💻 Computer Corner

A Parent's Guide To Social Networking

(NAPSA)—"It's 10 p.m. Do you know where your children are?" Remember that phrase from your own childhood? It's still a valid question, but now, it comes with a twist: "Do you know where your kids are—and who they're talking to online?"

Social networking sites are the hippest "meet market" around, especially among tweens, teens, and 20-somethings. These sites allow and encourage people to exchange information about themselves in profiles and journals, and use message boards, chat rooms, e-mail and instant messaging to communicate with the world at large. Unfortunately, while social networking sites can increase a person's circle of friends, they also can increase exposure to people who have less than friendly intentions. The Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection agency, offers tips for helping your kids use these sites safely:

• Keep the computer in an open area, like the kitchen or family room, where you can keep an eye on where your kids are going online and what they're doing.

• Use the Internet with your kids. Be open to learning about the technology so you can keep up with them. Look into their favorite sites so you can set sensible guidelines.

• Talk to your kids about their online habits. If they use social networking sites, tell them why it's important to keep their name, Social Security number, address, phone number, age and family financial information to themselves. Your children should be cautious about sharing other identifying information, too.

• Your kids should post only information that you and they are

Monitor your children's use of social networking sites to be sure they're not sharing personal information.

comfortable with everyone seeing and knowing. The Internet is the world's biggest billboard: Just about anyone could see their page, including their teachers, the police, a college admissions officer, or a potential employer. In addition, once information is online, it's there forever.

• Warn your kids about the dangers of flirting with strangers online. Because some people lie online about who they really are, no one ever really knows who they're dealing with. Tell your children to trust their gut: If they feel threatened or uncomfortable by someone or something online, they need to tell you and then report it to the police and your Internet service provider. You could end up preventing someone else from becoming a victim.

• If you're concerned that your child is engaging in risky online behavior, you can search the blog sites they visit to see what information they're posting. Try searching by their name, nickname, school, hobbies, or area where you live.

Visit www.OnGuardOnline.gov to learn more.