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Friends are everything to a teen. New technologies in the last few years have provided opportunities for teens to make “cyber” friends in addition to their real world friends. The very thought of “cyber” friends may produce uncertain images in the minds of parents. As with many issues in parenting, this is another area where parents need to gather more information and monitor what their teen does.

Social networking websites

MySpace and Facebook are two of the most popular general social networking websites. Social networking websites have wide appeal for teens with the number of users growing daily. In the 2007 Pew Internet and American Life Project – Teens and Social Media report, 55 percent of online teens have a personal profile on this kind of website. The websites combine many Internet features into one: personal profiles, blogs (web logs like an online diary or journal), places for photos and videos, the latest news in pop culture about music groups or hot new products, opinion polls, user groups, and more.

The most popular feature that social network sites provide is the personal profile. The sites provide many options for teens to create a page complete with pictures, interests, preferences and other information about themselves. Videos can be posted as well. Teens can allow as many or as few “friends” to view the page by the kinds of restrictions they choose. The tools to setup the page and determine who has access are easy to use with directions right on the website.

There are also many social networking websites which may appeal more to specific groups. For example, Flixster (<http://www.flixster.com>) focuses on movies.

Issues for parents and teens

Parents and caregivers need to know something about social networking sites. Check out a website (<http://www.myspace.com> or <http://www.facebook.com>) to experience what they look like and how they work. Look for what kinds of information people are posting including age, interests, and photos. Think about what



impression the information conveys.

Social networking websites have potential for both negative and positive consequences. These are public websites. Which means people of all ages, interests, and backgrounds have access to them. There are several areas of concern for both parents and teens.

- Safety is first and foremost. There are a number of cases where sexual predators have been able to identify and locate children and teens through the personal information that was posted.
- Information teens think would only be of interest to their friends can get in the hands of others with negative results. For example, news about a friend's personal life goes to others who use it to harass or bully the person.
- Employers find damaging information about the person's past as he/she looks for a job. Inappropriate information might be posted that leads computer hackers to alter the person's profile or access their computer.

Why are teens so attracted to social networking websites?

Certainly there are many adults who use social networking websites. But for parents who don't, the big question is why would teens put all of that

personal information on the Internet? It may help parents if they can understand the appeal that social networking websites and other web features have for teens.

Consider the world in which today's teens have grown up. The media has made very public the personal lives of well known people from entertainment, sports, and political circles. Celebrities live out their lives in the limelight. Other examples are TV reality shows many of which are popular with teens.

As mentioned earlier, friends are everything to a teen. As today's teens are growing up, they view the Internet as a place to "hang out" just as real world places are. Using the Internet to connect to friends they know in person and to make new friends is a natural step – it's just another way to communicate. Today's teens are a self-publicizing generation. It is natural for them to put information out there.

A normal developmental task for teens is figuring out their identity. For example, it is typical for teens to "try on" different identities through their clothing and hairstyle choices. Designing a webpage complete with favorite symbols, quotes, and pictures can also be viewed as a way to "try on" an identity, test an image, and get feedback from others.

Tips for parents

- Learn what your teen is doing on the Internet. One way is to ask your teen to help you with doing a task on the web.
- Help teens know what is appropriate to put on the web. They have the web knowledge but you have life experience.
- Be clear about what is not safe to post on the web: full name, address, specific places they go, phone numbers, ethnic background, and anything else that would help someone identify or locate them. Remind your teen that strangers and people they don't want accessing their information have the ability to do just that. Once something is posted on the web, it is no longer private.
- Stress that the rules of social networking sites must be followed. There are age limits on most sites.
- Establish limits on how much "screen time" your teen has including time at the computer, watching TV, or playing video games.
- Invite your teen to show you his/her web page. Give him/her a day or two of warning before looking at it.

Some teens may "rethink" what they have posted.

- Consider joining the same website your teen is on and setting up your own profile. That way your teen will be able to look at your profile and you will be able to ask to view his/her profile. Knowing this, teens will be much better at self – monitoring.

It's not all bad

Much of what is in the news recently about social networking websites has been negative. There are very serious privacy and safety issues. But, there are many positives things about these websites when used appropriately. Creation of a personal web page can be a very creative outlet for a teen. Frequent entries into an online blog can give teens practice in writing and expressing their thoughts and opinions. Through using technology, teens are learning how to manipulate and use large amounts of data and information to a higher degree than previous generations. Teens are also learning skills needed to build a website and use other technologies.

