

What's up with teens and blogging websites?

You've probably read or heard stories about teens (and pre-teens) fascination with Instant Messaging and blogging websites. Sites like MySpace, Xanga, and FaceBook have become instantly popular. What goes on at these sites?



These sites give their users space on the Internet to post personal web-pages. Although age restrictions may be stated, enforcement is pretty much non-existent. Users can use the site to post profiles about themselves, pictures, music, video clips, clipart, chats, and journal writings. One user can contact or post any comment on another user's site.

Most users feel a false sense of security--- they believe that only their friends, and no adults will see their sites. Teens often post pictures of themselves and friends, and talk freely about their social and school lives. Some teens use their space to spread gossip or cyber-bully others.

Teens who try to be responsible and cautious with their postings cannot

control content that others add to their site through Instant Messaging. They also cannot control pictures or blogs that others may post about them on different sites. Once information is posted, it is gone into cyberspace--- anyone can access it.

But probably the biggest danger in this blogging phenomena is the danger from predators. Anyone can set up an account and search for users by school name or by interests. Within a few minutes of accessing a teen's blogging site, predators can learn a tremendous amount of information about that user and his/her friends. Posing as a "friend of a friend" (by using information gleaned from various blogs) contact is easy.

What can parents do?

- **Educate yourself**

Set up an account for yourself on one of these blogging websites and search by student name or school name or school group for student blogs. See what students are posting. (warning: offensive language is common)

- **Talk to your child**

Communication is the best defense. Show your child that you are familiar with these websites. Explain the dangers. Set up limits and procedures. See:

<http://www.blogsafety.com/>

- **Understand that this is not a personal privacy issue**

This is not a private journal that a child keeps at home. Once websites are posted, they are posted to a public forum. There is nothing private about them!

- **Keep educating yourself to the ever-changing world of teens & cyberspace**

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