

INTERNET SAFETY

Keeping a lid on MySpace:

One school works to curb hazards of 'online communities'

Since its founding in 2003, MySpace.com has enjoyed the bulk of success—\$200 million in revenue in 2006 alone—that many similar online communities like Xanga, Facebook and LiveJournal have seen among internet users 18 years and younger.

But creating a MySpace page or entering a chat room creates potential hazards that come from meeting someone without ever seeing his or her face.

According to NetSmartz, a non-profit organization created by the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 61 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds have a personal profile on some social networking website. The potential risks are evident: 71 percent of those adolescents have reported receiving online messages from someone they don't know, and 40 percent reported that they will usually reply and chat with that person.

In April, Cy-Fair ISD upgraded to a state-of-the-art internet filtering system. According to the Instructional Technology Department, the system filters dangerous and inappropriate sites from students. The problem lies in students bringing their online experiences from home into the classroom.



In November, several campus staff members attended a seminar at Region IV Education Service Center featuring a Florida detective Mark Middleton who presented a case on internet safety. Although students must be at least 14 years old to create an online

community account, many students pose as older so they can register. Students and their parents may not realize that students have created public profiles. Middleton stated, "Would you let 1 million strangers in your home? Because that's what you do when you expose your information online."

After attending the seminar, Mary Engle, Arnold Middle School Counselor, relayed what she had learned to Susan Higgins, Arnold principal. Higgins, Engle and assistant principal Bonnie Beachy invited parents to a presentation on Jan. 9. to bring parents into the internet safety loop. More than 150 parents attended the impromptu meeting.

While many students later groaned that their parents had deleted their MySpace accounts, just as many parents were grateful for the crash course in the ever-changing realm of online communication.

"Some parents feel inadequate because they're not savvy with the computer and their kids can run circles around them on the internet," Beachy said. "So it's hard to confront the kids about it if they're not sure what to call them on."

The Instructional Technology department cautions parents to supervise their children's time on the internet and to talk to them about the hazards of going online. Keeping the computer out of the bedroom and in a public part of the house is recommended. Parents can also install filtering systems like NetNanny to help block potentially dangerous websites.

MySpace encourages school administrators and teachers to notify the company if they find false or offensive profiles or underage users who attend their schools. MySpace can be alerted of such activity by emailing schoolcare@myspace.com from a district email address.

Although online activity that occurs outside of school can't be punished within the school, administrators like Beachy have found that talking to students and notifying parents can often solve half of the problem.

"When we can get all parties involved, maybe then we can prevent conflicts like this at school from happening," she said.



| Abbreviation | Meaning |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| 121 | one-to-one |
| AFAIK | as far as I know |
| AFK | away from keyboard |
| AKA | also known as |
| ASAP | as soon as possible |
| A/S/L? | age/sex/location |
| B4 | before |
| B4N / BFN | bye for now |
| BAK | back at the keyboard |
| BBS | be back soon |
| BEG | big evil grin |
| BF | boyfriend |
| BRB | be right back |
| BTA | but then again |
| BTW | by the way |
| BWL | bursting with laughter |
| C&G | chuckle and grin |
| CID | crying in disgrace |
| CP | chat post |
| CUL or CUL8er | see you later |
| CUZ | because |
| CYO | see you online |
| DIKU | do I know you? |
| ILU | I love you |
| IM | instant message |
| IMing | chatting online |
| IMO | in my opinion |
| IOW | in other words |
| IRL | in real life |
| JIC | just in case |
| JK | just kidding |
| JTLYK | just to let you know |
| JW | just wondering |
| K | okay |
| KIT | keep in touch |
| KOC | kiss on cheek |
| KOL | kiss on lips |
| KWIM | know what I mean? |
| L2M | listening to music |
| L8R | later |
| LMIRL | let's meet in real life |
| LOL | laughing out loud |
| POS | parent over shoulder |
| PU | that stinks |
| QSL | reply |
| QSO | conversation |
| QT | cutie |
| RL | real life |
| RSN | real soon now |
| RYO | roll your own |
| SF | surfer friendly |
| SO | significant other |
| SOMY | sick of me yet? |
| SOT | short of time |
| STW | search the web |
| SUP or WU | what's up |
| SWAK | sealed with a kiss |
| SYS | see you soon |
| TAFN | that's all for now |
| TAW | teachers are watching |
| TCOY | take care of yourself |
| THX | thanks |

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