

## Safer social networking

### Young children

Social networking describes a variety of online services like Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, online games such as World of Warcraft and Moshi Monsters and virtual worlds such as Club Penguin. These services let people communicate with others online. This can enable young people to stay in touch with friends and family and join in fun fantasy worlds and games. However, children may forget who they are communicating with online and disclose too much about themselves. They may also behave in ways that they wouldn't offline.

Generally young children will have little direct involvement in social networking as they will not meet the recommended age guidelines. There are some social networking sites targeted at children that claim to moderate communication to provide greater protection for children. Your child may ask to use one of these websites at some stage, and the following tips may be useful.

- If your child is using social networking services, including gaming sites and virtual worlds that allow them to communicate directly with other people check the age guidelines and privacy policies of the sites. Check how moderation occurs—do they administrators check all messages before they are published? Are you comfortable that your child is safe interacting on the website?
- Set rules—make sure your child knows what information they can share or post online and which websites they can visit. Ask them to tell you before they post any personal information online, including their full name, mum or dad's name, their address or school.
- Help your child to create screen names or IDs that do not communicate their gender, age, name or location.
- Establish rules around the types of content or information they should report to an adult. For example, one rule may be 'tell Mum or Dad if somebody asks you where you go to school or where you live' and 'tell mum and dad if anybody talks about rude things'.
- Advise your child to check with you before clicking on links sent by others on social networking websites. These may lead to adult content.
- Help your child understand that what they say and do online is important. Encourage your child to use the same manners, communicate with others in the same way and report others who aren't being nice, just as they would in the offline world.
- Advise your child not to respond to any negative messages and to report any negative messages they receive to you or another trusted adult.

### 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](http://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.