Safety and Social Media

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Social networking sites, chat rooms, virtual worlds and blogs are now common forums for teens, tweens and young children to socialize and have fun. It is more important than ever before for parents to teach children how to navigate these spaces safely and responsibly. Parents are often not fully aware of rules and regulations associated with social media. For example, Facebook, Instagram and SnapChat all require users to be at least 13 years of age. Parents are often persuaded to allow their children to set up accounts just because "everyone else is doing it" without fully understanding the possible pitfalls of signing users agreements.

For example, it is not commonly known that when signing a user agreement for Facebook, the user immediately allows Facebook to own the users information forever. SnapChat is widely used due to the lure of images disappearing within seconds. This is also untrue. Someone can take a screen shot of a Snapchat image and there are ways professionals can "undelete" images. The most significant fact is laws related to cyber safety have changed significantly in recent years. The results have created legal statutes for parents and even children to be sued for sharing too much information, posting comments, photos or videos that are unauthorized or cause damage to someone's reputation.

Applying real-world judgment and parental supervision can help minimize these risks. The following rules can help parents guide children to safe and responsible use of social media.

- Remind children that online actions can have offline consequences.
- Follow the rule that states, "If it's digital, it's permanent".
- Remember that once something is sent, you have lost control of where it goes.
- Use all privacy settings at all times.
- Encourage online manners.
- Limit access to your children's profiles.
- Remind children to only communicate with people they know and periodically review who your children are talking to.
- Create a safe screen name that does not reveal personal information.
- Remind children to limit sharing personal and private information.
- Encourage children to trust their instincts and share with a trusted adult any communication or posting they feel is inappropriate or unsafe.

The videos below are suggested for viewing with children to help convey the importance of safety and responsibility when using social media at any age.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZ_f7yOAzPU

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMJ4u3zfmoo

http://www.netsmartz.org/reallifestories/yourphotofate