

Common Sense on Protecting and Respecting Privacy Online

Some facts

- > 66% of teens on social networking sites use privacy controls on their profiles
- > 39% of kids have posted something on their social networking pages that they later regret
- > 22% of teen girls have posted nude or revealing photos of themselves online
- > 15% of teens report that they've had private material (IMs, texts, emails) forwarded without permission

It's a culture of sharing

Our kids live in a culture of sharing that has forever changed the concept of privacy. In a world where everyone is connected and anything created can get copied, pasted, and sent to thousands of people in a heartbeat, privacy starts to mean something different than simply guarding personal or private information. Each time your child fills out a profile without privacy controls, comments on something, posts a video, or texts a picture of themselves to friends, they potentially reveal themselves to the world.

Why privacy matters

Digital life is both public and permanent. Everything our kids do online creates digital footprints that wander and persist. Something that happens on the spur of the moment – a funny picture, a certain post – can resurface years later. And if kids aren't careful, their reputations can get away from them. Your child may think they just sent something to a friend – but that friend can send it to a friend's friend, who can send it to their friends' friends, and so on. That's how secrets become headlines and how false information spreads fast and furiously. The stakes only rise when we remember that everything takes place in front of huge invisible audiences. Kids' deepest secrets can be shared with thousands of people they've never even met.

Common Sense says:

- **Explain that nothing is really private – no matter what kids think.** Privacy settings aren't infallible. It's up to kids to protect themselves by thinking twice before they post something that could damage their reputation or that someone else could use to embarrass or hurt them.
- **Teach kids to keep personal information private.** Help kids define what information is important for them to keep private when they're online. We recommend that kids not share their addresses, phone numbers, or birth dates.
- **Make sure your kids use privacy settings on their social network pages.** Encourage kids to really think about the nature of their relationships (close friends, family, acquaintances, strangers) and adjust their privacy settings accordingly
- **Remind kids to protect their friends' privacy.** Passing along a rumor or identifying someone in a picture (called "tagging") affects their privacy. If your kids are tagged in friends' photos, they can ask to have the photos or the tags removed. But there's not too much they can do beyond that.
- **Establish a few hard-and-fast rules about posting.** No nude or semi-nude photos or videos – ever. Not online, not via mobile phone (known as "sexting"). No pictures of doing drugs, drinking, or having sex.
- **Remind kids that the Golden Rule applies.** What goes around comes around. If kids spread a rumor or talk trash about a teacher, they can't assume that what they post will stay private. Whatever they say can come back to haunt them in more ways than they can imagine.
- **Help kids think long term.** *Everything* leaves a digital footprint. Whatever gets created never goes away. If they don't want to see it tomorrow, they'd better not post it today.

