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Social Media Gone Awry: Tips for Teens to Stay Safe

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Anyone who is a parent today did not grow up with the generation of technology that teens are using to capture and document a tremendous amount of their lives on social media. The good, the bad and the ugly is being recorded and shared -- as we recently saw again in the horrific rape case in Steubenville, Ohio. I recommend that parents have a conversation with their children about safety when using different forms of social media -- from Facebook to texting and anything in between. Today, the culture seems to promote that "anything goes" in regards to self-expression. There needs to be a conversation about what is appropriate behavior and what actions could have huge repercussions that damage their reputation -- and are harmful to others.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month -- a time to recognize that we each can play a part in promoting the social and emotional well-being of children and families in communities. Let's start by protecting our own children from the dangers that lurk in the Internet.

Here are a few tips to keep your teen safe when using the Internet and other web-based technologies. If you think it's an awkward conversation; you can hand them this blog to read.

- Be smart about what you post on the Web. It is a lot more public than it seems. Protect your space. Use privacy settings and don't just randomly accept everyone's request as a friend. Do a bit of investigating to find out more about them first. It's recommended that you don't use your real name or give out too much personal information on your Facebook page or other social media sites.

- Clean up your profile. Take anything embarrassing, too personal or any photos that show you doing something illegal (drinking, drugs) off of your page. Those photos of you dancing with a beer bottle in your hand, are not going to look good when you are applying for college.
- Provocative and sexy names and pictures can draw attention from people you don't want in your life, particularly online predators.
- Posting or sending sexy photos of yourself (sexting) can get you into big trouble with the law. If you are underage, they may be considered child pornography, a serious crime. Never take an image of yourself that you wouldn't want your parents, teachers, or your employers to see. Think twice or three times before you post. You can't take it back and it's out there forever.
- You have no control over where the photos are sent once you send them. The image that you meant for your boyfriend or girlfriend can be sent to their friends, and their friends and their friends. If you forward a sexual photo of someone underage, you are as responsible as the original sender. You could face child pornography charges, go to jail, and be legally required to register as a sex offender. You could also be asked to leave a sports team, be humiliated in public, or lose educational opportunities and have legal problems. Here is a video from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (2 minutes), where teens discuss the dangers of online posting.
- Report any nude pictures that you receive on your cell phone to an adult that you trust. Do not delete the message; get your parents or your guardian, your teacher or school counselor involved immediately.
- Be careful what you download or look at. Some images are extreme, and once you see it -- it's in your mind forever. This is particularly true for violent and/or pornographic images.
- Adults who talk to you about sex online are committing a crime. So are adults who meet underage teens for sex. Some teens may think it's fun but it is serious trouble and best to report it to the police. You can also make a report by clicking [here](#).
- Be careful if you go in person to meet someone in person that you met on the Internet. You may think you know them well, but you don't. Tell your parents or someone you trust before you go. Don't go alone, bring a friend. Always meet in a public place. Make sure you have your cell phone and an exit plan. Here is another video clip (2.40 minutes) where teens talk about bad experiences they had when meeting someone in person who they met online.

The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC), the world's first child protection agency, will hold their annual Spring Luncheon on Thursday, April 18, 2013 at The Pierre Hotel in New York City. The afternoon will feature a keynote address by child advocate, Elizabeth Smart. To learn more, please contact the Special Events office at 212 233 5500 ext 216 or email info@nyspcc.org.