A parents' guide to social-networking websites

GET WITH IT!

understanding and sharing the world of social-networking websites with your children

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1. Introduction: the world of social-networking websites

For many parents, learning about new media technologies can seem like playing catch-up with their children. Teenagers, especially, are quick to learn new technologies: putting their music collection on iPods, texting on mobile phones, chatting on instant messaging services. They are also quick to drop a technology they think is old: the bad news for parents who've just gotten to grips with email is that many teenagers now consider it too slow. They have moved on to new and more exciting ways of communicating.

One of these new ways is social-networking websites. Though the chances are your teenage children will never say they're on a social-networking website. Listen out, instead, for them to say they're on Bebo, or MySpace, or Facebook. Thousands of Irish teenagers have joined one or more of these websites. Thousands of Irish teenagers use them safely everyday. A parent taking a first look at a social-networking website could be hard pressed to understand why a teenager would use one everyday. It can be difficult to see the attraction of using them at all. Social-networking websites can seem a confusing world of strange sights and sounds and puzzling language. It can seem a world where parents don't fit in. That's because parents aren't meant to fit in. It's a space created by teenagers and for teenagers.

Don't be put off, though. Behind the dazzling colours, images and videos is a clear and simple structure. And like other media technologies that your teenage children mastered quickly (mobile phones, the games console), social-networking websites are easy to understand and to use – if you invest a little time and patience into learning. If they were difficult to use they wouldn't have attracted hundreds of millions of users worldwide. No matter how disorganised or messy a social-networking website looks, it can be divided neatly into three main activities:

- Identity: creating an identity or a personality online
- Communication: with friends online
- Sharing: photographs, videos, music, information on hobbies and interests

To use a social-networking website is to be part of a community. Teenagers can be sitting alone in front of their computers at home, but online they are out with their friends. They are developing their communication skills, being creative, and finding out more about the world and the things they are interested in. They are experimenting – as all teenagers do – with their identity and image. And being online helps them learn some of the digital skills that will become more – not less – important in the world as they grow up.

Teenagers are sharp at learning *how* to use new media technologies, but sometimes they do not realise the *consequences* of using them. Just as adults can be taken in by fraudsters online, teenagers can be at risk if they are not sensible in how they use a social-networking website. They can come into contact with people they shouldn't. They can see and learn things they shouldn't. They can give away personal details to strangers and have no idea how that information will be used.

There is no way to remove all of the risk from your children's activities, either online or offline. In a car you make them wear a seatbelt. On the street you stop them from talking to strangers. These steps do not eliminate risk; but they do *reduce* risk. Similarly, certain steps can reduce your children's risk when they use social-networking websites.

The first step has to be taken not by your children but by you, the parent. That step is to learn, because knowledge is the best way to look after your children's welfare online. This booklet will help you. It will explain the following:

- What is a social-networking website?
- What people do on them?
- What are the main risks?
- Steps to stay safer online

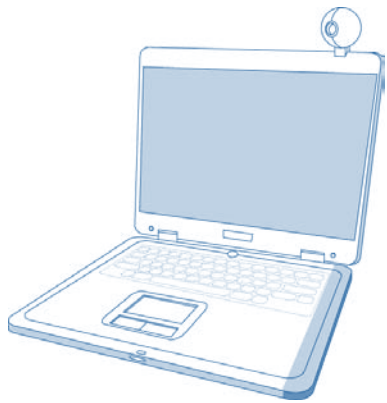
Finally, the booklet will show you how to register for and use a social-networking website. The reason isn't to boost the websites' membership. The aim is for you to learn how to use a media technology that has become an everyday part of teenagers' lives. If you don't know how to use the technology yourself, you are in a weak position to safeguard your children online. Go online and explore the websites. This booklet will give you the information you need. If you do not have the internet at home, you can consult your local library about use of their internet services. Another option is to use the computers in an internet café for a (usually) small charge.

If you are new to the internet, computers and other media technologies, you will find it helpful to read the first two booklets in the Get With IT! series. The first booklet is an introduction to new media technologies. The second booklet is on filtering technologies to protect children from seeing inappropriate content online. The booklets explain many of the terms used here, such as the internet, web-browser, email, and instant messaging. The booklets are available for free from the Internet Advisory Board, either in print by phoning freephone 1800 242595 or to download at www.iab.ie. They are also available at your local library.

This booklet speaks more often of teenagers than of children. The reason is simple. So far, the most famous and popular social-networking websites have generally restricted their membership to teenagers and adults. These websites usually tell you when registering that you must be at least a certain age to join, e.g. 13. If your child is below the minimum age to use a particular website, you should delete their account immediately.

However, a growing number of social-networking services are being offered to preteens (children of twelve years and younger). And websites that at the moment do not allow preteens to join could change their policy in the future. If your child is a preteen, and wishes to use a social-networking website, you are advised to check out the service first. Satisfy yourself that it is an appropriate online space for your child's age group, and keep close and regular checks on your child's online activities and communication.

More information on safer and unsafe behaviour on social-networking websites is available at www.watchyourspace.ie.



2. What are social-networking websites?

Web 2.0 is a term that's being used to describe new developments online. It means the second generation of the World Wide Web, where people are a lot more active and have greater control over what they can do. Most of the websites you visit allow you only to read, watch or listen to what's on them. You cannot change the websites or add content of your own. It's a bit like watching a programme on television: you cannot change what's being shown on screen. In many ways, you are watching the programme 'passively'.

Web 2.0 changes this. You don't 'passively' read and watch what's on a website. You can change what's on it. You can add your own content, and you can communicate with other people who themselves are adding their own content. This is part of an online trend called user-generated content. The audience isn't just watching; it's creating.

One application to come out of recent Web 2.0 developments is social-networking. A number of such websites have become incredibly popular among Irish teenagers and young adults. Bebo, MySpace, Facebook and Nimble are names familiar to teenagers across the country. There's a good reason why. Most teenagers will be members of one or more of these websites.

To understand what a social-networking website is and how it works you need to keep one word to the front of your mind: communication. In one way or another, almost everything you do on these websites is a form of communication with other people online. Whether you are creating an online identity for yourself (called a profile), sending and receiving messages, or sharing photographs, music, and videos, you are communicating.

As you read earlier, no matter how confusing a social-networking website looks at first glance, it can be divided neatly into three main activities: identity, communication, and sharing.

- Identity. Teenagers spend a lot of time creating an identity for themselves online. This takes place on a special webpage called a 'profile'. Your profile is your public face. It is what other people see when they visit you online. The profile webpage carries most of the options you need to manage your account: creating lists of 'friends' (people you communicate with), sending and receiving messages, publishing (uploading) photographs and videos, and setting the privacy level of your profile. You can decorate the profile with patterns and colours (usually called 'skins'), photographs, graphics, sounds and videos to match your personality and interests. Teenagers will spend most time on their profile.

- Communication. There are many ways to communicate as this is the key reason for using a social-networking website. You can mail (like email), send and receive voice, video and instant messages, leave comments on someone's profile, write a blog or record a videoblog. (A blog is short for web-log. It is like a diary, but with one big difference; instead of being secret, a blog is supposed to be read by other people.) You can also take part in discussion groups and special interest groups. These sometimes involve conversations in a chatroom.
- Share. You can publish information about yourself and your hobbies and interests. Other people can read it and decide whether they'd like to add you as an online 'friend'. You can record your own music or videos and publish them online. You can send 'friends' a message letting them know you've found an interesting video or new piece of music. You can share photographs of yourself, or swap funny pictures.

