

Social Networking

Building good connections

What's not to like about social networking? MySpace and Facebook feel more like home than home. They're where you post an update on your new favorite band, get the history notes you missed when you were sick, and check out the profile of that cute girl your friend knows from jazz band. Here are a few things to keep in mind to help you make the most of social networking:

- Treat others well. Gossip, sarcasm, and criticism hurt just as much online as in person. And choose your words carefully. A comment that would be fine face to face can sting when read. Don't count on smiley face icons to help you out.
- People will judge you by the way you present yourself online. Employers, colleges, scholarship committees, and even potential friends will form opinions about you based on what you choose to share in profiles and posts. Make sure they'll like what they see.
- Leaving your profile public can bring unwanted attention. Public profiles might attract people who are fun to get to know, but you can also be contacted by others who are dishonest, annoying, demanding, or scary. Be selective by keeping your profile private.
- Check photos and videos to make sure you're not accidentally sharing information that would make you easy to track down. Background details like sports uniforms, well-known landmarks, and street signs can provide clues that might allow you to be located by untrustworthy or malicious people.
- Balance your online life with in-person relationships and activities. Spending time blogging, updating your profile, and e-mailing new friends can suck up huge amounts of time. Keep plenty of space in your life for your family, school, activities, and friends you can see face-to-face.
- Be savvy about what happens to information once you post it. Whether your profile is private - so that only those you trust can see it

- or public and available to everyone, remember that once you've put words, photos, or videos online, they are out of your control and can be copied and pasted anywhere. Even in a private profile, make careful choices about what to share.

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