



# Boarding the e-safety train

## Social Networking.

	<p>The first step is just to look. Take note of what social networks (and there may well be more than one) that your family use – including yourself and your partner. The most popular ones at the moment with young people are:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Facebook (even with very young children)</li> <li>➤ Moshi Monsters</li> <li>➤ Club Penguin</li> <li>➤ Habbo Hotel</li> <li>➤</li> </ul> <p>This list is not exhaustive – new social networks spring up all the time, and it is not possible to list them all here. You could check the “Favourites” tab of your internet explorer to see which social networking sites are stored there. Try Google. Put your young people’s names into Google and see what comes out. You never know! Many times, parents think they child has no online presence only to find out they do – <b>but remember, it is possible to create a social networking site and hide it from Google.</b></p> <p>Don’t forget their phones! They may not be using your home computers for this, but most phones have an internet browser – check the “favourites” on that, too.</p>
	<p>Having, looked, the next thing to do is listening. Do they talk about the same ones that you have seen? Sometimes they have one “official” social networking site, but also secretively maintain others. Trends change rapidly among young people, and they may well have more than one online presence. Do their friends talk about your young person’s Facebook site that did not appear on Google when you searched above?</p> <p>If you think they might have a site that is hidden from you, you might want to look into text conversations. This is <b>not</b> spying, it is reasonable monitoring of where your young people are going online.</p>
	<p>Once you have got as much information as you need, now is the time for some straight talking. Social networking is seen as “a way of keeping in touch with friends and family” and, indeed, it is. But it is also one of the largest market research engines the world has ever seen, and as with anything this large, it carries significant, but identifiable risks. Some of the most important questions to ask are:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Do they change their password regularly? (They should.)</li> <li>➤ How many “friends” are in their contacts lists? (should be a reasonable number – some youngsters have over 1000 people there!)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Do they know them all in the real world? (Again, they should – this is the safest way.)</li> <li>➤ What does their site say about them? (Is there content there that would put a prospective employer or college off?)</li> <li>➤ Is there material there that should not be there? (Words AND images)</li> <li>➤ Do they check their privacy settings every time they use the site? (They should- Facebook can and do make unilateral changes to privacy settings sometimes.)</li> <li>➤ Is there a plan for dealing with cyber-bullying? (Including a way of telling you about it – this is difficult for them, particularly if they have used some pretty choice language while attempting to deal with it themselves.</li> <li>➤ Is there “face &amp; place” information there that should not be there. (For example, there may be reasons why it is not safe to tell the world that they will be in a certain place at a certain time.</li> <li>➤ To what extent could someone wander through their site, perhaps collecting photographs as they go?</li> <li>➤ Would they recognise a fraudulent log in site? (There are many so-called Facebook login pages out there. The way round this is to check the web address at the top EVERY time they log on.)</li> </ul>
	<p>Once you know what you need to know and have had the discussion – it is a great way forward if you can agree what needs to be done to keep everyone safe, and draw up a simple action plan saying who will do what, and by when. Review it, and remember that it will need to change over time.</p>
	<p>The term “social networking” is merely the tip of a very big iceberg. The real driver behind it is to collect marketable information and make money. Some Social Network sites even sell directly to their membership. Others trade that information with commercial suppliers.</p> <p><b>Nothing is free!</b> Either you are paying for social networking with cash, or by information.</p> <p><b>It IS possible to engage with social networking YOUR way, not theirs.</b></p> <p><b>Some top tips:-</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>You do NOT have to put multiple contact information on. Usually, one email address is enough.</b></li> <li>➤ <b>You do NOT have to respond to “your account security is weak” messages.</b></li> <li>➤ <b>You do NOT have to respond to “You haven’t used your account for some time” messages, complete with threats to block your access. The LAST thing a social networking site will do is block you!</b></li> <li>➤ <b>Sadly, unsavoury people do use social networking, some pretend to be something they are not, and young people come equipped with a high level of self-belief. Like it or not, they ARE gullible.</b></li> </ul>

Youngsters will probably resent any attempt you make to “intrude” into their online life. One way around this is to “ask them to help you set up your own site.” You may have one already. If you do, ask them to help you with the security settings. If they can’t, or don’t know how, this tells you that they aren’t able to look after their own site yet. Some parents and carers have created dummy sites and attempted to join their child’s as a new friend to see if their youngster is able to spot it.

It’s all good fun!

