

PERSPECTIVE

How to stay safe in cyberspace

You can't just say anything

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THE new world of social media networks are amazing spaces. They bring people together, across the globe with no borders.

We can share, collaborate, celebrate, learn, and seek validation or emotional support. But it is still a very 'new' space. We are still learning how it works and its capabilities.

The safety of this new ground depends as much on the user as it does on the site. Lately, we have seen more and more media coverage about the viral spread of personal information, particularly in the hands of the younger generations.

Social media has become the perfect playing ground for self-exploration, identity exploration and the formation of identity which occurs during adolescent development. What appears to be a bit of silly fun can actually be quite dangerous and may come back to haunt them. We need to remember that we are using a public forum.

The risks are huge when used without appropriate thought and etiquette. We must be diligent in monitoring what we write. Inappropriate photographs once cached into Google Images are there permanently.

Not only are children exposing themselves to risk from pedophiles and other unsavory characters, they risk damaging their reputation in the future when seeking employment.

There is a huge risk that a young person taking or distributing such

photographs will be charged with child pornography or other similar criminal offences. Speak to your child about what is appropriate subject matter for creating groups in social media and the types of information they are sharing.

Other risks online include harassment and cyber bullying, giving away information which might help strangers determine physical location or use the information to manipulate. Posts and tweets, whether posted by yourself or others, can cause psychological harm or jeopardise reputations and, as mentioned, future prospects.

As parents, adults and educators we need to be aware and constantly have open dialogue with our children and our peers about what is appropriate on facebook and other social media and what is not.

Sadly, Australia has always had that sense of 'she'll be right, mate' and a huge attraction to cheeky, naughty or risky fun or saying exactly what we think — and this is where the boundaries are pushed.

For most, our online life reflects our offline, our 'real' life. However, social networking allows amplification, perpetuation and the ability to widely and quickly distribute problems or conflicts.

Never before has it been so important that users stop and think before they hit that send button. Tweeting our feelings to the world may seem like a good idea at the time, but the repercussions are huge. Our own behaviour online is the key to well-being within the social media space. Remember that



something posted in anger or on impulse is extremely difficult to take back.

With a more open, global society, it is vital that we educate our children and ourselves to make informed decisions and critically analyse the 'next new thing'. It may feel good at the time to send that

tweet but what are the consequences down the track?

Encourage your peers to report inappropriate groups and pages. Use tools such as private groups to share personal stories.

Social media and facebook are brilliant ways of making the world a smaller place, and provide an amaz-