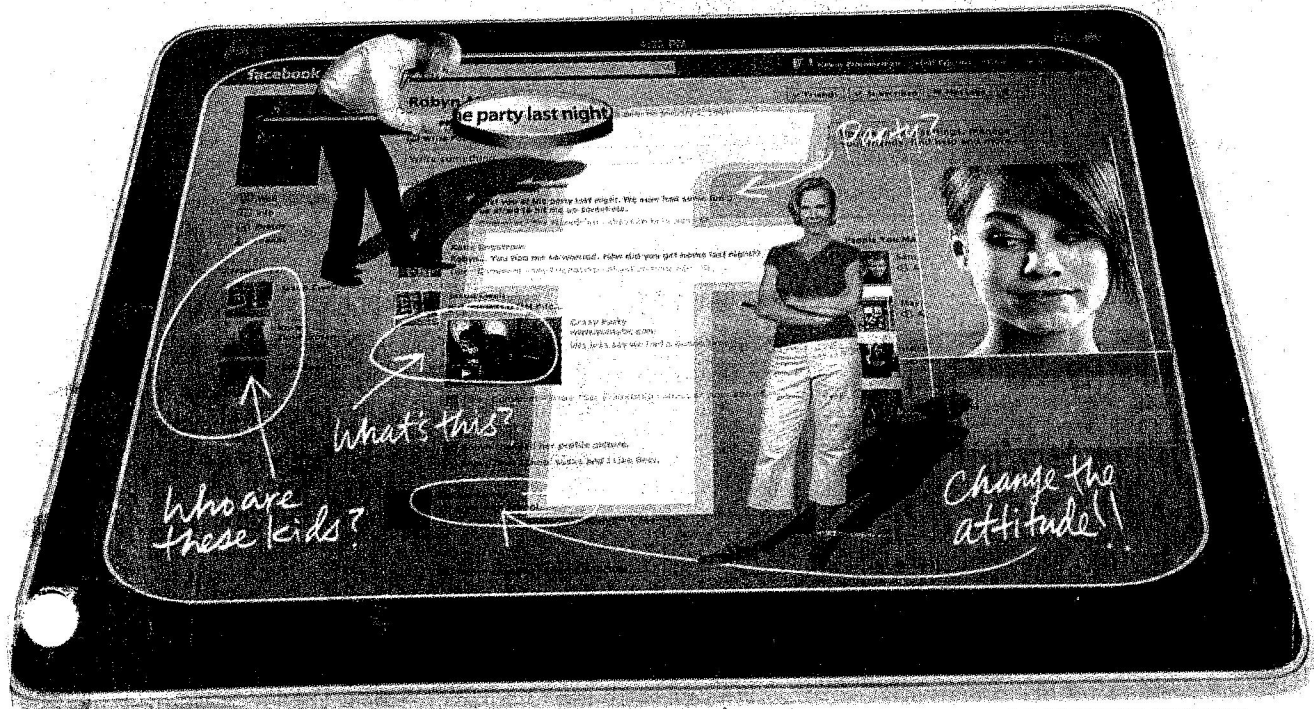


6 most important ideas

FACEOFF OVER FACEBOOK



MARK MARTURELLO/REGISTER ILLUSTRATION

The kids like to call it 'creeping,' but parents want to monitor their activity

By MIKE KILEN
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Sabrina Alcalá is Facebook friends with her parents. She knows they monitor her online interactions and is OK with that because, she said, "I'm not doing anything wrong."

"But they will ask if I know all my friends," said the 17-year-old senior at Southeast Polk High School. "Or, if they see I'm talking to a boy, ask if I'm going to be dating him. That's annoying."

Alcalá needed to clear the air with her father on another matter. If he wanted to remain Facebook friends, he'd have to put a lid on his online chatter on her page.

"I don't like it when my dad writes on my stuff," she said. "When kids write a status, it's not for parents to comment on."

Facebook has been around for

eight years and has firmly settled into an acceptable venue of family communication. With it comes parental hovering — your kid might call it "creeping" — and a tenuous series of negotiations regarding boundaries and online etiquette.

Gone are the days of parents snooping through a diary or putting an ear to the bedroom door to find out what's going while their teen talks on the telephone.

