Safer social networking

Teenagers

Social networking describes a variety of online services like Facebook, YouTube, Foursquare, Twitter and online games such as World of Warcraft and Runescape. These services let children and teens communicate with other people online. This can enable children and teens to stay in touch with friends and family. However, teens may disclose too much information online. They may also behave in ways that they wouldn't offline. The following tips will assist teens to behave safely when using social networking.

- Talk to your teen about managing personal information on social networking websites. Encourage them not to put key personal information on their profiles. This includes their phone number, home or school addresses, information about workplaces or clubs.

- Remind your teen not to post photos of themselves or others that they would not want strangers to see, or that may have a negative impact on how others view them.

- Ensure your teen understands the privacy features—in particular how to set their profile to private and limit access to their information. Encourage teens to screen online 'friends'.

- Remind your teen that not everyone is who they claim to be. Although they may enjoy having many online friends, adding people that they don't know on 'friends lists' allows those people to learn all about them. This information could be used for scams or cyberstalking.

- Talk to your teen about the use of location based services. Services such as Foursquare and Facebook enable social networking users to report their physical location to other users by 'checking in'. Some services let people report their friends' locations and have location based functions turned on by default. Your teen can review their settings and block this function or limit who sees their location based information. Remind your teen that allowing strangers to see where they are, or where their mates are, is a risky behaviour.

- You may also like to contact your mobile phone company for assistance with blocking internet, Bluetooth and GPS functionality on their child's mobile phone to limit their ability to notify others of their whereabouts.

- Encourage your teen to keep their online friends online. If they do want to meet someone that they haven't met so far in person, they should ask a parent or another trusted adult to go with them and always meet in a public place, preferably during the day.

- Remind your teen not to respond if someone sends them negative messages or asks them to do something that makes them feel uncomfortable. They should tell a trusted adult and save the messages.

- Encourage your teen to set up a separate social networking account if they want to promote themselves or an interest and engage with like minded people that they don't know offline. They should ensure the site does not contain their personal information.

More information

The Cybersmart program provides a range of cybersafety materials for parents and their children. For more information, resources, advice and tips, visit the Cybersmart website at

www.cybersmart.gov.au. Encourage your children and teens to take a look around the website. If you have young children, you may like to explore it together to help them understand how to protect themselves against online risks and make the most of their experiences online.