iPads and social media

Among the most popular mobile apps among kids is **Instagram**, free software that digitally enhances photos and posts them to your account online. The photos can be shared on other social media sites such as **Facebook**, which bought Instagram last year.

Then there's **Snapchat**, among the top 10 free iPhone apps available. Coined by the media as the "sexting" app, Snapchat lets you send a text, photo or video that self-destructs within 10 seconds of being opened.

Kik Messenger also allows unlimited texting for free and offers anonymity to its users. Able to run on an iPod Touch or Kindle Fire, Kik allows vague user names -- for example, a nickname or a string of random digits -- that won't reveal a person's real name or phone number.

But as with anything online, each of these apps comes with serious caveats.

Snapchat, for example, acknowledges on its Web page that its messages aren't guaranteed to disappear: Anyone receiving a text or photo can use their 10 seconds to capture a "screenshot," or photo of their device's screen, and save that image to their phone. Video also can be downloaded, although Snapchat says it alerts senders when their data is saved.

Instagram is generally considered pretty tame as long as kids adjust their privacy settings to limit who can see their photos and don't post nudity, which could subject them to child pornography laws. But Levey points out that many parents don't know their kids are on Instagram until there's trouble -- usually when kids post photos at parties, and other kids who aren't invited see them.

Dale Harkness, a technology director at Richmond-Burton Community High School in Richmond, Ill., said parents often will hand their kids a mobile device without understanding exactly what it can do. He estimates that even without the latest social media app, **the average high school student probably transmits some 150 texts a day.**

"It's not anything that every parent and grandparent hasn't already seen," Harkness said. The problem, he adds, is the actions "get documented, replayed and sent around," and kids "forget how fast it moves and how far it goes." (http://www.newsnet5.com/dpp/news/science_tech/Monitoring-your-kids-on-Facebook-Thats-so-2009-as-kids-use-social-media-like-Instagram-SnapChat)

The following information on social networking can be used to inform parents at back to school nights and through other means. This topic should also be the focus of at least one all staff meeting to ensure that EVERY member of the school's adult community understands what social media is and what role it plays in students' lives:

How to help your kids use social websites more safely (http://www.microsoft.com/security/family-safety/kids-social.aspx)

These days, many kids draw little distinction between real life and online life. They may use social websites designed for children such as Webkinz or Club Penguin, or social websites designed for adults such as Windows Live Spaces, YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, Twitter, Facebook, and others. Whatever they're doing, they should understand that many of these web pages can be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet.

Kids can use these sites to:

- Chat

- Play games

- Post and browse through photos and videos

- Blog

- Post an online profile

Unfortunately, some of the information kids post on their pages can also make them vulnerable to phishing scams, cyberbullying, and Internet predators. Here are several ways you can help your kids can use social websites more safely.

- **Communicate with your children about their experiences.** Encourage your children to tell you if something they encounter on one of these sites makes them feel anxious, uncomfortable or threatened. Stay calm and remind your kids they are not in trouble for bringing something to your attention. Let them know you will work with them to help resolve the situation for a positive outcome.

- **Set your own house Internet rules.** As soon as your children begin to use the Internet on their own, it is a good idea to come up with a list of rules for using the Internet that everyone can agree on. These rules should include whether your children can use social websites and how they can use them. For more information on setting rules, see Using family contracts to help protect your kids online.

- **Ensure your kids follow age limits on the site.** The recommended age for signing up for social websites is usually 13 and over. If your children are under the recommended age for these sites, do not let them use the sites. It is important to remember that you cannot rely on the services themselves to keep your underage child from signing up.

- **Educate yourself about the site.** Evaluate the sites that your child plans to use and make sure both you and your child understand the privacy policy and the code of conduct. Find out if the site monitors

content that people post. Also, review your child's page periodically. For more suggestions, see Tips on blogging safely for parents and kids.

- **Insist that your children never meet anyone in person that they've communicated with online only, and encourage them to communicate only with people they've met in person.** Kids are in real danger when they meet strangers in person whom they've communicated with online only. You can help protect your children by encouraging them to use these sites to communicate with their friends, but not with people they've never met in person.
It might not be enough to simply tell your child not to talk to strangers, because your child might not consider someone they've "met" online to be a stranger. For more advice on protecting your children on the Internet, see Online predators: What you can do to minimize the risk.

- **Ensure your kids don't use full names.** Have your children use only their first names or a nickname, but not a nickname that would attract inappropriate attention. Also, do not allow your children to post the full names of their friends.

- **Be wary of other identifiable information in your child's profile.** Many social websites allow kids to join public groups that include everyone who goes to a certain school.
Be careful when your children reveal this and other information that could be used to identify them, such as their school mascots, their workplaces,or the name of the towns they live in. Too much information can make your children vulnerable to cyberbullying, Internet predators, Internet fraud, or identity theft. For more information, see Recognize phishing scams and fake emails.

- **Consider using a site that is not very public.** Some websites allow you to password-protect your site or use other methods to help limit viewers to only people your child knows. With Windows Live Spaces, for example, you can set permissions for who can view your site, ranging from anyone on the Internet to only people you choose.

- **Be smart about details in photographs.** Explain to your children that photographs can reveal a lot of personal information. Encourage your children not to post photographs of themselves or their friends with clearly identifiable details such as street signs, license plates on their cars, or the name of their school on their sweatshirts.

- **Warn your child about expressing emotions to strangers.** You've probably already encouraged your kids not to communicate with strangers directly online. However, kids use social websites to write journals and poems that often express strong emotions. Explain to your children that many of these words can be read by anyone with access to the Internet and that predators often search out emotionally vulnerable kids. For more information, see things you can teach kids to improve their web safety.

- **Teach your children about cyberbullying.** As soon as your children are old enough to use social websites, talk to them about cyberbullying. Tell them that if they think they're being cyberbullied, they should share this information right away with a parent, a teacher, or another adult that they trust. It's also important to encourage kids to communicate with other people online in the same way they would face-to-face. Ask kids to treat other people the way they would prefer to be treated.

- **Removal of your child's page.** If your children refuse to abide by the rules you've set to help protect their safety and you've attempted to help them change their behavior, you can contact the social website your child uses and ask them to remove the page. You may also want to investigate Internet-filtering tools (such as Windows Live Family Safety) as a complement to, not a replacement for, parental supervision.

Learn more information on helping protect your child on the Internet.

Faculty and Staff Guidelines

Student Guidelines

Parent Guidelines