. Some sites let you share certain kinds of information with certain groups of people only.
- **Secure your computer.** Use reputable computer security software and keep it up-to-date. This can help protect you from cybercriminals who may try to infect your computer with malicious software that you might download unknowingly and is designed to steal your personal information.
- **If you have kids:**
    - Review the site's Terms of Service to make sure they are old enough to use the site.
    - Make sure personal information is kept private. Some security technology can even help you prevent them from posting information like your home phone number online.
    - Advise them to post only those things they wouldn't mind teachers, relatives, or future employers to see or read. Anything they post can be public forever.
    - Encourage them to treat others respectfully and to tell you if they are being harassed online.
    - Teach them to respect copyrights, and avoid the unauthorized use or distribution of copyrighted material on their profiles.
- **Report it.** Inform the site of any unwanted contact or inappropriate content. Most major social networking sites have a mechanism for you to do this. For more information on reporting any unwanted contact, please see our Help section.