

Newsletter



THIS ISSUE

- Some Suggestions for Everyone When Using Social-Networking Sites
- What Educators, Ministers and Adults Should Know When Using Social-Networking Sites

Dear All,

When I was a teenager, the way we shared information and did our social networking was by phone, one attached to a cord in the wall! Most of our conversations could be overheard by a parent, or a nosy sibling. Privacy in my house was an unknown concept. You can tell that I was a teenager a LONG time ago. Our children's needs to socially network haven't changed but the technologies used to do so have. Recent data shows us that we have done a pretty good job educating our kids about online predators and many of

our children have learned to identify them and avoid exploitation or abuse. However, the cell phone conversations, texting, sending pictures or online chat give the appearance of privacy. This is huge misconception. Here are some recent headlines in the news that give rise to a new question "do we need to protect our children/youth from themselves?"

- "New Berlin student charged with blackmailing students into sex acts in Facebook deception."
- "In Wisconsin, a 17-year-old was charged with possessing child pornography after he posted naked pictures of his 16-year-old ex-girlfriend online."
- "In Alabama, authorities arrested four middle-school students for exchanging nude photos of themselves."
- "In Rochester, N.Y., a 16 year old boy is facing up to seven years in prison for forwarding a nude photo of a 15-year-old girlfriend to his friend."

Schools, religious education programs, the President of the United States and even Pope Benedict XVI are using online social networking. The internet is an open forum for the world to see. It has tremendous benefits, but there is a big learning curve and as the headlines show, misuse can have terrible consequences.

Some Suggestions:

- Develop age appropriate guidelines for when your child/youth can use technologies and social networking sites, as well as rules for use.
- Be actively engaged with your children. Make sure to let them know they can come to you anytime for help. This is particularly difficult for teenagers because often they may be doing something that is breaking the rules and are afraid of getting caught. This can also make them more vulnerable for exploitation.
- Make sure that your child knows that is easy to for someone to misrepresent themselves online and to only add people that they know to their friends' list.
- Once a photo is posted it can be manipulated by someone else and can remain in cyberspace forever.
- Inform your child/youth that there can be serious consequences to using the internet, webcam, or cell phone to post pictures of themselves or others, from criminal to embarrassment or humiliation.
- Keep computers in areas of the home that is visible and can be easily monitored by adults.

Amy Peterson
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Educators, Ministers, Adults and Social Networking



Some of your students probably have one. Perhaps even you have one. But what do you do with it, and how can you use it well?

With the emergence of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, as well as YouTube and Instant Messaging; the way youth communicate has changed dramatically. This change has led many educators and ministry leaders to wonder if they too, should begin to communicate in this way.

Just as children and teens need guidelines on how to use social networking sites and other Internet communication tools, so do teachers and ministers. Educating teachers, ministers, adults and students together on the benefits of social-networking sites can create a better understanding between them as they explore online communication in a more safe and responsible manner.

It is important for adults to remember that just as there are boundaries when working face to face with children and youth, there are also boundaries with social networking. Following are a few suggestions for establishing one of these accounts:

- Make sure parents are aware that you are making yourself available online.
- Never be aggressive. There is a difference between initiating a "friend request" and accepting one. You should allow them to add you, do not seek them out.
- Do not communicate with youth more than necessary via Facebook or MySpace.
- Remember that your sites should be first and foremost representative of your parish/school/ministry, not of you personally.
- Facebook and MySpace should be seen only as a means of communication with youth, not a personal expression.
- What you post isn't private or temporary.
- Don't post photos or information you wouldn't want your current or future employer to see.
- Educate yourself about the realities of online communication. If used correctly and responsibly, these sites can have immense educational benefit.

A copy of this Newsletter can be found on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website www.archmil.org/safeguarding under the heading, Resources.

Self-worth and Human Dignity

"Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person."

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1706)

The emergence and popularity of social networking sites has created a surge of problems from cyber-bullying to pornography; extortion to sexual predators; At times leading to dangerous situations for individuals as well as those around them.

Human dignity means protecting your own self-worth as well as treating others with respect; placing value on human life.



Every person who takes advantage of social networking sites needs to be cognizant of what they post. Individuals must know that once something is placed in cyberspace it becomes public forever; anyone can see it. For example, posting pictures that may seem funny and harmless to one person are seen as promiscuous and hurtful to others. The reputation of someone can be damaged by the click of a button.

Remembering that we are all created in the image of God and are obliged to follow moral law, whether it be through direct human contact or the internet, this allows us to live a life respecting ourselves as well as others.

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