

CYBERSAFETY: AN OVERVIEW FOR CHADWICK PARENTS

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1) INTRODUCTION

What are teens doing online?

In short, *communicating*. Social Networking refers to the socialization that is booming among teens in cyberspace. Teens are hanging out together in virtual space or on Web sites designed specifically for that purpose. "Preeminent among these virtual hangouts is [MySpace.com](#), whose membership has nearly quadrupled, since January alone, to 40 million members. Youngsters log on so obsessively that MySpace ranked #15 on the entire U.S. Internet in terms of page hits in October, according to Nielsen/NetRatings."¹

While on those sites, or on mobile devices like cell phones, at least 75 percent of wired teens almost daily:²

- Send or read e-mail
 - Often attaching photos, links to other Web sites, documents and other information teens deem worth sharing
- IM (instant messaging) or Text (also called SMS — instant messaging via cell phone)
 - Exchange messages in real time. IM'ers use an "abbreviated language" consisting primarily of acronyms, to communicate quickly.³
- Blog (Web Log)
 - Write content for online sharing. Blogs have been called "diaries on steroids." About half of *all* blogs online are authored by teens.⁴
- File share (Peer to Peer Web sites)
 - Visit sites like [www.kazaa.com](#) and [www.limewire.com](#), to download music, movies, even pornography⁵
- Play online games against other online players
 - Teens chat with the players in the "game rooms" while playing

Why should we as parents and teachers be concerned?

Problems associated with social networking in cyberspace include:

- Distraction/cyber addiction
 - It can interfere with their daily tasks, like homework, family time, spending face-to-face time socializing and so on
- Overexposure to inappropriate images

¹ "The MySpace Generation", Business Week magazine cover story, Dec. 12, 2005)

² [Pew Internet and American Life survey](#), July 2005

³ [www.netlingo.com](#) has a dictionary of IM shorthand

⁴ "Kids, Blogs and Too Much Information," MSNBC, April 29, 2005

⁵ These files are most often copyrighted, pirated and/or otherwise being illegally shared. Additionally, using these sites provides other anonymous users access to your child's computer hard drives.

- There is almost no way of controlling what images may pop up on a computer screen while your child is browsing the Internet. About 25 percent of youth in a 2001 national survey reported incidents of unwanted exposure to sexual material.⁶ Noted author (and parent) Wendy Mogel suggests, “There is no way to erase hateful, violent or sexual images from the hard drive of your child’s mind.”⁷
- Posting inappropriate and potentially libelous content
 - Content of teen postings can include references to friends and schoolmates, sex, drugs, alcohol use and violence. Often their public postings clearly indicate where they go to school, which exposes them to risks and can sully their and the school’s reputation.
- Cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking
 - About 19 percent of surveyed youths in 2001 stated they’d received an unwanted sexual solicitation that year via a chat room or e-mail/IM.⁸
 - Cyber-bullying also means unkind and harrasing messages from peers and online acquaintances.

cyber-bullying and the careful grooming that takes place as a pedophile predator attempts to lure a girl *or* boy into meeting him in person are the most extreme risks that teenagers face when engaging in online social networking.

2) HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR CHILDREN ARE AT RISK?

The best way to tell is to monitor their behavior and ask them directly about their habits. Additionally, there are indicators signs that could mean something is amiss in cyberspace. They include:

- Spending large amounts of time online
 - Has your child found a questionable or risky site? Ask him!
- Minimizing the screen when you walk in the room. Does she?
 - Is your child investigating sites you’d find inappropriate and therefore is hiding them from you?
- Mood swings after being online. Have you noticed?
 - Has a cyber bully upset your child? One of every 17 kids between the ages of 10 and 17 had been threatened or harassed online (or by cell phone text messaging) and of those about one-third found the incidents extremely distressing.⁹
- Staying up late
 - Is your child waiting until you are out of sight before experimenting with risky sites or behavior?
- Wanting to be alone on the computer
 - Is your child forming questionable relationships online?
- Excessively using chat rooms and instant messaging?
 - Is your child online instead of doing homework?
 - Is your child chatting online with strangers?
- Receiving unusual e-mail
 - Has someone your child met online now making ‘real life’ contact?
- Excessively using cell phones and texting
 - Is your child in phone contact with a stranger from a chat room?

