

ChildrenOnline

Phone: 413-214-1225

A Division of Web Safe Consulting

Devoted to the safety of children and teens online

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Adults who are unfamiliar with online social tools, such as Facebook and instant messaging, may not understand how their children can be encouraged, and even manipulated, into contacting strangers to increase their number of "friends" without any regard for safety, exposure of personal information, or other potentially negative consequences.

Take Instant Messaging for example. Kids are all

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This month's newsletter focuses on the phenomenon of "friending." The online urban dictionary defines **friending** as "the action of adding somebody as a friend for social networking sites or social community sites etc". This includes friending via chat and IM communities, by adding someone as a friend on a user's Buddy List.



[Spectorsoft](#), manufacturer of Internet monitoring software, has produced a list of the [nine most risky activities](#) that kids do online. The first three activities are:

1. Posting personal information online (56%)
2. Interacting online with unknown people (43%)
3. Having unknown people on a buddy list (35%)

Fortunately, most children and teens feel too creepy about friending total strangers. However, they don't realize how easily they can be fooled and manipulated online into doing exactly that...friending strangers, resulting in negative consequences such as having their personal information stolen or used to harass or embarrass them or being manipulated to download malware. Manipulating others to download computer malware has skyrocketed in the last year, especially in social networks because most members are so trusting.

Just as parents talk to their children about their friends and

about connecting to others. Connecting to others is one of the single greatest motivators for their use of the Internet. Marketers and scammers know this too. For example, folks at AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) have created an application called [AIM Fight](#). The app encourages kids to add as many people as possible to their buddy list to increase their fight score.

"You need to get people to add you to their Buddy List® window, and have more people add those people to their Buddy List windows, and have even more people add those people to their Buddy List windows." Players are given a rank but only the top 5% are publicly listed. For some kids, this friendly competition is irresistible and they will "friend" complete strangers in their effort to be ranked.

Nowhere has the practice of friending strangers exploded

relationships in real life, we need to do the same thing with our children regarding the world of online friends. This includes setting rules for their behavior online and monitoring their activities online.

As always, we welcome your comments. Our telephone number for Children Online is 413-214-1225. We want to remind our subscribers that we launched our new web site last month. It contains many new resources for educators and parents alike.

We hope you are all enjoying the remaining few weeks of summer,
Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman

Contact Marje or Doug via email at marjem@childrenonline.org or dougf@childrenonline.org for information about our programs or consulting services.

Concerns About Friending

When did the word "friend" become a verb? Today, it is common to hear the phrase "He friended me". That phrase typically refers to the online idea of friend. As in "He contacted me to be his "friend" online. Just what exactly is a friend online? A friend online can mean many things. An online friend can indeed be a real life friend who you know in person and have fun with. An online friend can be a long lost friend who you once knew in person years ago and are now back in contact with. An online friend can be a friend of a friend or simply a contact who wants to know you better. Or, as in the case of thousands of teens, an online friend can be someone you have never met or known or have any connection to whatsoever except through chatting online.

With the popularity of social networking sites, children and teens are finding themselves making decisions about "friends" everyday. Should they confirm that someone is a friend? How do they know that this someone will be thoughtful and kind? Should they trust this person with their personal information? Could this "friend" really be an advertising "bot" (computer program), interested in using their information to sell them things? The broader question, we believe, is "are

more than on social networks like Facebook.

RELATED ARTICLES:

1. [5 dangers of social media](#) by Alexander van Elsas, Blogger and CEO of Glubble, which produces a Family browser.

"Privacy is losing ground to social media while they should be developed hand in hand."

2. [Tips for parents about teen's use of social networking sites](#) from OnGuardOnline.gov

3. [Where Nobody Knows You're a Virus](#) by Rob Pegoraro, Technology Columnist at the Washington Post.

4. [Can Anyone Be Your Facebook Friend?](#) by Stan Schroeder, Mashable.com.