The most popular social-networking websites among Irish teenagers are Bebo (www.bebo.com), MySpace (www.myspace.com), Facebook (www.facebook.com), and Nimble (www.nimble.ie). But there are many other websites, including Xanga, Friendster, and Faceparty. If the service your teenage children use isn't named here, don't worry.

The safety advice and principles described in this booklet apply to all social-networking websites.

Your profile is your public face online. You can choose to keep your profile 'public'. That means anyone online can look at it, see your personal information, and send you messages. Or you can set your profile to 'private'. That means only 'friends' can see your profile and send you messages. Parents are advised that teenagers under eighteen years old should always set their profile to 'private'.

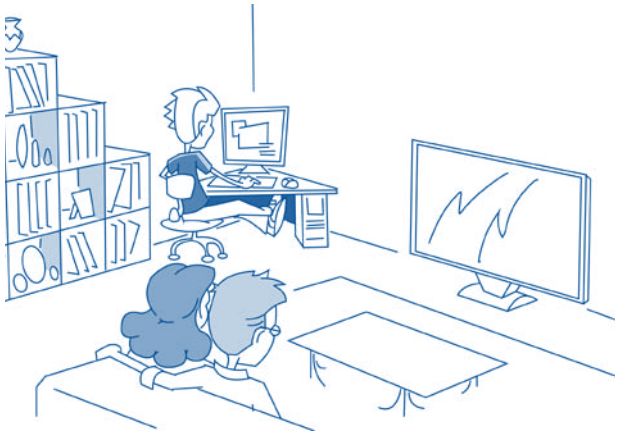
Why do I need to know about social-networking websites?

The internet is a public place. It doesn't matter if a teenager is using a computer in the sitting-room, a bedroom, or spare room. When they are online they have, virtually, left the boundaries of the home. They are out in public. And a social-networking website is one of the internet's most crowded public places.

Just as there is safe and unsafe public behaviour in the real world, there is safe and unsafe behaviour online. A parent wouldn't be happy if their fourteen year old child stopped a stranger on a busy street and told them their name, address, mobile phone number, and handed over photographs of themselves. Yet, without realising so, many teenagers do this online all the time – by being careless when they use their social-networking website.

In any public space, on the street or on a social-networking website, good behaviour helps keep you safe; careless behaviour can put you at risk. There are measures you can take to help keep your teenage children safer online. Especially for younger teenagers (13-15 years), you should consider the following: set rules for when and how long they can use their social-networking website, create a 'buddy-list' of trusted friends they can communicate with online, keep the computer in a busy room in the house (the sitting-room is a good place), and learn how to use the technology yourself.

As teenagers grow older, they will struggle for greater independence and privacy from their parents. Tech-savvy teenagers can usually find ways around the restrictions that parents place on their online freedom. It therefore becomes more important that they are able to make responsible decisions on their own. Teach them the values of safer internet use, values that will help them make informed decisions about their online behaviour even when you are not around.



In this booklet, when you read the word friend it means just that: a friend. When you see 'friend' it can mean something different. Social-networking websites describe *any* contact online as a 'friend'. The contact can indeed be a real world friend. It can also be a stranger or someone a teenager doesn't know very well.

3. What are the risks of teenagers using social-networking websites, and what are the best ways to stay safer online?

The main risks faced by Irish teenagers on social-networking websites include the following:

- Bullying, intimidation and harassment
- Damaging their reputation and good name by their behaviour online
- Being approached by online predators, who may try to coax them into a real life meeting
- Giving out personal information online and not knowing who can see it
- Identity theft
- Publishing unsuitable photographs or videos of themselves online, e.g. with webcams. Once the images are online they can be copied and circulated by other users
- Seeing inappropriate content (text, photographs, videos), including pornography, hate, racist and self-harm material
- Being influenced by the profiles of users who glamorise drinking, drugs, fast driving, or anti-social behaviour
- Spending too much time online and neglecting physical exercise or homework
- Breaking the law by posting copyrighted material online

If you or your children ever come across content on the internet that you suspect to be illegal please report it using the confidential www.hotline.ie service. Full instructions on what information you need to provide are given on the Hotline website.

Sensible behaviour online can help protect teenagers when they are using social-networking websites. Nothing can eliminate all risk, in

any area of life. But the better a teenager behaves online, the less they are at risk.

Read the next few pages with two questions in your mind. What is the risk being explained? What is the advice for teenagers to stay safer online?

Your profile is your public face. When people visit you online, this is what they see – the first impression of the kind of person you are. Through your profile you create your online identity, manage your communication, share some of your favourite music and videos, and create slideshows of your photographs. If you want to see what your teenage children are doing on a social-networking website, this is your starting point.

Teenagers see social-networking websites as a space to communicate with their friends. It isn't a space intended for parents. Don't be surprised if your teenage children are reluctant to show you their profile. Nevertheless, start by asking permission to see their profile. A good approach is to treat online safety as a 'co-operative' relationship between you and your teenage children. Sometimes a teenager won't tell a parent about a bad experience online, because they fear being blamed or losing their internet access. If teenagers feel they can talk openly about their online habits and experiences, without being judged, it will lead to more honesty in the long run.

But in a small number of cases parents should **be aware of shadow profiles.** Some teenagers have more than one profile. One is polite and respectable and can be shown to parents to prove the teenager is behaving online. The other is their real profile: it will be a more accurate reflection of your teenager's behaviour online and is probably a space they don't want you to see (well, not if they've gone to the trouble of creating a shadow profile). One way to tell if you're being shown a shadow profile is to keep an eye on the comments section. If a teenager spends hours every week on their profile, yet it shows few signs of recent communication (only a few comments, posted weeks ago), it may be a shadow profile.

Once you know that your teenager has a profile at all, you should give them a clear and simple but very important piece of advice: **always keep profiles private.** Anyone online can look at a teenager's information and try to contact them if their profile is public. If their profile is private, only 'friends' can see their information and communicate with them. Especially for younger teenagers (13-15 years), setting a profile to private is the *minimum* level of security they should set for their profile. But teenagers shouldn't see this as allowing them to safely say anything online. No profile is totally secure. There are ways to break (hack) into someone else's account and misuse their information. Sometimes an online 'friend' can take personal information from a profile and send it to someone who shouldn't have it, or post it on another website.

So **guard personal information online.** Home address, phone number, email address, school. Teenagers give away this information online all the time. They shouldn't. Information online is easily copied, downloaded, stored, printed, or even published on another website. They can never be 100% sure who has access to the information or how it will be used.

Teenagers should run the following question through their mind before they publish anything online: **does the world really need to know this piece of personal information about me?** Take the teenage habit of revealing their mobile phone number somewhere on their profile. There is no reason to have this information online. Family will already have their mobile phone number. They don't need to go online to find it. Friends can ask for their mobile phone number face-to-face. They don't need to find it online either. Who, outside of family and friends, needs to have a teenager's mobile phone number? The same applies to a teenager's home address or many other pieces of personal information. The people who *should* have this information (family and friends) already have it. Online it can be lying around for people who *shouldn't* have it.