Now, it's an online game and a vital, if risky, part of adolescence.

The satirical online news site theonion.com offered advice to Facebook parents, summing up with this: "The only excuse now for not knowing every detail of your child's life is having a life of your own."

But experts say it's a parent's job, even if it leads to some tense moments at the dinner table.

WHO'S DOING WHAT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA?

Americans spend more time on Facebook than they do any other U.S. website. A look at other social media trends:

71% of 18-29-year-olds use social networking to stay in touch with current friends.

come (more)

18-34-year-olds

and females are the most active social networkers.

4 in 10 parents

admit to regularly checking their children's social media status updates.

Sources: 2011 Pew report on Why Americans Use Social Media; Nielson Social Media Report Q3 2011; 2011 Bullguard Internet Security Survey

conflict between parents & kids

FACEBOOK

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There are 20 million Facebook users under the age of 18, and those young adults are conducting much of their social lives on the Internet. They test boundaries, establish identities and sometimes give out too much information.

The consequences can be dire as they draw the attention of stalkers, bullies or potential future employers who just called up their high school party photos.

Last fall, Joshua Raymond Wilson of Waterloo pleaded guilty of felony stalking after peeping in the window of a 17-year-old after he found her on Facebook and got her address.

So when Michelle Riesenberg of Des Moines first talked to her ninth-grade daughter, Heather, about joining Facebook, she made this clear: Her daughter could join if she allowed her mother to be a Facebook friend, ensuring that she could follow Heather's interactions with others. Heather also had to give Riesenberg her password.

Young adults are adept at sharing some information with only certain friends. A password allows Mom to sign on and have access to it all.

"She didn't like it," Riesenberg said. "But I wanted to make sure she was safe and not saying where she lived."

Some may say Riesenberg's approach is hard core, or that it breached the privacy of her daughter, but experts are in her corner.

Young adults' brains aren't developed enough to think of long-term consequences of their actions until their early 20s, said Linda Fogg-Phillips, a Las Vegas author and lecturer on Facebook and families. Fogg-Phillips also works for Facebook, on incorporating the social network into education.

Half of the 75 adults in her Facebook for Parents study group at Stanford said their children won't friend them.

"What do you mean?" she asked them. "Don't you feed them and give them shelter? In my house, if they want dinner, they are my Facebook friends."

ADVICE FOR PARENTS FROM FACEBOOK

- » **WHY THEY WANT IT:** Start a conversation with your teens about Facebook and why it's important to them. Ask them to show you how to set up your own Facebook profile, so you can see what it's all about.
- » **RULES FOR SHARING:** Discuss what's appropriate information to share online, and what isn't. It's also important to talk about the Golden Rule: treating others the way you want to be treated.
- » **SMART POSTING:** Make sure your teens know where to go for support if someone ever harasses them. Help them understand how to make responsible and safe choices about what they post, because anything they put online can be misinterpreted or taken out of context.
- » **SET BOUNDARIES:** "Friend" your child, but try to respect the same boundaries you use offline. Let your relationship dictate how you interact. For example, whether you join a conversation among your child's friends or whether you post on his or her wall. Think of social media as a get-together at one of your child's friend's houses.
- » **PRIVACY SETTINGS:** Ask them about privacy settings, and suggest that you go over them together, regularly. Set ground rules, and enforce them.

It takes enough time for parents to manage their own social networking lives, emails and cell-phones. Now they have children's to watch. That's why new businesses such as SafetyWeb have popped up. SafetyWeb charges \$10 a month to monitor all social networks and text messages and give parents alerts and reports.

"We will even know about cussing," said Gretchen Pahia, spokesperson for the California company.

But one survey shows how parents are tracking their teens' online activities.

Eleven percent of parents joined Facebook specifically to "spy" on their children, and 55 percent use it to "keep an eye on them," according to the 2011 Bullguard Internet Security Survey. That 2011 survey of 2,000 Internet users in Great Britain also showed that 24 percent of the parents said that was the only way they could see what their child was really up to.

Here's one reason why that kind of monitoring could be vital: It gives parents a heads up to potential problems. In a study of 224 college students, a third had posted photos or made mention of drinking alcohol. And 60 percent in that group rated higher for alcohol dependence and abuse, according to the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine.