5. [Friending Everyone is a Dangerous Thing](#) by Blogger Richard Adhikari.

children and young teens ready to be making these decisions everyday"?

It is hard to navigate the world of real friendship, especially for young teens today who spend much of their time instant messaging or texting. A critical component of child development is the process of learning trust, friendship, and intimacy. The anonymity afforded by the Internet doesn't make this any easier. This has always been a lesson that is fraught with disappointment, hurt and betrayal. Before the Internet kids struggled over friendships, loyalty and betrayal on playgrounds and in backyards. While this lesson is still being learned, we should be working as parents and educators to help our children face the new challenges of the online world of friendship.

It is not uncommon for many teens to have as many as a thousand friends online between instant messaging, social networking sites and texting. These "friends" may have access to their personal social networking pages with pictures, information and insights about who the person is. While many teens insist that they have some connection to their "friends", many are often teased, humiliated, bullied or scammed by their "friends".

Here are a few recommendations we have for helping your children navigate "friending" online:

1. Only allow your children to have "friends" online whom they know in person and TRUST.
2. Take the time go through child's buddy list on instant messaging and social networking sites. If you don't know the person and they aren't sure how they know them, take that name off their list.
3. Contact the parents of your child or young teen's buddy list. While your child might be embarrassed, you can establish a relationship with parents that can be very useful for creating group rules around chatting online and therefore keeping your kids safer.
4. Ask for access to your teen's social networking pages. If they have hundreds of "friends' online, make sure their page is free of any mean language, provocative pictures or information that could be used against them in some way.

6. [Staying Safe on Social Networks](#) from the US Computer Emergency Readiness Team.

About Children Online

Children Online offers innovative and comprehensive workshops on Internet safety and online education to students, parents, faculty and administrators. Our approach, unique in the field of Internet safety, combines a thorough understanding of Internet technologies, child development and counseling, to focus on the impact of the internet on the social, emotional and language development of young people.

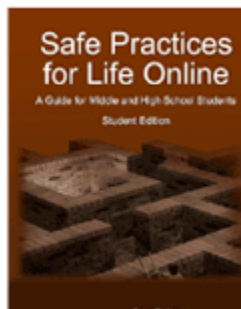
Doug Fodeman and Marje Monroe, experts in technology, counseling and education, work together to provide invaluable research and tools for parents and schools with practical real-life solutions to the issues faced by young people online. Since 1997, Marje and

5. Remind your kids that nothing is private online and once something is posted, they no longer have any control of the information.
6. Talk to your kids about the anonymity of the Internet and that anonymity can lead to meanness and harassment when taken too far.
7. Set time limits for your child's screen time.
8. Encourage real life encounters with friends. Create rules for dating online. For example, do not allow a teen online to have a long term (2 weeks in Internet time) chatting relationship without at least one conversation in real life.
9. Begin having conversations early with your children about friendship. With the popularity of Webkinz and Club penguin, young children are facing the task of understanding whom to trust online.
10. Have frequent conversations with your child. Discuss their "online reputation" with him/her. Nothing can substitute for your wisdom and values in helping your kids deal with friendships either in person or online.

INTERNET SAFETY CURRICULUM

Safe Practices for Life Online

Children Online has a curriculum on Internet Safety that includes nearly 100 student exercises and lots of information on many topics including social networks, instant messaging, cyberbullying, online marketing, scams directed at kids, protecting privacy online, avoiding identity theft and impersonation, creating strong passwords and more.



There is also a student edition which includes cartoons and "Did you know" sections of interesting facts for students.

To learn more or place an order visit our [publications page at ChildrenOnline.org](#) or

Doug have spoken to thousands of students, teachers and parents. They have several publications in the area of Internet safety and offer a free online newsletter. More detailed information can be found at ChildrenOnline.org.



go directly to our publisher's pages:
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[Student Edition at Lulu.com](#)

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