⁶ University of New Hampshire’s [Crimes Against Children Research Center study](#), March 2001

⁷ Wendy Mogel, *The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*, Vol, 20, Number 15, June 3-9, 2005

⁸ University of New Hampshire’s [Crimes Against Children Research Center study](#), March 2001

⁹ *ibid.*

How does cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking happen?

Cyber-bullying

According to an 2004-2005 i-SAFE survey of 1500 middle school students, it was reported that while online:

- 52 percent said hurtful or angry things to another person
- 57 percent had someone say hurtful or angry things to them
- 42 percent were bullied
- 34 percent were threatened online

Cyber-bullying is a very serious and growing form of social bullying. Teens bully via personal Web pages, community Web pages, e-mail and instant messaging and blogs. Basically, any method of online communication is an opportunity for a bully. As one victim of cyber-bullying stated, "Rather than just some people, say 30 in a cafeteria, hearing [the bullies] yell insults at you, it's up there for 6 billion people to see. Anyone with a computer can see it."¹⁰ This can lead to the same psychological issues children suffer if bullied in "real" life.

Cyber-stalking

Believe it or not, your children are quite possibly revealing all kinds of personal information online, including photographs of themselves and/or their friends and family. Through those increasingly popular virtual hangouts, like MySpace.com, Facebook.com, Friendster.com and others, teens are actively engaging in cyber friendships and communication that encourages them to reveal personal information. The sites are supposed to be for children 16 and older, but the sites cannot stop users from lying and children as young as 8 and 9 years old have been found to have posted online.

Parry Aftab, executive director of WiredSafety.com, a resource for parents and educators to help children safely engage online, "One of the most popular sites, MySpace.com, is designed to allow people to share their creativity, pictures and information with others. Sometimes people do this to find romance. Sometimes they do it to find friends with similar interests. While this may be OK for adults, it is not OK for kids. MySpace may have originally been created as a very hip and exciting way for young adults to connect with people of like interests (an informal dating service). However, it has exploded into an irresistible cybermall for young teens and has put many kids unknowingly at risk."

Many cyber stalkers are pedophiles who lurk on these sites to get to know your child. They learn about his or her likes and dislikes, desires and dreams. They find phone numbers, addresses, class schedules and so on. They can earn your child's trust to the point of arranging in-person meetings. Although this is a rare occurrence, it does happen. Again, Parry Aftab: "Our children need to realize that there are real risks relating to meeting strangers offline, including murder. The first confirmed murder victim by an Internet sexual predator was 13 when she died, in May 2002. The risks are real, not matter how smart, sophisticated or tech savvy your kids are. 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."¹¹

These virtual meeting places are not going away anytime soon. In fact, the uber-popular MySpace.com was recently purchased by media mogul Rupert Murdoch for \$580 million. Clearly, there is a market for social networking. We do not want financial gain to happen at the expense of our children's safety and well-being. We need to educate ourselves and in turn, our precious children, to visit cyberspace safely.

¹⁰ "cyber-bullying" In-Depth article, CBC News In-Depth, March 2005

¹¹ www.wiredsafety.org/Internet101/blogs.html

Think of the Internet like a car – would you give your child the keys without first teaching him or her how to drive?

3) WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY CHILD?

Upon learning the serious risks involved with social networking, most parents' reaction, understandably, is to prohibit their teens from using the Internet at all! But that is certainly not the answer. While there are dangers lurking out there, there are also some exceptional educational and social experiences that can, and do, happen. For example, blogs can be positive. As one mother of an 8th grader said, "For every off-color picture you might find, you are also going to find a number of kids having really interesting conversations about their developing views of spirituality, what they think about war. Those are good things to be thinking about."¹²

To keep your child safe, we strongly encourage you to employ these three tactics:

- Educate
- Communicate
- Moderate

Educate

You are taking the first step right now by reading this to educate yourself and in turn, your children, on the positives and negatives of cyberspace. Your children will want to do the "right thing" when they have more facts about what they are doing online and how potentially risky it is.

