

For PARENTS: MySpace/Internet Guidelines

1. MySpace.com prohibits anyone under 14 years of age from using their website. Unfortunately, while they may set rules to keep younger kids off the site, they can't prevent kids from lying about their age, pretending to be 14 years of age or older.
 - a. To address this, MySpace.com has developed special software to review the profiles of their members, to try and find anyone under age, based on information the members post about themselves. It's not perfect, but it does help spot the underage members.
2. While MySpace.com is doing its best to keep your children from using their website and lying about their age, it's up to parents to do their job too.
 - a. Parents need to talk with their children about not sharing personal information online. Personal information includes pictures, names and addresses, schools they attend, cell and phone numbers and many other less obvious things, such as the name of their school team, ethnic background and even a mall near your house.
3. WiredSafety.org is developing a special program just for parents concerned about their kids using social-networking and online dating sites.
 - a. It will teach you what you need to know about finding out if your child has a profile on one of these sites, how to review them and remove them, if you want to.
 - b. It will also help you if your child is being cyberbullied using one of these sites or members from these sites, or is cyberbullying others.
4. The best way to find out if your child has a profile on this or another similar site is to ask them.
 - a. If you're not sure that your child is being honest with you, you can search MySpace.com using their e-mail address, or by searching for their school. (You click on "search" and enter their email address or full name in the appropriate search box.)
 - b. If you find that your child has a profile on the website, you should review it. It's amazing how much you can learn about your child by reading their profiles. Does it contain personal information, such as their full name, address or phone numbers? Has your child posted photos? Are they photos of themselves or someone else? Are they sharing poems they write or provocative comments about themselves or others?
5. If you want the profile removed (you must remove your child's profile if they are under age), contact MySpace.com's parental help staff or contact WiredSafety.org.
6. If you become aware of the sharing, use or viewing of child pornography online, immediately report this to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at **1-800-843-5678**.
7. Ask them why they created the profile. You might learn that they wanted to share their thoughts with others, make new friends or even allow others in their school to get to know them better. But not all of their motives are as noble or safe. Some may be interested in meeting new romantic interests or role-playing inappropriately online.
8. If you discover that your child is posting provocative comments or inappropriate images online, it's time for the tough talk. (Parents of young boys need to understand that their children are equally at risk. About one-third of the cases of Internet sexual exploitation are men exploiting boys.) The risks are real, not matter how smart, sophisticated or tech savvy your kids are.
9. Just remember that while your kids may know more than you do about technology, you know more about life. And you are allowed to set the rules and enforce them. You're still the parent!

- a. There is software you can install that will record what your kids say and post online. There is even one that will e-mail you reports at work. The ones I like best are made by Spectorsoft, and can be found at software4parents.com or spectorsoft.com. But don't use them just to spy on your kids.
 - b. Check the program reports if something goes wrong. It will collect whatever you need for evidence and to help your child if something goes wrong.
10. Also, check your parental control programs. Many, such as AOL's and MSN's, can block access to social-networking websites or other sites you think are inappropriate for your younger child.
11. Many Internet Service Providers (ISP) have rules about online behavior. If you disobey an ISP's rules, your ISP may penalize you by disabling your account, and sometimes every account in a household, either temporarily or permanently.
12. If your child is being bullied by another MySpace.com user online, check the terms of service first.
- a. If the bullying violates MySpace.com's terms of service, report it to TOS (Terms of Service) and the offending comments and/or profile will be removed.
 - b. If something serious occurs and you need to reach out to law enforcement, let them know that MySpace.com has created a special procedure for law enforcement inquiries, especially when the safety and well-being of its site users is involved. They should contact abuse@myspace.com.

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All Rights Reserved by ThinkB4UClick & Take5! & WiredSafety.org, run by cyberlawyer, Parry Aftab.

Additional Resources:

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: www.ncmec.org

MySpace.com: www.myspace.com

Netsmartz Workshop: Keeping Kids and Teens Safer on the Internet: <http://www.netsmartz.org/>

Wired Safety: www.wiredsafety.org