Where you can go for more information:

National Institute on Media and the Family

<http://www.mediafamily.org>

NetSmartz Workshop – Keeping Kids and Teens Safer on the Internet

<http://www.netsmartz.org>

Parenting Education Resources

<http://www.parenting.umn.edu>

Pew Internet and American Life Project – Teens and Social Media

http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Social_Media_Final.pdf

Teens and the Internet – Teen Talk: A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/00145.pdf>

Web Wise Kids – Equipping Today's Youth to Make Wise Choices Online

<http://www.webwisekids.org>

WiredSafety – Keeping Kids and Teens Safe on MySpace, Facebook and other Networking Sites

<http://www.wiredsafety.org>

www.parenting.umn.edu

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How big is this problem?

Even though it can feel like the news is filled with reports of school shootings and other violence, school-related violence is actually lower than in previous years. Statistically, school is the safest place for children to be. The majority of children are safe at school.

How can I talk to my teen about such a serious issue?

It is important to talk to your teenager about school violence and to listen to his thoughts and concerns on this issue.

- It is okay to express fear at what has been happening and compassion for the students and families who have survived these horrors.
- Explain that there is a difference between being different from other students and having severe problems that lead to extreme violence.
- Express to your teen how important it is to let you or another adult know if s/he hears another child threatening violence towards himself or others.
- Talk about what it might feel like to be an outcast at school and find out if your teen is having trouble fitting in.
- Teens are aware of social issues so talk with them about bigger issues, like gun control and what they can do to help keep their school safe.
- Talk with your kids about solving problems constructively; help them to find appropriate solutions to problems without using violence.

How can schools help keep kids safe?

Decreasing violence in schools requires a joint commitment from the school, the students, the parents, and the community. Here are some practices that schools have found to be effective:

- Increased supervision by administrators and security guards.

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- Checking visitors' IDs.
- Tracking all incidents of violence in full detail.
- Keeping track of students who have been in trouble in the past either in school or in the community.
- Increasing mental health services for students.
- Placing telephones in classrooms.
- Making peer counseling available.
- Teaching conflict resolution or anger management.
- Eliminating backpacks or restricting their use.

What do we know about the teens who are committing these crimes?

Students who are potentially violent tend to exhibit more than one of the following:

- Inability to recognize their own anger and redirect it so it does not lead to violent behavior.
- Difficulty recognizing others' feelings.
- Feeling no remorse.
- Believing that the only solution is to take matters into their own hands.

- No positive role models.
- Feeling unloved at home and unaccepted at school.
- Experienced either physical or psychological abuse, or neglect.
- Inability to see their future.

Be aware of these additional warning signs in teens:

- Name calling, abusive language, and threats of violence.
- Preoccupied with weapons or violence.
- Cruelty to animals.
- Problems with drugs or alcohol.
- Discipline problems at school such as truancy or expulsion.
- Few or no close friends, feeling like an outcast at school.
- Is being bullied or bullies others.
- Prefers movies, TV, music, video games, reading, or clothes with violent themes.
- Expresses anger, frustration, or violence in writing or drawings.
- Depression or mood swings – there is a difference between feeling down one day and being depressed. It is not normal for teenagers to be severely depressed or extremely moody!
- Has threatened or attempted suicide.

Where to go for help

If you observe any of these behaviors in your teen or another teen, contact the school counselor, your physician, or a mental health professional.

Where you can go for more information:

Youth Violence Prevention: Dept of Health and Human Services

www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/school_violence.htm

National Crime Prevention Council

<http://www.ncpc.org/>

National School Safety Center

<http://www.schoolsafety.us>

National PTA

<http://www.pta.org>

You may also want to look at:

Garbarino, J. & deLara, E. (2002). *And words can hurt forever: How to protect adolescents from bullying, harassment, and emotional violence*. New York: Free Press.

Elliott, D. S., et al. (Eds.). (1998). *Violence in American schools: A new perspective*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Garbarino, J. (1999). *Lost boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them*. New York: Free Press.

Garbarino, J., et al. (1998). *Children in danger: Coping with the consequences of community violence*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Schaefer, C. E., & DiGeronimo, T. F. (1999). *How to talk to teens about really important things*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

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Methamphetamine is a substance that is derived from amphetamine and is a stimulant that strongly affects the central nervous system. Meth can be smoked, snorted, injected, or ingested orally. It is available in many forms such as powder, ice, and tablets with a variety of street names including: ice, crystal meth, chalk, sketch, yellow powder, poor man's cocaine, speed, go-fast, and glass. Methamphetamine use typically starts during the teen years. According to the 2009 Monitoring the Future survey, methamphetamine use in recent years has dropped among teens, however the possibility of harsh behavioral, social, and physical consequences and meth's severe potency keeps it as a concern among many communities. Parents have a critical role in communicating with their teen about the use of meth.



