

MySpace

Why it Isn't a Place for Kids!

What is MySpace?

MySpace.com is a web site that is very popular with teenagers and our upper elementary students. MySpace allows your child to customize and post personal information. They can add photos of themselves and their friends. Users select icons that best represent various aspects of their personalities. They can answer survey questions, post diary like entries, and write descriptions of themselves. Friends can post comments on each other's sites.

Many of your child's friends may currently have a MySpace account.

Why is MySpace a Danger to Your Child?

There are several reasons you should seriously consider *not* allowing your child to post information to MySpace. The first reason is that users are required to be 14 years old to obtain a page. Children simply lie to gain access. Your child puts themselves in danger with online sexual predators by posting personal identity information: their first and last name, city, school, age, and picture. Your child will usually describe in detail their personality, interests, and extra curricular activities. Generally, children provide their Instant Message Screen Name as well. Access to this information makes it easy for a sexual predator assuming an online identity to initiate contact with your child. Anyone can easily use the page's search function to identify profiles within 5 miles of a given area.

A second reason that you should question your child's use of MySpace is due to the content of the sexually explicit material and offensive language. MySpace offers no filters – you child has access to any site that a user wants the public to

see. Many parents would be concerned with the content that children are exposing themselves to by visiting this site.

Finally, it is important to realize that children often assume a false sense of security when they are online. Either they do not know that information posted to the Internet is public record, or they do not believe that adults are aware or interested in this site. Many children will post very personal thoughts and will not always portray themselves or others in a respectful manner.

What Should I Do If My Child Uses MySpace?

It is important that you ask your child to see their MySpace posting. Explain to them the dangers of MySpace. Work together to identify information displayed that might put them at risk. View the friends linked to their page and ask your child to identify each. Together delete any information, photo, or friend that you find objectionable.

Should you decide to allow your child to continue using this site, be sure they change their profile age to 14. Many children list themselves as older teens or young adults. Setting this age will restrict anyone from accessing their site unless they are designated access by your child. Although this will keep your child's identify information unavailable to strangers, it will also essentially lock you out of viewing their postings. It will also not prevent your child from viewing other people's pages. It is important that you routinely review your child's account information.

If you discover your child has a MySpace account against your will, you can use the contact information found on the site to request removal. Experts suggest that you will have better success at avoiding confrontation if you stress the inappropriateness of the MySpace material from a moral standard, rather than focusing on the age issue.