The same principle should apply when **registering** to create an account on a social-networking website. This isn't an excuse for teenagers to give false information. But they should still ask themselves, is it necessary to reveal this piece of information about myself? A teenager can safely say they live in Ireland. They can safely say they live in Dublin. But if the registration form asks for more detailed information (information that could identify and locate the teenager in the real world), they should leave the space blank. Not all spaces on a registration form have to be filled in. Teenagers should fill in only the information they have to. Don't use your family name (only your first name), especially if you have an uncommon family name or you are the only family with that name in your town.

For the same reason, **teenagers don't have to use their real name as their username** (which will appear on their profile). They can use a nickname or a made-up name. Real world friends will still be able to find them online: they can be told the nickname when they meet face-to-face or over the telephone. If real world friends and family are aware of a teenager's identity online, why does anyone else have to be? But teenagers should consider carefully the username they choose. Sexylady or BeerBoy doesn't give out a great impression.

It's important, however, that teenagers **always give their correct age when registering.** Some – though not all – social-networking websites automatically increase the privacy and safety levels of users under the age of eighteen.

To appeal to teenagers, who may be short on time and patience, social-networking websites have made their registration process easy and quick. (But be careful setting up a quick profile, as the default settings may not be set to 'private' when you first choose to make your profile live.) New users have to give only basic information to set up an account. It is important to remember, however, that as a teenager builds up their profile they can add extra information on themselves and their interests and hobbies. If they are not careful, they could publicly give away more detailed information on their

home address, school, or mobile phone number. If a teenager has put personal information online and regrets doing so, **deleting the profile won't always solve their problem.** Not if someone has already copied or downloaded the information.

This doesn't mean teenagers can't say anything about themselves online. They can, but they need to be sensible. **Any personal information they reveal should be general.** If they say they like playing Gaelic football, they don't have to add the name of their local GAA club. It could identify them in the real world. Teenagers should never assume their personal information is private even if their profile is.

Which also means they **shouldn't assume online conversations are private even if their profile is.** They cannot be certain that their conversations are taking place within the safety of a trusted group of friends. In the real world, friends fall out all the time. An angry friend can go online, copy conversations and information from a teenager's profile, and send them to people who were never meant to see them. If someone hacks into the profile of one teenager they can gain access to the profiles of all their 'friends' as well. Anything a teenager says online, even on a private profile, can become public knowledge. Teenagers shouldn't say anything that is deeply personal or will embarrass them later on. A good test is this: if a teenager wouldn't be prepared to say it out loud in a crowded room, they shouldn't say it online at all.

The issue is control. Social-networking websites give teenagers control over the content they want to publish online. But they lose

control the moment that information *is* online. Photographs are a concern here. All teenagers should be aware that they **lose control of their photographs once they are online.** Sharing photographs and creating an identity around a profile picture are popular activities on social-networking websites. But a photograph online is there forever. A teenager can't get it back. Even on profiles set to private, teenagers can never be sure who exactly is viewing or downloading the photographs. They can even be changed using special software (e.g. Photoshop) and published on other websites. *The teenager can delete the photograph from their own profile, but they can never delete it from the internet.*

With some teenagers' photographs the greatest risk is embarrassment in later life. A sixteen year old might publish a silly, rude or compromising photograph for their profile picture or to give their 'friends' a laugh. It won't be as funny if that photograph surfaces when they are twenty-one and looking for a job (and many employers do check the profiles of potential employees). A profile picture doesn't have to be a photograph: it can be a cartoon or graphic instead, which is a safer option that won't come back to haunt anyone in later life.

There are more sinister risks as well. Photographs that seem innocent can give away identifying information about a teenager, such as their name. The background in the photograph could identify their school or local sports club. Photographs with a 'tag' can put a name to a face online. Using the 'tag' feature means a small box will appear on screen to name each person in a photograph.

Inappropriate photographs of teenagers are a serious issue, also. Sometimes the teenager creates the risk. A teenager concerned with their appearance might publish a 'sexualised' image of themselves online, trying to look attractive for their boyfriend or girlfriend or win praise from their 'friends'. A sexualised image does not have to contain nudity. It can mean that the teenager poses in a manner that has sexual overtones. Some websites even allow users to rate a photograph as 'hot or not', with each photograph carrying an

average rating. This can raise strong legal issues if the teenager is under seventeen years old. Some adults go online to search for inappropriate photographs of young people.

A teenager should tell their parents or a trusted adult immediately if someone online asks them for a photograph, regardless of whether the image is innocent or not.

Like personal information, **if there isn't a worthwhile reason for a photograph being online, it shouldn't be there.**

The same goes for a videoblog, which will contain images of the teenager and can reveal personal information. Once the videoblog is online they have lost control over it.

For teenagers to be serious about their safety online they need to realise one fact: **'friends' aren't always friends.** 'Friend' is the catch-all term used to describe a contact on a social-network. It describes *any* contact, whether the teenager knows them in the real world or not. Most of the time, online 'friends' will be a teenager's real world friends. Most teenagers use social-networks because they want to keep in constant contact with their real world friends. But these friends have friends, who in turn have more friends. If a teenager starts accepting 'friends of friends' as contacts, suddenly a lot of people will have access to their profile. Some of these 'friends of friends' won't be people that your teenager would normally hang around with in the real world. Sometimes teenagers aren't fussy about who they'll accept as 'friends' because online popularity can be measured by the number of 'friends' added to a profile. Every time a teenager accepts a new 'friend' it widens the network of people that has access to their profile. And this increases the risk of contact from a stranger and of personal information falling into the wrong hands. **Teenagers should review their list of online 'friends' regularly, so they are sharing their information only with people they trust.**

And they should treat a stranger online with the same caution they would treat a stranger on the street. Adults can lie about their age, their interests, and who they really are in an effort to win the trust of a teenager. Conversations with strangers online can begin innocently, but quickly become unsettling and even dangerous, e.g. asking teenagers for webcam images of themselves or trying to arrange a real life meeting. **Teenagers should ignore messages from strangers online and delete spam emails without reading them.** And, of course, teenagers themselves shouldn't try to contact strangers online. **A list of the people your teenager has accepted as 'friends' can be checked on their profile.**

Strangers aren't the only ones who can upset a teenager through contact online. **Bullies don't have to be in the schoolyard any more.** Bullying is a serious problem for many teenagers. It has found a new and often intense expression online and through mobile phones. This form of bullying (sometimes called cyber-bullying) can be subtle and difficult for parents to detect, because the marks are psychological rather than physical. Exclusion is a strong form of bullying: being left out of a group of friends online can be as distressing for a teenager as being left out of a group of friends at school. Bullying on social-networking websites can take more obvious forms, too: sending threatening and abusive messages (flaming), harassment, or spreading false and hurtful rumours about someone. An online bully can publish nasty messages directly onto someone's profile. They can even impersonate their victim. They can set up a fake profile pretending to be that person. Or they can hack into the person's real profile and change their personal information. **That is why teenagers should keep the password of their social-networking account secret, and turn on the option to review comments before they are published on their profile.** Passwords should be difficult for bullies to guess. In many cases a bully can easily find out a person's date of birth, their favourite football team,

or the name of the family pet. If any of them are used as a password the bully can access the person's account. The hardest passwords to guess are mixtures of letters and numbers (e.g. ha6ym74).