Hazardous Waste

The majority of the labs that create meth are found in rural or semi-rural areas, but meth is also gaining popularity as a club drug in cities. In a meth lab, you may find jars with tubing attached and a collection of ingredients including cold medicines, anti-freeze, acetone, lantern fuel, paint thinner, drain cleaner, and battery acid. There are numerous materials and ingredients that can be used to produce meth, but the physical space required for production is quite small. Meth can be produced in the trunk of a car or even in a purse which makes it portable and easy to store. Meth labs have also been found in hotel rooms, car washes, apartments, and storage garages. Each of these drug labs has the potential to become a hazardous waste site putting anyone who comes in contact with these areas at risk.

On the Farm

Anhydrous ammonia is another ingredient that can be used to produce meth. Anhydrous is not available to most meth producers, so it is often stolen from tanks on a farm. It is typically stored as a gas so it can be drained into a propane tank. These tanks are not suspicious looking since they are the type that typically attach to backyard grills. The valves may become bluish-green if they have been used to store or transport anhydrous.

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I could give it a try!

Teens need to develop healthy ways of taking risks. If they do not have a good understanding of boundaries they may think it is okay to experiment with drugs such as meth, not fully realizing the potential hazardous effects. Meth use among teens typically starts with casual use. Because of the pattern of rush and crash that develops from meth use, users may quickly become addicted. The rush period begins immediately after the user has smoked or injected meth. This rush or high, which can be described as euphoric, will only last for a few minutes, but the high that follows will last for 4-16 hours. Following this high, a user will crash feeling overwhelmingly low. During this period a feeling of depression can be unbearable which often leads to the decision to use meth again. It is possible to get addicted to meth with the first use.

What are possible signs of meth use?

- Sleeplessness
- Heightened noise sensitivity
- Increased aggression
- Nervous physical behaviors
- Anorexia or severe lack of appetite

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- Tremors and/or convulsions
- Lightheadedness
- Feelings of disorder
- Disconnected thoughts

Followed by:

- Feelings of depression
- Extreme lack of energy
- Fatigue
- Irritable and suspicious behavior
- Hallucinations or delusions

Parents can make a difference!

The likelihood of substance use by teens is significantly lower when parents learn the facts and risks about drugs and have frequent conversations with their teen about them. Remember, the most successful conversations between parent and teen should focus on information that is most important to the teen.

Meth Appeals to Teens:

- Teens who are concerned about their weight may use meth because they have heard it can help control their weight.
- Teens who are involved in physical activities may use meth because they have heard that it can increase their endurance.
- Teens that are sexually active may use meth because they have heard that it can heighten their sexual desire or activity.

What should parents do?

Monitor

Be involved with your teen's activities, friends, and other important adults in their lives. Being informed and monitoring your teen's relationships and behaviors will help you be able to distinguish between possible signs of drug use and typical changes in behavior.

Set Expectations

Teens need expectations. When parents consistently follow through with rules and consequences for behavior teens will learn that they are accountable for their choices.

Discuss

Discuss with teens what is happening in their world. If a teen can feel secure within the family and comfortable sharing their opinions, they are less likely to give in to pressure from friends. Tell your teen to use you as an excuse to get out of an uncomfortable situation such as, "no way, my mom and dad won't let me go!"

Educate

Combine the realities of her world with the information you have to help guide relevant and useful conversations. If you don't know the answer to her question, help your teen find the answer. Deciding whether or not you share your own experiences with drug use is a personal choice. Either way, face-to-face conversations are critical.

Model

Model the values and behaviors that you hold important for your family. Modeling may not seem immediately effective yet will have a lasting impact on the values your teen develops and the choices he makes about drug use.

Where you can go for more information:

Parents. The Anti-Drug

www.theantidrug.com

National Institute of Health and Institute on Drug Abuse

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/methamphetamine.html>

Minnesota Department of Health

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/meth/methdrug.html>

Adolescent Substance Abuse Knowledge Base

<http://www.adolescent-substance-abuse.com/meth-use-among-youth.html>

Monitoring the Future

<http://monitoringthefuture.org>