Here are some key points to share with your child:

- Don't believe everything you read, hear or see!
 - Anyone can post anything on the Internet, true or untrue. This includes profiles of the "friends" you're meeting. There is NO WAY to be certain that the 15-year-old-girl from New York you're chatting with is indeed who she says she is – she could be a 40-year-old-man living just down the street.
- It only takes a few minutes for someone to find out where you may be physically as you form a relationship virtually.
- Postings on the Web may never go away. They could come back to haunt you at any time!
 - For example, a college admissions office may visit MySpace.com to see if you have posted anything that either positively or negatively represents you. Or, a prospective employer may make it a policy to search the Web for prior postings by an applicant.
- Find out what your children do online and why.
 - You can check the history of their Web visits by using to the "History" feature on your Internet browser.
- You can report strangers who make your child uncomfortable online with the Web site where this is happening, or even with agencies such as www.wiredsafety.org.
 - Teach your child that responsible adults do not pursue relationships with minors
- Materials that you post on the Web for your friends are available for the entire world to see.
 - In his book, "Keeping Children and Teenagers Safe (And Parents Sane)", the author clearly makes this point: "Tens of thousands of kids have Web sites containing personal information that makes them easy to locate. Many sites include photographs and text that make them ideal fodder for pedophiles. Seemingly innocent photos of teenage friends in bikinis or in pajamas might not be so innocent to a pedophile. If you allow your kids to have a Web site,

¹² ["Kids, Blogs and Too Much Information."](#) MSNBC, April 29, 2005

apply this rule: “Don’t include anything in a Web site that you would not be willing to post on the bulletin board of every supermarket in every city in America.”¹³

- Visit cyber safety Web sites¹⁴ with your children to learn together how to stay safe online.

Communicate

It is imperative that you know if your children have personal profiles posted in cyberspace.¹⁵ You can search a specific social networking site and/or do a general Google search for their name, phone number, screen name, nickname, school name, etc.

If you a profile online, ask your children why they created it. 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. And when a young preteen lies about their age, others in their late teens might approach your children thinking they were older. And that’s bad for everyone.

If you find that your children have profiles on the Web, review them. It’s amazing how much you can learn about your children by reading their profiles. Do they contain personal information, such as their full name, address or phone numbers? Are photos posted? Are they photos of themselves or others? Are they sharing poems they write or provocative comments about themselves or others?

If you discover that your children are posting provocative comments or inappropriate images online, it’s time for the tough talk. Tell them to imagine that their parents, parents of your friends or teachers, will be reading what they write on their sites or on their friends’ sites. Remind them about stranger dangers and how that cute 14-year-old-girl they meet online may not be cute, may not be 14 and may not be a girl.

You can certainly have profiles removed (**and you must remove it if your children are under age**). First ask your children to remove them. If that doesn’t work, MySpace.com (and other sites) explain how to do it. You can also report profiles of underage children as well.

Finally, ask them this: If you were in a room full of people, strangers, a couple of friends and a whole bunch of adults, would you engage in the same behavior that you do online? Because really, that’s where they are doing.

Moderate

Most wired teens and parents agree that they are not monitored closely enough online.¹⁶ Here are some tips to help keep your children safe while giving them the freedom to explore cyberspace:

- Set reasonable and respectful rules and limits to your child’s Internet experience. Discuss them and monitor their compliance.
- **Never allow a computer with Internet access in your child’s room**, or other private areas – monitor the monitor!
 - If you can’t see what they’re doing, chances increase they’ll do something they don’t want you to see.

¹³[Protecting the Gift : Keeping Children and Teenagers Safe \(and Parents Sane\)](#), by Gavin De Becker, Dell Paperback, 2000

¹⁴ See Part 4: [For More Information](#) for links

¹⁵ See below for an example of [how to check MySpace.com](#).

¹⁶ Pew Internet and American Life Study: [Protecting Teens Online](#), July, 2005

- **Do not allow Internet access from your child's cell phone.** There should be no reason he or she must have it.
- Know your children's password(s) and screenname(s). Ask for a printout and keep track as they change their "identities" from time to time.
- Respect your children's privacy but make certain they know personally everyone on their IM or "buddy" list. Ask to have a printout of IM buddies with their e-mail addresses.
- Have fun being part of your child's online experience.
 - Learn from your children: Ask them to teach you how to get into a chat room or "blog"
 - Have them show you their favorite online destinations
 - Ask them what those crazy "IM" or "Texting" symbols and shortcuts mean (*ROFL = rolling on the floor laughing*).
- Become more cyber-savvy yourself. Start by using e-mail with some regularity.
- Know the sites and services your children frequent and have them show you how to log on.

