

## **My space, Your Space, Our Space**

In the last few years social networking websites such as myspace.com have become increasingly popular among young people. While there are privacy and safety concerns involved with these sites, there are positives as well, when used appropriately.

Social networking sites provide an opportunity for users to create personal webpages complete with profiles, pictures, interests, as well as other personal information. With parental supervision, they can provide a creative outlet for young people and offer an opportunity to practice writing and expressing thoughts and opinions. They can also be useful in building technology skills.

It is important for teens to know that while many sites provide some mechanism for restricting access to personal webpages, these are public websites. Students need to realize that anyone can have access and it is difficult to control who visits your site. Many young people view the internet as a place to “hang out” with friends they know in person and to make new friends. Unfortunately for some, those “friends” may not always be who they seem.

Consider these statistics:

- 50% of students age 13-18 frequently communicate with someone they have never met.
- 42% say they have posted information about themselves so that others can contact them.
- 12% have found out that someone they were communicating with was an adult pretending to be younger.
- 28% of teens admit to daily using a code to alert their correspondent that a parent is watching.

Below are a few tips parents monitor their student’s computer activity:

- Locate the computer in a common area in the home.
- Learn as much as possible about technology and the internet.
- Talk with your student about appropriate internet use.
- Be clear about what information is safe to post and set parameters around “screen time”.