Children are sometimes reluctant to tell their parents they've been bullied online because they fear losing their internet access. If your teenager is upset after using the computer, or suddenly stops using their social-networking website altogether, they may have experienced bullying online. They can ignore the bullying, or block the bully from sending them messages. This isn't a solution to long-term and sustained bullying, however. **Speak to your child if you suspect they are being bullied online or offline.**

Remember, also, that parents need to act responsibly if they find out that their child is using the internet to bully someone else. **A teenager can damage their reputation and good name by their behaviour online.**

Bullies, and anyone else who uses the internet with bad intentions, should be warned **that behaviour online isn't anonymous.** Every personal computer has an Internet Protocol (IP) address. It's like an identity tag for the computer and it leaves a record of where a person has been online. An online bully can try to hide behind a false name and fake profile, but they may be traceable through their IP address. Save any bullying messages that your child has received as evidence and contact your Internet Service Provider (ISP). This is the company that supplies you with internet access. Most ISPs in Ireland have rules (Acceptable Usage Policies) for how people behave on their networks and services. These rules ban customers from using their network to bully or harass another person, be it a child or an adult.

People aren't always who they seem online. **Content online can be misleading,** too. Videos are important parts of social-networking websites. The websites warn that people who upload videos containing nudity, violence or offensive material will have their accounts deleted. Employees called moderators use special

software to find and delete such videos. They will investigate 'flags' or warnings from users who have found inappropriate content. But even so, such content does find its way online and can stay there for a while before being found and deleted.

People who publish inappropriate videos often use sophisticated tactics, which they change as new safeguards are introduced. For example, some people upload videos that contain no inappropriate content themselves but give directions to find it elsewhere on the web. Also, some videos might not match their descriptions. There have been cases of popular children's cartoons being uploaded but with the original voices replaced with offensive language.

Other videos are simply too mature for a young audience. Encourage teenagers to be careful about the types of videos they search for. They should switch off any videos that contain graphic material (violence, pornography, hate, self-harm, eating disorders), and talk to a parent or trusted adult immediately.

With a sensible approach, teenagers can spend many hours enjoying the fun and free activities on social-networking websites. With so much to do, though, it can be easy to fall into the habit of **neglecting real life for virtual life.** Some teenagers, who spend large amounts of time online, have shown signs similar to addiction: social-withdrawal, being irritable away from the computer but happy while on it, and lying to family and friends about their online habits. They have also developed problems in other areas of life, through neglecting homework and exercise, and not bothering to meet friends face-to-face. **Teenagers should have a healthy balance between using the internet and their other daily activities.**

Finally, **while you're never too old to use a social-networking website, you can be too young.** Children are becoming interested in media technologies at younger ages (many children own their first mobile phone at ten years or younger). Social-networking websites generally do not accept members younger than thirteen years. But

it can be relatively easy to by-pass the age verification systems when registering. If your child is below the minimum age to use a particular social-networking website, you should delete their account immediately.

A survey of 400 Irish teenagers at the 2007 Young Scientist Exhibition found that the majority of them had a casual attitude to the dangers online, e.g. they made little effort to protect personal information and regularly accepted strangers as online 'friends':

- Majority of teenagers made no effort to hide their personal information online
- Majority of teenagers had accepted strangers as 'friends' online
- Half of the teenagers had witnessed cyber-bullying
- One in ten had witnessed cyber-bullying many times
- 70 per cent left their profiles public, meaning anyone could access their information or copy their images
- Only 18 per cent limited their information to 'friends'
- 13 per cent did not know how to restrict access to their information
- 12 per cent posted their mobile phone number online
- 25 per cent had accepted 'loads' of strangers as 'friends' online
- One-third said it was very easy to access adult material online, 40 per cent said it was easy, and one-quarter said it was hard
- Four out of ten accessed their favourite website each day; two-thirds did so at least three times a week

Source: National Centre for Technology in Education; Irish Times, 7 February 2007. 'Teenagers' profiles accessible on social websites'. See, also, www.webwise.ie.

4. How do social-networking websites work as businesses?

Social-networking websites are big business. MySpace was bought in 2005 for $580 million. Software developer Microsoft spent $240 million in 2007 to buy a small share-holding in Facebook, whose overall value is estimated to be billions of dollars. Google, which runs a famous online search-engine, bought the video-sharing website YouTube in 2006 in a deal worth more than $1 billion.

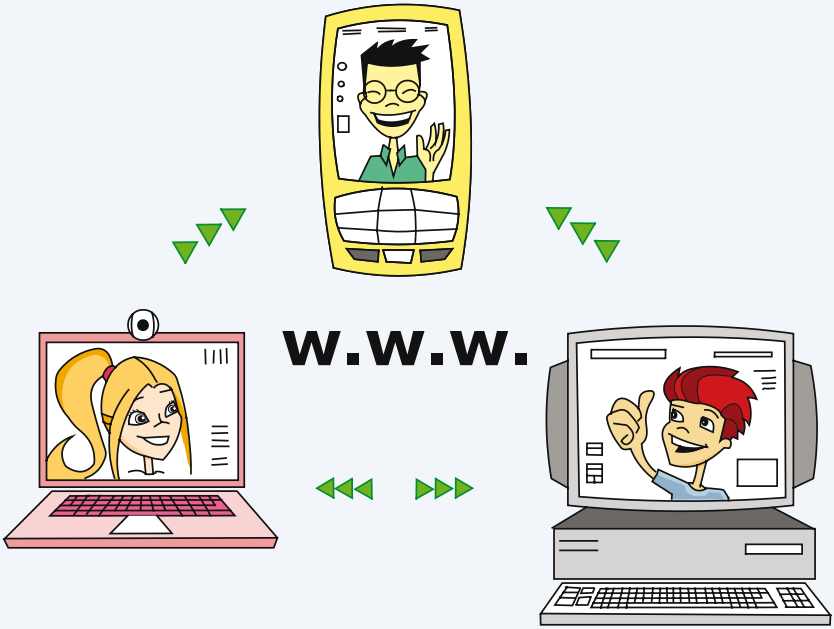
Corporations have been eager to invest in social-networking websites because they have built up an asset that is very valuable: namely, a loyal audience of young people worldwide. Young people are spending more time online and less time on traditional media such as television. Media corporations need to stay in touch with this audience to watch their films, television programmes, and listen to their music. Advertisers need to keep in touch with this audience to promote their products. If the audience is moving online, media corporations and advertisers have to follow them. That's what makes social-networking websites so valuable, especially as young people spend a lot of time on their profiles. Instead of jumping from website to website (like channel-hopping on television), they stay in one place. This is ideal for media corporations and advertisers: they know exactly where to direct their content and their advertisements.

They also know what kinds of content and advertisements to target at individual teenagers, because they can gather information on teenagers' hobbies and interests from their online behaviour and profiles. From an advertisers' point of view, this is more efficient than running a television advertisement and hoping that some of the people watching will be interested in the product. There is a strong consumer culture on social-networking websites. It is possible to become 'friends' with a brand, meaning a teenager can link to a profile set up to promote a product. This is called being a 'fansumer'.