Post a reminder of the "Big Four" rules near the computer:

- 1. No hidden screens!**
If you don't want others to see it, don't do it.
- 2. No strangers allowed!**
Only communicate with people you personally know.
- 3. No personal posting!**
Don't **ever** give out your real name, age, phone numbers or address (or anything else that might lead a stranger to your door.)
- 4. No photos!**
If you want to post a representation of yourself, put a picture of a piece of art you created, or something else that visually represents you.

Filtering Help

Fortunately, many tech companies are aware that children are being put in harm's way by some of the tools they're providing online. [MySpace.com](#) does a reasonable job of trying to prevent underage users from securing accounts. Additionally, there are lots of good Internet filtering software packages available for purchase that limit what sites/content your child can peruse.¹⁷ In fact, more than half of Internet connected families with teens now use filters.¹⁸ Check the parental control programs that come with your Internet service provider. Many, such as AOL's and MSN's, can block access to social-networking Web sites or other sites you think are inappropriate for your younger child. Also, organizations are cropping up around the country to help protect your child from cyber predators.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Part 4: [For More Information](#) for links

¹⁸ Pew Internet and American Life Study: [Protecting Teens Online](#), July, 2005

¹⁹ See Part 4: [For More Information](#)

4) FOR MORE INFORMATION

CyberSafety General Information and Help

- www.WiredKids.org, or, www.WiredSafety.org
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, help and information for teens and parents, www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/CampaignServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US&PageId=2023
- www.isafe.org
- www.getnetwise.org
- www.safekids.com

Popular Social Networking Sites

- www.myspace.com
- www.friendster.com
- www.xanga.com
- www.facebook.com
- www.livejournal.com

Cyber-Bullying

- www.Stopcyberbullying.org
- www.InternetSuperheroes.org
- www.onlinesafetypal.com
- www.cyberbullying.ca

Internet Filters

- www.software4parents.com
- www.netnanny.com
- www.cyberpatrol.com

Computer Monitoring Software

- www.spector.com (*records all activity on your Mac or PC, including all chats, IMs, e-mails, etc.*)

Cyberspace Dictionary (including IM/Texting “Secret Language” acronyms)

- www.netlingo.com/index.cfm

Articles of Interest

- “The MySpace Generation,” Business Week magazine cover story, Dec. 12, 2005: www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/05_50/b3963001.htm
- “cyber-bullying” In-Depth article, CBC News In-Depth, March 2005: www.cbc.ca/news/background/bullying/cyber_bullying.html
- “Kids, Blogs and Too Much Information,” MSNBC, April 29, 2005: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7668788
- “Highlights of the Youth and Internet Safety Survey,” March, 2001, University of New Hampshire: www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Highlightsfactsheet.pdf

- Pew Internet and American Life Surveys:
 1. “Teens and Technology: Youth are Leading the Transition to a Fully Wired and Mobile Nation,” July 27, 2005: www.pewInternet.org/PPF/r/162/report_display.asp
 2. “Teen Content Creators and Consumers, ” November 2, 2005, www.pewInternet.org/PPF/r/166/report_display.asp
 3. “Protecting Teens Online,” March 17, 2005, www.pewInternet.org/PPF/r/152/report_display.asp

