

WHAT IS SOCIAL NETWORKING?



METHODIST
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COLLEGE

As technology continues to develop at an amazing rate, it's important to remain informed and alert to how our girls are accessing, sharing and distributing information online. There is no denying the allure of sharing and communication in this networked age. From text messages to photographs on Facebook, the myriad ways we connect online has now become a mainstream way for all ages to keep in touch and stay connected.

Online games like Moshi Monsters and Club Penguin, introduce children to virtual worlds that are inhabited by cute avatars taking the form of other players. Facebook, Instagram and Youtube make it very easy for children to share photos and communicate not only with each other, but the whole world.

As with any activity involving social interaction outside the home, parents need to stay attuned to the potential dangers of sharing information online. Simply banning or blocking our girls from these social interactions is one option. However this strategy alone can lead to conflict and a lack of connectedness in girls. Navigating and negotiating this responsibility is an increasing challenge for parents.

At MLC we believe open and informed conversations with girls creates the best environment for success.

WHAT IS SOCIAL NETWORKING?

A social network is an online community, often with a common interest. The most common social networking site is Facebook (www.facebook.com) with more than 1 billion users worldwide. It allows users to share comments, chat and post photos in a contained environment with the user in control.

Many popular sites are described as 'social networking' but are really best described under other categories. Examples of sites that have social aspects but are not strictly 'social networking' include:

- Twitter — a micro blogging site;
- YouTube — a video sharing site;
- Tumblr — a blogging site;
- MSN — an instant messaging programme;
- Skype — a voice over internet protocol (VOIP) service, with chat built in;
- Instagram — a photo and comment sharing application; and,
- Online games with social networking components, such as Club Penguin.

TEXTING IS ON THE RISE

Among all the forms of digital communication, texting is the most ubiquitous among teenagers. Daily texting is especially prevalent among girls. Girls are also more likely than boys to choose texting as their favorite form of communication.

Using a mobile phone to send a text message is actually the least popular form of texting. Any device connected to Wi-Fi can send and receive messages in apps such as Skype, iChat, Kik etc.

Group chats are used by teens to communicate with a range of people and can lead to problems when the group incorporates unknown contacts.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO ASSIST CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MANAGING SOCIAL NETWORKING?

Sometimes it is useful to think of the Internet, online sites and social networking as physical places your child likes to visit. When establishing ground rules and agreed behaviours, it can be useful to use existing rules that children are familiar with, e.g. establishing supervision guidelines, rules for play outside the home and interaction with friends and strangers. All of these rules can be used to manage life online.

Please remember that to assist your child to be safe on social networking sites you should:

- Ensure that they comply with the age restrictions (this means no Facebook until age 13);
- Ensure that they understand how the privacy and security settings work;
- Ensure that they can change their passwords and they know how to report a problem;
- Have house rules about what your child can post and when they can add new 'friends' (i.e. ask you first);
- Ensure that they understand the house 'rules' about where they can go, who they talk to and what they post;
- Ensure that they know where to go if they have an online issue;
- Set up an account yourself and be your child's friend (this is not going to ensure safety but will help you monitor your daughter's account.); and,
- Know your child's password.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Australian Council on Media Authority (ACMA) is the definitive source for reliable information. Visit: <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au>

Easy Guide to Social Networking is the Australian Government's Easy Guide to Socialising Online provides information on how internet users can protect themselves and their information when using social networking sites, search engines and online games.

Visit: <http://www.communications.gov.au/easyguide>

The Line is an interactive site that offers young people advice and support on respectful relationships. This includes multicultural and indigenous resources.

Visit: <http://www.theline.gov.au/>

Digizen, is provides information for educators, parents, carers and young people to strengthen their awareness and understanding of digital citizenship. It encourages technology users to become responsible digital citizens.

Visit: <http://www.digizen.org>

For further details on social networking and girls, or any aspect of technology use, please book in to one of our Parent ILT workshops advertised in Wyvern.

POPULAR SITES/SERVICES

SITE	MINIMUM AGE	DESCRIPTION
Facebook	13 years	Facebook is a social networking site where users set up a profile with photos and information about themselves.
Twitter	NA	Twitter is a social media site where users create a profile and share brief messages of up to 140 characters (called tweets) with other users. Tweets can include links to photos, video and websites. Twitter members create a profile and can follow other tweeters of interest. They can 'retweet' and reply to other users' tweets.
Youtube	13 years	Youtube is most popular video sharing site. Users can create content and upload material and share openly with the world.
Instagram	13 years	Instagram unites the most popular features of social media sites: sharing, seeing and commenting on photos. It lets users snap, edit and share photos and 15-second videos – either publicly or with a network of followers.
Vine	17 years	Vine is like Instagram for videos. Users can create short, looping videos that can be instantly shared – popular with the teens who are interested in applications that create visual content.
Kik	13 years	Kik is a messaging app for 'smart' devices such as smartphones, ipod touches and tablets. Once the app is downloaded the user can send texts, 'stickers', pictures, surveys and videos to other Kik users free of charge (other than normal data costs) – which is one of the reasons it is popular with kids. Kik users have a user name to identify them; they don't use their phone number. Some users share their user names with each other on other platforms like Instagram to continue the chat privately.
Tumblr	13 years	This is a blogging platform that relies heavily on imagery and short posts. Most of Tumblr's traffic comes from users who are under the age of 25. Tumblr culture is based on memes that relate to various topics, such as fashion, pop culture and photography.
Snapchat	13 years	This is a messaging service where users can send photos, videos, texts and creative drawings to a regulated list of people. Photos get destroyed soon after they have been received, giving Snapchat users an illusion of anonymity. Users can decide who they share with.
WeChat	13 years	Popular chat app for mobile devices.
Skype	NA	Skype is the most popular VOIP call site that allows users to video chat for free over Wi-Fi. Also has text/chat feature.
iCloud	13 years	Online storage and chat features for the Apple platform of products.
Ask.fm		Ask.fm is a social networking platform where users create profiles with photos and information about themselves. Users ask each other questions, but you don't have to be a member to ask a question or browse profiles. Users can block their identity and ask questions anonymously. Users can limit who they accept questions from or can leave themselves open to questions from anyone, including anonymous users.
MSN	NA	Online storage and chat feature for the Microsoft platform of products.