Popular social-networking websites are free to use. Staying free pays off in the long run, because it helps the websites maintain a large audience. In any media industry, the larger your audience, the more you can charge for advertising. A social-networking website with millions of users can make more money from advertising than a website with thousands of users. Most teenagers do not have a lot of money, so social-networking websites are attractive as a cheap way of communicating. But they can communicate with their friends only if they join up as well. And so on, with other friends encouraging their friends to join too. A social-network becomes more valuable – both to the corporation that owns it and the people who use it – as more people join it. In this way social-networking websites have built up huge audiences.

Advertisements are usually presented as 'promoted' videos or profiles, sponsored links (a paid-for link to another website), or banner advertisements (like pictures or graphics on screen).

Some social-networking websites offer services that link a profile to a user's mobile phone, e.g. an SMS text message alert is sent to the user when a 'friend' leaves a comment on their profile, or they can access their profile through the internet application on their mobile phone. These services incur charges to a teenager's mobile phone account.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sign up

search

main | friends | photos

Categories

- My Photos
- Send a message
- My friends
- My music
- My videos
- Change blog
- Calendar
- Add as a friend
- Block user

Hello!

This is where Sarah posts a short message
visitors and friends to her profile. The mes
be about anything she likes, but usually
some general information about herself,
and maybe her motto in life!

Just for Laughs!

This is Sarah's blog. A blog is like a diary but with
difference: other people are supposed to read i
Sarah doesn't write anything too personal in her
she knows that anyone who has access to her p
Sarah is careful in how she uses her profile.

She has set it to private, and has accepted only
friends and family as `friends'. But she knows tha
other people can gain access to private profiles
her personal information when she's online. Sara
blog often, and she enjoys reading the commen
`friends' have made about it.

Sign in username

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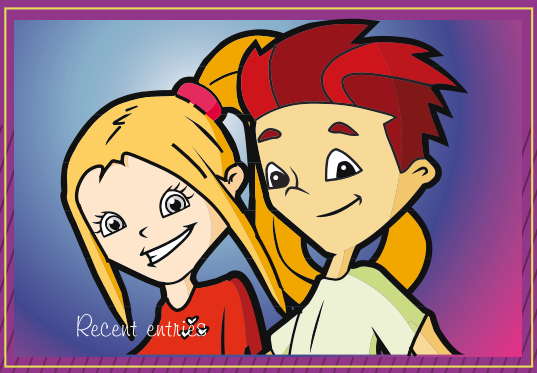
Forever Friends

videos | music | games

Todays Best Mates are....



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Check it Out!

All the latest music and film releases

Top tips for safer use of social-networking websites:

- Set profiles to private
- Guard personal information online: even private profiles are not 100% secure
- Think before you publish: information and photographs online are there forever
- ‘Friends’ aren’t always friends: be cautious when communicating online with people you don’t know and trust in the real-world
- You aren’t anonymous online: behaviour online can damage your real-life reputation
- Don’t respond to communication that is bullying or makes you feel uncomfortable: tell a parent or a trusted adult what has happened

On da net its gud 2 tlk

The way teenagers spell on social-networking websites has probably featured in many an English teacher's worst nightmare. 'Was' becomes 'wuz', 'the' becomes 'da', and 'night' becomes 'nite'. Expect to see '4U' instead of 'for you'. And if you don't already know what 'OMG' means, you could have a hard time guessing. Many of these abbreviations were carried over from the mobile phone, where people were shortening words and sentences to keep text messages as brief as possible. The language has become a key feature of the culture on social-networking websites. Some reasons are practical. It saves time. 'B4N' is quicker to type than 'Bye for now'. Other reasons are less obvious but more important: the language marks an identity that sets teenagers apart from parents and adults online. It's a language common to peer-groups of teenagers: people of similar age, interests and outlook on life. It sets a boundary between those who belong and those who don't.

All languages change over time. It isn't necessarily a bad thing that teenagers write this way in text messages or on their profile. Just save an English teacher the nightmare of seeing the language turn up in a homework essay.

OMG – Oh My God
F2T – Free To Talk
4 – For
4U – For You
2L8 – Too Late
B4 – Before
WOT – What
G – Grin
H – Hug
K – Kiss
H8 – Hate
CUZ – Because
SUM – Some
U – You
R – Are
NE – Any
BRB – Be Right Back
BFF – Best Friend Forever
LOL – Laughing Out Loud
LV – Love

For safety reasons it's a good idea to be aware of the abbreviations below:

POS – Parents Over My Shoulder
PAW (or PRW) – Parents Are Watching
PIR – Parents In Room
WTGP – Want To Go Private?
ASL – Age, Sex, Location
F2F – Face To Face
GNOC – Get Naked On Cam (webcam)
NIFOC – Naked In Front Of Computer
PRON – Porn
TDTM – Talk Dirty To Me
LMIRL – Let's Meet In Real Life
IPN – I'm Posting Naked

5. Registering for and using social-networking websites

The best way to safeguard your children when they are using any media technology is to know how to use that technology yourself. The technologies that have become part of everyday life – mobile phones, the personal computer, the internet – are not difficult to use. You will need time and patience. Maybe you will need some advice. If you do, there are people in your household who are likely to know a lot about new media technologies: your children.

Learning by doing is a good way to become familiar with a new technology. Here you will learn how to register for a social-networking website and begin using its features. Reading this booklet on its own will give you a good understanding of how the websites work. Even better would be to sit down in front of a computer with internet access and try each feature as it is explained in the booklet. If you do not have the internet at home, you can consult your local library about use of their internet services. Another option is to use the computers in an internet café for a (usually) small charge.

You will learn how to register for and use two social-networking websites: Bebo and MySpace. Then you will learn about a video-sharing website called YouTube. As you explore Bebo and MySpace you will see how important videos are to social-networking. Learning how to upload, search, view and report videos on YouTube will help you deal with the video activities on social-networking websites.

The Internet Advisory Board does not endorse or support any of the websites, nor does it accept responsibility for their contents. They are featured here because they are popular with Irish teenagers. Learning how to use Bebo and MySpace will give you a good enough understanding to approach any other social-networking websites that your children use. Facebook and Nimble, for instance, are two social-networking websites that are attracting more Irish users everyday.

These websites change often, adding new features, dropping others, re-designing the way they look. By the time you go online, the website may not be exactly as it is described in this booklet. But you will still have enough information to find your way around.

As you go through this section, and experiment with different features on the websites, bear in mind the safety guidelines you read earlier in the booklet.

For teenagers under eighteen years old there are three golden rules for using a social-networking website:

- Think carefully before giving away personal information, photographs or video images
- Do not communicate online with people you do not know and trust in real life
- At all times keep profiles set to private

Bebo

Bebo is the most popular social-networking website among Irish teenagers. Users, called Beboers, range from school-children (of at least thirteen years) to college students to young adults. Bebo is free to use, although it does target advertisements, sponsored links and sponsored profiles at users. Some additional services can cost money, such as linking a profile to a user's mobile phone.

Bebo has a section with advice for parents. It is organised into three main areas:

- Disclosure of information online
- Bullying and harassment
- Being targeted by predators

Parents should keep a regular check on this section. As the website changes over time, so too will the safety advice.

You have to be at least thirteen years old to join Bebo. If you have a child younger than this using the service delete their account immediately.

