

Have you heard of MySpace.com? If you haven't, you will want to educate yourself. MySpace.com has become a popular website among teens, preteens, and adults as a place to post messages and chat with others. It works in this way ... Users sign-on and create personal web pages. Participants must be 14 years of age to have a page, so younger children must lie to gain access to the site. Often kids will use the term "POS", meaning "Parent Over Shoulder" to warn whomever they may be chatting with to tone down their conversations. They can add pictures or messages that others can access. They can also access pictures or messages any other MySpace users may have posted. If you choose to quickly scan MySpace, you will see that many of these pictures and messages are adult in nature. Recently MySpace.com was linked to a pedophile bust in Riverside and a bomb threat at a high school in Costa Mesa. A search for news articles about MySpace on your web browser will result in multiple stories about children who are missing nationwide because of contacts they have made with nefarious MySpace users.

It has come to my attention that there are Del Cerro students who have created personal pages at MySpace.com. These students have created pages at home for the innocent purpose of communicating with friends; however, they have had to lie about their age to participate. **(SVUSD firewalls have identified MySpace.com as an adult website and therefore block all students and staff from accessing the site from school.)** While the decision to allow a child to have a MySpace.com page is a parenting decision, I urge all parents to be vigilant about their children's use of MySpace.com and all other web surfing.

Your best defense against the perils of the Internet is simple trust. Start by establishing the following ground rules (taken from "Family Fun" magazine) with your kids and encourage everybody to stick to them. (You might even tape them on the wall next to your computer).

1. I WON'T GIVE OUT PERSONAL INFO

I will never reveal my real name, where I live, my phone number, computer passwords or any other personal information to anyone on the Internet under any circumstances, no matter how nicely they ask or who they say they are. If someone does ask, or if anything else suspicious happens to me on the Internet, I will immediately stop what I'm doing and get an adult.

2. I WILL SHOW E-MAILS TO MY PARENTS

I promise to never open e-mail from anybody I don't know. Instead, I'll save it and show it to my parents.

3. I WILL BE CAREFUL IN CHAT ROOMS

I will never visit an un-moderated chat room without a parent's permission. In any chat room, I will remember that there is no way to tell if somebody chatting with me is really a friend or just pretending to be a friend. And just to be safe, I'll use a gender-neutral screen name.

4. MY PARENTS AND I ARE A TEAM

Since my parents trust me enough to abide by these rules, I promise that when they ask me for help performing even the simplest of computer tasks, I will not laugh at them or act overly condescending ;-)

The above rules are only the basics, and you may wish to modify or add to them as necessary. (If your family has a digital camera, for example, you might add a clause forbidding the transmission of family photos without permission.)

If there are any questions, or if there are things that you feel I need to be aware of, please contact me. Happy surfing and stay safe!

Lisa Graham, Principal

RELEVANT SITES

Internet safety strategies and technologies are constantly changing. For information and resources on the latest developments, visit the following Web sites:

www.AmericaLinksUp.org
www.Cyberangels.org
www.FamilyGuideBook.com
www.GetNetWise.org
www.SafeKids.com
www.WebWiseKids.com