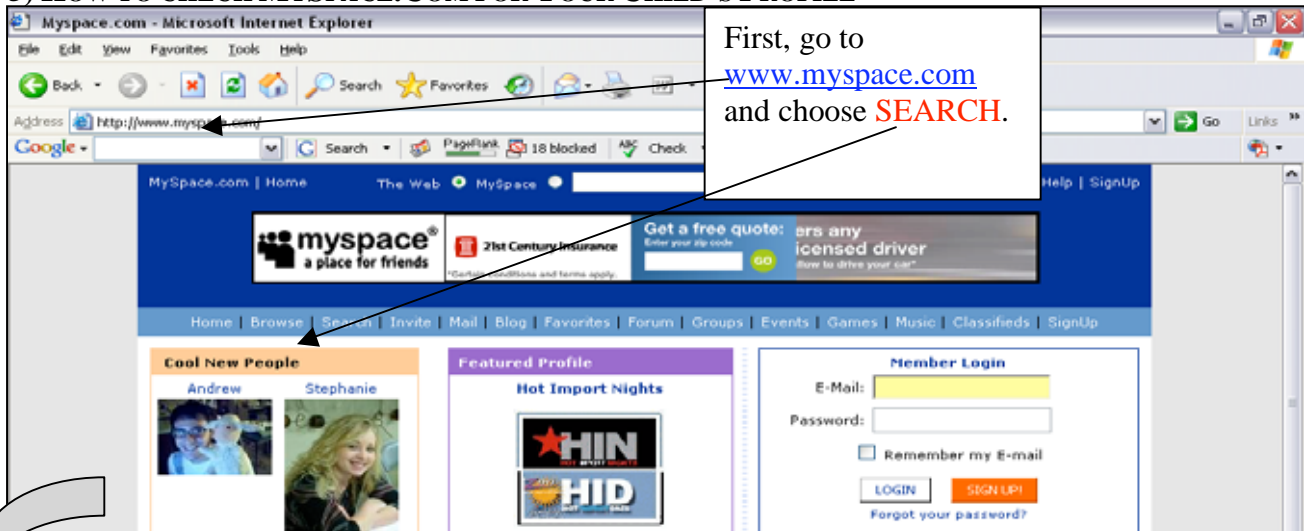
Books for Parents:

- Protecting the Gift : Keeping Children and Teenagers Safe (and Parents Sane), by Gavin De Becker, www.amazon.com/gp/product/0440509009/ref=cm_bg_d_1/102-9874649-0413732?v=glanceandn=283155

Books for Teens (and Parents): (this is available at the Chadwick US Library)

- “Katie.com (My Story)”, by Katherine Tarbox. *“Katie.com is Katherine Tarbox's true story of how [a 40-something man] used the Internet to manipulate and molest her and how she fought back by prosecuting him under the Communications Decency Act of 1996 and sharing her experiences so that other teens might avoid a similar situation.”*
http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0452282535/qid=1133806098/sr=2-1/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_1/102-9874649-0413732?s=booksandv=glanceandn=283155

5) HOW TO CHECK MYSPACE.COM FOR YOUR CHILD'S PROFILE

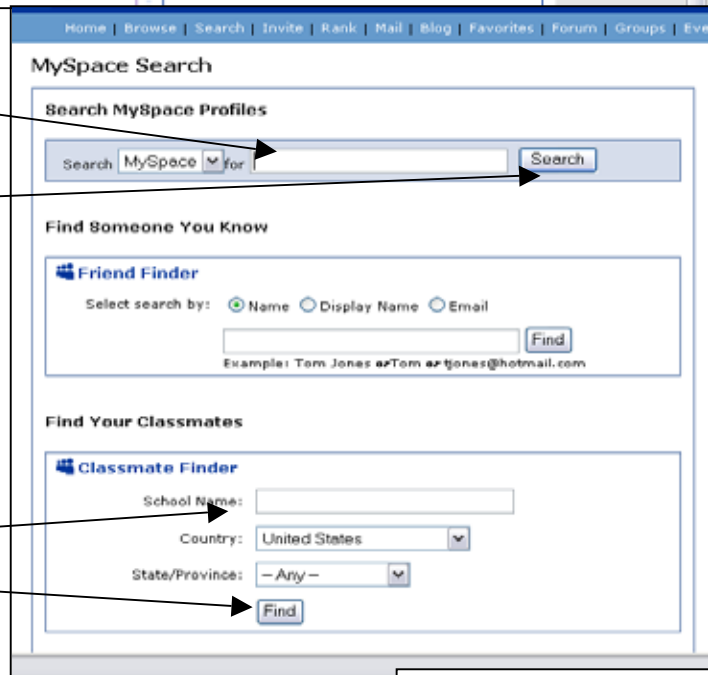


Second, enter your child's name, nickname, or known screenname. Click **SEARCH**.

OR

Because so many children do not use their real names online, try *searching by their school*.

Enter "Chadwick School" in the Classmate Finder window. Click **FIND**.



If you searched by school, click the blue "Chadwick School" link to advance your search.

Finally, to find any relevant profiles, change the ages in the "Browse By" window to say 16 to 35.

Change the bottom feature to say *Current Students*.

Click **UPDATE**.

