

Social networks such as **Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn** and **Twitter** have moved rapidly into the mainstream; **61% of Americans now participate on a regular basis.** Teens and young adults are still the heaviest users, but many others are now following their lead—social media use among those 50 and older has nearly doubled in the past year alone.¹ For many families, social networking has already become a central aspect of everyday life, often serving to bridge geographic and generational gaps.

how well are you connected?



A New Take on Togetherness

Family members and circles of friends can create and manage online profiles and then communicate or interact with each other in the same virtual space whenever they choose. Put simply, it has become much more convenient to stay in touch and maintain relationships across the miles. Many people document the key milestones and highlights of their lives with stories, status updates, photos and videos uploaded on their profiles. It seems natural that parents, other relatives and friends are often eager to follow their progress and respond to the postings.

7 out of 10 people have used social networks to reconnect with friends or business colleagues from the past.²

Sources: 1) Pew Research Center
2, 3) PC World, August 2010

Building Virtual Villages

Social media has also become a common tool for professional networking, political participation and continuing education. Individuals can ask for and receive advice or offer their own knowledge when they join online communities and discussion groups that speak to their personal needs and experiences. There are countless groups available for those who share the same hobbies, interests or health concerns.

Just for Fun

Online communities like Facebook and MySpace offer easy access to popular social games (such as FarmVille and Bejeweled) played among circles of friends and family.

Game play isn't only for the young; it also appeals to the young at heart. Believe it or not, 38% of social gamers are age 50 or older.³

The Facebook Nation

Launched just six years ago, Facebook's membership was first limited to Harvard students. Facebook is now the world's largest social network and the most visited site on the Internet. 50% of Americans have Facebook profiles. **If Facebook were a nation, it would be the third largest in the world.**



China
1.35 billion



India
1.21 billion



Facebook
500 million



United States
310 million



Indonesia
232 million

The community's population grew to exceed half a billion worldwide in July of 2010—at the same rate it would surpass the 1 billion user mark by late 2011.

Sources: United Nations, US Census Bureau, Facebook



Help Protect Your Teens Online

*Socializing on the web has become a way of life for many older children and teens. 40% of young people visit websites like Facebook or MySpace on a typical day, and those who do hang out for an average of almost one hour.**

The Potential for Problems

Many kids learn the hard way that over-sharing on the web can have real-life ramifications, but parents can suggest that they think carefully before posting personal information about themselves and others. It can even be risky to publish certain facts about their families, such as when they will be out of town on vacation. Some teens suffer as a result of harassment by individuals or groups who could be mistreating them both at school and online; parents may want to watch for signs of cyberbullying, which has become more common. Children should also understand the danger that could be involved if they agree to meet a stranger in person.



To open a Facebook account, users must be at least 13 years old, but there is no verification process to stop younger children from gaining access with a false birth date. Default privacy settings for minors protect their accounts from being found on general search engines, and they may only receive messages from others in their network.



If you have a profile on the same website, consider connecting to your child's page so you can get a realistic idea of their interactions. If not, ask to see their profiles from time to time. Parents who want to employ strict monitoring can rely on software or online services to catch any unacceptable online behavior.



Teachers, coaches, college admissions officials and potential employers have been known to check out the online profiles of students, so teens should remain aware that inappropriate photos, updates and associations could be scrutinized and possibly impact their opportunities in the future.

*Source: The Kaiser Family Foundation

Under Watchful Eyes

76% of parents who have Facebook profiles are linked to those of their children—and it's a non-negotiable rule in 41% of households. Despite their monitoring efforts, 33% of parents said they still worry about what their children might be up to online. Not surprisingly, 30% of kids say they would choose to "unfriend" their parents if they could.

Source: Reuters