Research also shows that chil-

dren whose parents closely monitor their friendships and behavior become resilient adults.

"When the parents are uninvolved, that's a risk factor for behavioral problems," said Don Damsteegt, a psychologist with Family Psychology Associates in Cedar Rapids and public education committee chairman for the Iowa Psychological Association.

The monitoring of teens online has expanded as the average age of Facebook users has climbed in the last two years. Now grandmas and aunts are getting involved.

Jayne Marquardt of Clive has had to call the parents of younger cousins who posted "inappropriate bikini photos," because she knew the parents weren't up on the latest technology.

Other young relatives who were sisters engaged in bitter fighting on Facebook, she said. Their grandma got online and wrote, "You are breaking my heart."

Marquardt said she finally called the youngsters and intervened. She accepted that she might be "de-friended" but was surprised to find she wasn't.

That reaction is more common than you think.

"The No. 1 reason children don't want parents on Facebook is a fear they will embarrass them. Once they realize they won't post

True?

STEPPING INTO A TEEN'S ONLINE LIFE

Once parents get into their teenager's online world, it can be a puzzle. Some parents are amused at the arcane nature of posts or say it's as if they were written in code. But other posts can be full of sexual innuendo or filled with curse words.

For a parent, that leads to a critical question: How should I respond?

First, parents learn they are visitors in their children's world.

"My daughter and her friends are much more connected to peers in the whole community. But I think it's ridiculous that someone has 1,000 friends," said Wendy Stokesbary, a Cedar Rapids psychotherapist. "Don't accept everybody."

You wouldn't get in a car with strangers; why accept them on Facebook?

Stokesbary said it's best for parents to praise publicly but reprimand privately. If inappropriate language surfaces, have a face-to-face talk. Don't post it online.

"I got the hint pretty quickly the way my daughter responded to my posts," Stokesbary said.

embarrassing baby photos, they are OK," said Fogg-Phillips. "Kids recognize it is parents' role to guide and protect them and that responsibility exists in the virtual world."

Even her older daughter in college has "de-friended" her three times but always asked her mother back. One time Mom didn't accept her request. "She actually got irritated," Fogg-Phillips said.

For the most part, young adults accept that they will be watched.

"I try to not post anything that I don't want my whole family to see," said Nathan Vore, a Des Moines Dowling Catholic High School student.

The potential pitfalls are still many, however.

Young adults are adept at keeping secrets from adults. They switch settings. They put on blocks. Teens have always been masters of secrets, and experts say what happens online is no different.

One possibility for parents who suspect potentially dangerous use by their child: contact Facebook to eliminate the page.

Another problem is that a growing number of Facebook users are younger than the required minimum age of 13. Today, there are 7.5 million. They use fake birth ages or unknowing parents even sign them up.

"I just get on to talk to my aunts," said one 12-year-old in a Des Moines mall.

Children, and many adults, may also not know the terms of service associated with Facebook.

"Almost nobody has read

them," said Michael Bugeja, an Iowa State University journalism professor who wrote one of the first books on the effects of social media, "Interpersonal Divide: The Search for Community in a Technological Age."

Among the terms of service: Facebook can collect data whenever you interact on its site and provide it to advertisers.

"Facebook takes all that information, aggregates and uses it to sell product," Bugeja said.

Bugeja also calls social networking a "tremendous distraction" and one that can lead to negative images that follow you for years.

"That's why many social scientists I know are calling Facebook 'image book.'"

Yet the benefits of Facebook

seem clear to many of the young adults who continue to use it, although the freewheeling days appear to be dwindling and some are switching to other networks such as Twitter or Tumblr.

"I need it to connect with my friends. I can read it right here on my phone," said Ashley Wilkins, 14, who attends McCombs Middle School in Des Moines. "I spend a couple hours a day on it."

She and her friends walking through the mall know their parents are reading, but don't care. There's a measure of comfort in it.

Therese Davis, a grandmother from West Des Moines, has seen young relatives post sad or desperate comments and alerted their parents.

"I just tell them their child is having a hard day," she says. "Lord knows, parents need help."

how many know this?

4)

what?