Registering for Bebo

Open your web-browser and go to www.bebo.com. Click on the 'signing up' link near the top of the webpage. This brings you to a registration form. Here you will be asked to fill in information such as your name (which will be used as your username), age, gender, and country. Some of the information given here will be used to create the user's profile, and can be seen by other users.

Further down the registration form you will be asked to supply an email address and a password. Your username and password will be needed whenever you log into your account. Keep both of them secret.

The registration webpage carries clickable links to Bebo's terms of service, privacy policy, and safety guidelines. You should read these before signing up to the service.

When you have filled in the form, click 'save and continue'. Now the email address you gave becomes important. Bebo sends an email to the address. Inside the email is a web-link. You must click on it to switch on (or activate) your Bebo account.

Bebo's main feature is communication among 'friends'. The final step in registration brings you to a webpage called 'find friends'. The email address you gave is important once again. You can use your email address book (a list of your email contacts) to find people you know who have already registered with Bebo. Or you can email your contacts and invite them to join you as 'friends' online. You can skip this stage if you wish, and invite 'friends' to join you later on.

You are now fully registered as a Bebo user. You can start building your profile and communicating with 'friends'.

Building your Bebo profile and communicating with 'friends'

Your Bebo account is divided into five main spaces: Home, Profile, Friends, Mail, and Explore. You will see them as clickable links spread across the top of the webpage. You can do different things in each space. The four most important are Home, Profile, Friends, and Mail. Home arranges the overall management of your account. Profile is your public face online. Friends lets you review and change your list of 'friends'. Mail allows you to communicate with 'friends'.

Home

Home is where you manage your account. Here you can change your account details (name, address), your username and password, and search for 'friends'. Home is divided into three sub-sections, which you will see as clickable links across the top of the webpage: Changes, Search, and My Account.

Changes, as it sounds, allows you to keep track of recent changes you've made to your profile, e.g. new photographs or videos you've uploaded, or new 'friends' you've added.

In Search you can look for 'friends' or music, or seek out information on the web.

My Account allows you to change account details such as your username, email address, password, the types of emails you receive through Bebo, and your general preferences. You can also 'review profile comments and white boards'. Comments and white boards are spaces where 'friends' can make comments on any subject and publish them on your profile. If you click the option not to review comments, 'friends' can publish their comments straight away, without you seeing them first. If you click the option to review them, you get to read the comments first and then decide if you want them published on your profile.

Another option in My Account is to choose your 'ad preferences'. Bebo users are automatically signed up to view all types of advertisements. Here you can choose not to see certain types of advertisements. You can also 'cancel your membership' in My Account. This will remove your profile from Bebo.

Profile

Your profile is your public face online. Bebo gives you many different options on how to decorate ('pimp') your profile. If you look carefully around the profile webpage you will see a clickable link for all of the features mentioned below.

The first step is to choose your profile picture. This is the centre-piece of your profile. It also acts as an identity tag when you visit another person's profile and leave a comment (a small version of your profile picture appears beside the comment). You can load profile pictures from your computer's hard-drive. You can use a photograph of yourself as your profile picture. Using a funny cartoon or graphic is another possibility, and it can be a safer option than a teenager using a photograph of themselves.

The next step in pimping your profile is to choose a background. This defines how your profile looks: bright, dark, funny, or serious. The background is called a 'skin'. It comes in different colours and with different pictures and graphics. You can choose a ready-made skin from one of the many available on Bebo. You can also create your own skin, but you will need to download special software onto your computer to do so. The option to create your own background is labelled 'roll your own' skin.

Alongside your profile picture you will see an option to 'edit profile'. This allows you to add more information about yourself than you did when registering. You can add information about your name, age, hometown, country, full address, telephone number, and email address. You can also add details on your favourite hobbies, sports, films, music, and other interests.

Another option is to choose a username for the instant messaging and VoIP services on your profile. VoIP is Voice over Internet Protocol and it allows people to make voice calls online.

An important feature in the 'edit profile' section is 'accessible profile'. You can allow anyone using Bebo to see your profile, or you can keep it private so only invited 'friends' can see it.

Friends

Friends lets you view a list of your contacts and choose your 'top' or favourite 'friends'. In this section, Add Friends allows you to search Bebo for people you might already know, based on the contacts in your email address book. Address Book allows you to search for new 'friends'. If you find someone you know, or someone who seems interesting, you can click on a link in their profile called 'add me as a friend'. They can then accept or decline you as a 'friend'. If you are accepted as a 'friend', you can communicate with that person even if their profile is set to private.

Mail

Communication is the key activity on Bebo. Here, you can send messages (like emails) to 'friends', either individually or to several 'friends' through a list. The 'inbox' stores messages. The 'compose' section allows you to write and send a message. You also have the option of adding photographs, videos or music.

Explore

Many teenagers use social-networking websites to share music, videos and writing. Explore has sections for Music, Video and Authors so they can publish the kinds of material they like. Often they are publishing work they have created themselves. Many bands post their music online and try to build a fan-base through social-networking websites. On a band's profile you will see a link to 'become a fan'. In the Video space you will have the option to upload a video from your computer's hard-drive, a mobile phone, or a webcam. You will learn more about uploading and sharing videos in the section on YouTube.

MySpace

MySpace began as a website for bands to share music. This remains an important part of it today, but its audience reaches far wider than musicians. Teenagers and young adults from nearly every country use the website for social-networking. They communicate with friends and new people, share music, watch videos in the MySpace TV section, and even publish videos of their own.

MySpace is free to use, but users will be targeted with advertisements, sponsored links and featured profiles.

You have to be at least fourteen years old to join MySpace. If you have a child younger than fourteen using the service delete their account immediately.

Registering for MySpace

Open your web-browser and go to www.myspace.com. On the right-hand side of the webpage you will see a box for 'member login'. Click on the option to 'sign up'.

This brings you to a registration form. You type in your first name (which will be your username) and surname, and you choose a password. An email address will be needed to activate your account. Next, MySpace will ask for your location, gender, and date of birth. You have the option of keeping your age private, so it will not show up on your profile.

You must agree to MySpace's terms of service and privacy policy before signing up to the service. Read both of these carefully.

The next step in registering starts to build your profile. MySpace will ask you to upload photographs from your computer's hard-drive, one of which you can use as your profile picture. Click 'browse' to look through your computer's hard-drive for photographs. Click 'upload' when you have selected the photographs you want to publish online.

You then have the option to send emails to friends and family to join you as a contact on MySpace. They will automatically be linked to your profile when they register and you can begin communicating with them.

By this time, you will have received an email at the address you gave earlier in registration. Clicking on the link inside the email activates your account.

Building your MySpace profile and communicating with 'friends'

Home/Profile

If you uploaded a photograph when registering it will appear as your profile picture (although you can change the photograph for a cartoon or graphic, if you wish). Next to it you will see a number of options that are important for managing your account, profile, and communication. The options are Edit Profile, Account Settings, Upload/Change Photos, Add/Change Videos, Manage Calendar, Manage Blog, and Manage Address Book.

Edit Profile allows you to add extra information about yourself, including people you'd like to meet, your general interests, favourite music, films, television programmes, books, and heroes. You can also give a reason for why you are on MySpace by choosing one or more of the following: Dating, Relationships, Friends, and Networking. The choice is important, especially if your profile isn't set to private. You can search through MySpace for people who are looking for Relationships or Dating. People who registered their age as under eighteen years are not included in searches (although this could change in the future).

