

Safe Online Relationships

Social networking sites, like MySpace and Facebook, allow you to stay in constant contact with your friends and increase your social circle. But, they can also allow others to monitor your life and use information to harm you. Because you provide personal information on profiles, blogs, and message boards, these sites also have the potential to be very dangerous.

What Do I Need to Know?

It is important to build safe and healthy relationships, whether they are with people you know in person or online. When people talk about using social networking sites safely, they usually focus on strangers or predators. But, you are just as likely (if not more so) to be harassed or abused by someone you know. There are ways to have fun online and stay safe at the same time.

What Can I Do?

Here are some specific tips that can help you be safe online:

- Don't do or say anything online you wouldn't in person. It may seem easier when you are not face to face, but this can get you into trouble.
- Only post things you are okay with people seeing and knowing. While phone numbers and addresses obviously let people contact you directly, things like school and team names, landmarks and photos may also make it easier for people to find out where you live, hang out or go to school.
- Remember, it's not just about you. If you post information or photos about your friends or family, you may also be putting *them* at risk.
- Don't respond to harassing, abusive or inappropriate comments. It won't make the person stop and it might get you in trouble or put you in danger.
- Use the privacy preferences to keep your page as private as you can.
- If you are in or coming out of a dangerous relationship, you should not be using any form of technology to contact your abuser. It can be dangerous and may be used against you in the future.
- Save or keep a record of all harassing or abusive messages, posts, and comments, in case you decide to tell the police or get a protective order.
- Never give your passwords to anyone except your parent or guardian. It's a good idea to choose passwords that are not easy to guess, not to use the same password for all your accounts, and to change passwords regularly.
- It may seem extreme, but if the abuse and harassment will not stop, changing your usernames and email addresses may be your best option.
- Report inappropriate behavior to the site administrators.
- Trust your instincts! If you think something is wrong or are feeling threatened, tell someone who can help you.

If you are being abused or harassed, whether it's over the phone, online or in person, Break the Cycle can help you learn about your options and legal rights.

**You have the right to a safe and healthy relationship...
free from violence and free from fear.**