Account Settings lets you set the privacy level of your account, or cancel (delete) your profile. The Account Settings section is divided into three main parts: Account, Password, and Privacy. Account lets you change your contact email address. You can delete your account here, too. Password allows you to change your password.

Privacy is one of the most important parts of a MySpace account. You can select or de-select (turn on or turn off) the privacy level by ticking the small boxes that appear beside each option:

- Show people when I am online
- Show my birthday to my 'friends'
- Allow the profile to be viewable by Everyone, Everyone 18 and over, or My 'friends' only

- Allow my photos to be shared/emailed
- Block users by age (allow users under 18 to contact me)
- Block users by clicking 'block user' on their profile (when you visit another person's profile, you see an option to 'block they cannot send you messages or leave comments on your profile)

When you have selected the privacy settings you want, click 'save all changes'.

The Spam section helps you lower the number of unsolicited messages you receive through MySpace. For example, you can block non-friends from sending you messages. You can also block unsolicited messages (messages you didn't ask to receive) from special interest groups, bands, event organisers, or invitations to an instant messaging conversation. Some spam messages can lead to inappropriate content.

The Miscellaneous section gives you the option to read other people's comments before they appear on your profile.

Clicking on Photos brings you to the My Albums section. Here you can Upload Photos, Create An Album, Create Slideshow, and View All My Photos. Click 'browse' to search for photographs on your computer's hard-drive. When you have selected the photographs you want to publish online, click 'upload'. You can 'tag' or identify the people in each photograph.

The Create Album option allows you to organise your uploaded photographs into groups, e.g. your holiday photographs. Importantly, you can set the privacy level of the album: whether it is viewable by 'friends' only or by everyone.

Add/Change Videos allows you to add videos to your profile. Clicking 'upload video' will bring you to a webpage where you can give your video a title and a brief description. You can also set the privacy

level of the video. This is under the heading Visibility. You have two options. The first is Public: anyone can view it. The second is Private: only 'friends' can view it. You 'browse' for the video file on your computer's hard-drive. Once you have selected it, you click 'upload' to publish the video online.

Other options on your profile

As you scroll down your profile you will see a number of panels that allow you to do different things. One of these is to set your Status and Mood. This feature lets your friends, or anyone visiting your profile, know your current situation, e.g. Status: at home; Mood: relaxed.

The panel for My Mail offers a quick way to manage your communication. You can look at messages saved in your inbox, messages you've recently sent, review 'friend' requests (people who've asked to be added to your profile as a 'friend'), and post bulletins. A bulletin can be a piece of news about recent events in your life, e.g. birthday today.

You will also see a panel for Cool New People. It displays the profile pictures of other people on MySpace. Clicking on their picture allows you to see their profile (as long as it hasn't been set to private). If they seem interesting, you can make contact with them by clicking 'send message' on their profile.

Towards the bottom of your profile, you will see a panel that displays a list of your current 'friends'. You have an option to Edit Friends, which allows you to remove a 'friend' from the list.

Other areas on MySpace

So far you have learned about the Home/Profile space. There is more to MySpace. A lot more. The website is arranged into fifteen different spaces, which you will see as clickable links near the top of the webpage: Home, Browse, Search, Invite, Film, Mail, Blogs, Favourites, Forum, Groups, Events, MySpace TV, Music, Comedy, and Classifieds.

Home, described above, is the most important area for managing your profile.

Browse allows you to search for other people ('friends') on MySpace. There are a number of options you can select to narrow or widen your search. You can search by gender, location, interests, or age (but you cannot search for people younger than eighteen years). You can also search for people who are Single, In a Relationship, Married, Divorced, Swinger, or for people who are interested in Dating, Networking, Relationships, or Friends.

Invite allows you to email people and invite them to join you as 'friends' online.

Film allows people to publish and watch amateur films and videos. Cinema films, new DVD releases and television programmes are promoted here, also.

Mail allows you to write, send and store messages.

Blog allows you to write your own blog. You can subscribe to and read other people's blogs, as well.

Favourites lets you bookmark other people's profiles so you can find them easily later on.

Forums are discussions among many people on a particular subject, ranging from cars to sports to music to almost anything. Forums can involve conversations in a chatroom.

Groups are collections of users who share an interest, e.g. film or videogames. Groups draw members from around the world. Some groups are not suitable for minors.

Music lets you search for, publish and listen to music. Many bands publish their music on MySpace and try to build a fan-base by

attracting as many 'friends' as possible to their profile. Commercial music (e.g. bands or singers signed to record companies) also features here.

MySpace TV is the video section. It is divided into five main spaces: Home, Video Charts, Categories, Channels, and My Videos. Home, in this case, is the homepage for videos. Video Charts lists the most popular videos on MySpace. Categories allows you to search for videos by topic (entertainment, comedy, travel, news and politics, and videoblogs, among others). Channels divides videos into online programmes, such as a comedy programme. My Videos is a list of videos that you have marked as your favourites.

Registering for and using a video-sharing website

The sections on Bebo and MySpace talked briefly about sharing videos and showing (embedding) them on your profile. Videos have become an important part of the internet in general, and of social-networking websites in particular. They are an easy way for people to share music, or show funny videos they recorded at home or on holiday. They are also a good way for people to blog if they don't feel like writing down their thoughts; they simply record them instead.

Online videos come from many sources: television, old-videos, DVDs, or they can be recorded on camcorders, digital cameras, webcams and mobile phones. Most videos run less than ten minutes.

While many videos are fun and entertaining or educational, some videos carry content that is inappropriate for teenagers under eighteen years old. Through videoblogs, teenagers risk giving away personal information *and* publishing inappropriate images of themselves.

This section will explain how to register for and use YouTube. It is a video-sharing – not a social-networking – website. But parents should know how it works for two main reasons. First, knowing how

to use YouTube will help you understand the video activities on social-networking websites. Second, the YouTube website itself is extremely popular with Irish teenagers.

YouTube

YouTube is the world's most famous video-sharing website. It carries videos on almost every topic imaginable. You can post comments about videos, or even send a message to the person who uploaded it. Some videos people will have recorded themselves. Other videos can be clips of television shows or music videos (and sometimes publishing these online without permission can break copyright law).

Inappropriate content, e.g. pornography, will be deleted from YouTube. However, some videos carry mature content and you must be over eighteen years old to watch them. It is important to be aware of the kinds of videos your children are watching online, either on a video-sharing website or a social-networking website. YouTube has a history section for each account, where parents can check on previously viewed videos.

Use of YouTube is free. Advertisements, sponsored links and promoted videos will appear on screen, however.

Registering for YouTube

Open your web-browser and go to www.youtube.com or www.youtube.ie. In the login panel, click on the option to 'sign up'. A registration form will appear, in which you have to choose a username, a password, and give an email address to activate your account. You will also be asked for your age, gender, and location. Finally, you have to agree to YouTube's terms and conditions, which you should read before signing up to the service.

Finding videos on YouTube

The easiest way to find videos is through the search-engine near the top of the webpage. Type in a few words that best describe the sort of video you are looking for: 'football', 'spectacular', and 'goals', for instance. Press 'search' and you will see a list of videos that match the keywords you entered. Each video will have a title and a picture (usually taken from the video itself) that will give you a better idea of what it is about. Click on the video you want to watch. It should begin to play automatically.

Another way to find videos is to through browsing YouTube's four main sections: Videos, Categories, Channels, and Community. Near the top of the webpage you will find clickable buttons that will take you to each section.

Videos arranges popular videos in a number of different ways: Most Viewed, Top Rated, Most Discussed, and Top Favourites, among others.

Categories organises videos by topic, such as Comedy, Entertainment, Gadgets & Games, and People & Blogs. Videoblogging is popular on YouTube. Other people can subscribe to your videoblog; they will receive a message every time you post a new videoblog.

Channels are similar to profiles on social-networking websites. Here you can watch the videos that an individual YouTube member has uploaded (this could be a person who regularly uploads a videoblog or comedy videos). You subscribe to a Channel by clicking the orange 'subscribe' button.

Community is groups of YouTube members who share a common interest, such as music. Group discussions are common, and can involve communication with strangers online.

Options when watching a YouTube video

When you find a video that seems interesting, click on it. The video should load and begin to play automatically.

To the right-hand side of the video player you will see a list of related or similar videos that might be of interest to you. Underneath the video player you will see four options: Share, Favourite, Playlist, and Flag.

Share lets you send messages to 'friends' telling them you've found an interesting video.

Favourite bookmarks the video so you can easily find it again.

Playlist adds the video to one of your playlists (lists of different types of videos you like, e.g. music or comedy).

Flag is the most important function for parents. If you become aware that your child has found an inappropriate video, e.g. pornography, you should click the Flag option. This sends a request to YouTube to review the video and maybe delete it from their service. From a drop-down menu on screen, YouTube will ask you to select one of six reasons for why the video is inappropriate:

- Sexual Content
- Violent or Repulsive Content
- Hateful or Abusive Content
- Harmful Dangerous Acts
- Infringes My Rights
- Spam

Once you have chosen your reason, click 'flag this video'. YouTube will review the video within 48 hours and delete it if necessary. For content rated as mature, users wanting to watch the video in future will have to confirm that they are at least eighteen years old.

Underneath the video player you will see a comments section. Here people can leave comments on the video they have just watched and respond to each other's comments.

Managing your account

As with a social-networking account, it is important to manage your YouTube account. Near the top of the webpage you will see your username highlighted as a clickable link. Near to it you will also see a clickable link for Account. Clicking on either of these will bring you to a section where you can manage your account. You can organise your communication, and you can upload videos. Later on you can edit them or take them down. It also allows you to keep track of the videos you have watched and the Channels to which you have subscribed.

Further down your Account webpage you will see a number of panels that allow you to manage your Channel in a similar way to managing your profile on a social-networking website. Your Channel is your public face on YouTube. In the Account section, you can choose a profile picture (e.g. from a video you have uploaded), decide whether or not to display comments on your Channel, and decide who can comment on your Channel (anyone or just 'friends'). You also have options on the design and layout of your Channel (similar to pimping your profile). Further options allow you to add more information about yourself, change your password or email address, and review your list of 'friends'. You can also Delete Account here (delete your information from the website).

Uploading videos

If users didn't upload videos there wouldn't be much on YouTube. Uploading videos is easy. On most webpages you can click on an option to 'upload'. Next you give your video a title and a brief description of what it's about. Then you enter some 'tags' – a few words that best describe the video and will help people find it through a search ('Kerry' and 'scenery', for example).

Further down the webpage you can choose Broadcast Options. You can make your video private so only 'friends' can see it. Or you can make it public so anyone can see it. You also have Sharing Options, such as whether to allow anyone or only 'friends' to comment on your video. You can review the comments before allowing them to be published on your video. Another option is Embedding: you can decide whether or not to allow external (other) websites to link to the video and show it on their space.

When you are happy with the settings, click 'upload a video'. Now you have two options for how to upload the video. One is to Use Quick Capture, where the video is recorded directly from a camera or webcam and published immediately online (videoblogs can be recorded this way).

The second option is to upload a video that is stored on your computer's hard-drive. Select 'browse' to search through your computer's hard-drive. Having selected the video file, click 'upload a video'. Your video will then be published online.

6. What to look out for on a teenager's profile

By reading this booklet, you have learned what a social-networking website is, and what are the benefits and risks of teenagers using them. You know how to register for a social-networking website and how the different features work: pimping a profile, communicating online, and uploading videos. In short, you now have the best means to protect your teenage children when they use social-networking websites: information.

If you decide to look at your child's profile, you should examine it with the following questions in mind:

1: Is their profile private or public?

2: Does the profile picture identify your child and is it an appropriate photograph?

3: How much personal information has your child given away on their profile? Have they published their real name, home address, mobile phone number, or given away details on where they'll be at certain times of the day? Have they revealed personal information in their blog?

4: Have they been in contact with people they do not know or trust in the real world? Have strangers been trying to contact them through their profile?

5: Are the comments (text, voice or video) on their profile appropriate? Do any of them encourage drinking, drug use, anti-social behaviour, or are they of a sexual nature? Do any of the comments suggest that your child is being bullied or harassed online?

6: Does your child have a collection of photo albums or a slideshow of photographs on their profile? Are the photographs in these albums

appropriate, and do they identify your child (e.g. are tagged, or have captions identifying who's in the photograph)?

7: Has anyone online asked your child for a photograph or webcam image of themselves?

8: Has your child uploaded a video of themselves (e.g. videoblog) online? Are the videos appropriate, and do they give away personal information?

9: Is your child's profile linked to their mobile phone? Is the mobile phone number visible?

10: Has their profile a VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) service? (It allows people to make voice calls across the internet, and can be similar to making a telephone call.) Also, are there instant messaging services on their profile? If so, do they use these services to communicate only with trusted real world friends and family?

7. Useful websites

www.iab.ie
Internet Advisory Board

www.watchyourspace.ie
Advice on managing children's profiles on social-networking websites

www.makeitsecure.ie
Provides information on IT security risks online

www.webwise.ie
Provides parents, teachers, and children with educational resources, advice and information about potential dangers on the internet

www.childline.ie
Child safety issues

www.hotline.ie
Irish hotline for public to report child pornography and other illegal content

www.scoilnet.ie
Provides advice and support to schools on Information Technology

www.barnardos.ie
Charity for the protection of children

www.netsecure.ie
National awareness campaign on computer security

www.ncte.ie
The National Centre for Technology in Education provides advice and support on ICTs in education

www.equality.ie
The Equality Authority

http://www.ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/safety tips/index_en.htm
A European Union website with safety tips on social-networking.

GET WITH IT!

This booklet is about helping you

The world of social-networking websites is one of fun, communication and creativity. But for many parents, social-networking websites can seem strange and confusing. Parents sometimes worry about the risks that these websites can hold for their children.

This booklet will help parents to understand and use these websites, and help them to safeguard their children online.

For more information contact:

Internet Advisory Board,
c/o
Pinebrook House
71-74 Harcourt St
Dublin 2

Freefone 1800 24 25 95
T: + 353 1 6028661
F: + 353 1 6028634
E: getwithit@justice.ie
W: www.iab.ie

This booklet was produced on behalf of the Internet Advisory Board by the Society, Information and Media (SIM) research centre, Dublin City University. All rights rest with the Internet Advisory Board.