Students First, Safety First

Social Media and Networking

Fulton County Schools is committed to providing safe and secure learning environments for our students. Our Board of Education makes annual, ongoing investments that provide safety and security to our physical buildings as well as programs that focus on the social and emotional well-being of our students and staff. This commitment continues with regular parent and community education about current student safety issues.

What is Social Media/Networking?

Social networks are websites or apps that enable users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, or images. These sites and apps are like virtual club houses. Once you become a member and create a profile, you can interact and connect with family and friends via online activities like chat, email, photos, events and status updates. Examples of social networking sites: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Tumblr, Reddit. For younger children, there are sites that provide stronger parental controls, like: Azoomee and iTwixie.

Did you know?

According to a 2018 survey conducted by Pew Research Center:

95 percent of teens use a smartphone •45 percent of teens say they are online on a near-constant basis • 85 percent of teens use YouTube • 72 percent of teens use Instagram • 69 percent of teens use Snapchat • 51 percent of teens use Facebook • 31 percent of teens believe the impact of social media on their lives is mostly positive • 24 percent report that social media effects are mostly negative • Those that believe the effect is positive, site the following: greater connection to others, increased access to news and information, and opportunities for self-expression • Negative consequences of social media reported include: increased bullying, the spread of rumors, less meaningful human interactions, and a distorted sense of reality.

Why Social Media/Networking Can Be Risky for Children?

- Perhaps the biggest problem with social networking can be summed up with the acronym "TMI" or "too much information." Our children need to understand that if they reveal too much about their personal lives, it could lead to problems— like susceptibility to cyberbullies, online predators, invasion of privacy, and identity theft. These problems are not due to social networking, as they have been around since the advent of email and chat. But with social networking, the volume of content has grown and become much more personal and is easily seen by anyone. Example of TMI on social networking apps or websites: A student was rejected admission at a college after gushing about the school while visiting the campus, then trashing it online.
- Online bullying or harassment is an issue children face on social networking sites. Because these sites are all about sharing personal information, and it's easy for the information to be spread, it's easy for your children to become a victim. Some examples are:
  - Flaming: Online fights sent via email or instant message with angry or vulgar language
  - Harassment: Repeatedly sending nasty, mean, insulting messages
  - Denigration: "Dissing" someone online by sending or posting gossip or rumors about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships.
  - Impersonation: Pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material to damage their reputation

- o Pranking: Tricking someone into revealing secrets or embarrassing information and then sharing it online
- Online Predators - It's commonly believed that the Internet is the perfect environment for online predators because it is easy for them to hide their identity, get access to potential victims, and provides a huge pool of victims to target. Online predators typically "groom" their victims by building trust with the child through lying, the use of blackmail and guilt, creating different personas and then attempting to engage the child in more intimate forms of communication, and eventual in-person meetings. On social networking sites, online predators can use all these techniques to become friends with children and try to engage with them. Online predators will also use information from a child's profile to try and locate them in person.

Parent Tips for Social Media/Networking and their Children

Children tend to want to share information with their friends and connections. A profile on a social networking website or app is like a window into their life. They need to understand that they need to protect their privacy and their reputation diligently. Help your children understand the importance of owning their digital lives and only sharing things that will not put them in danger, negatively affect their future, or harm others.

Set some limits and make a few rules for your children about their online behavior, especially on social networking sites. Some tips and examples are:

- Limit the amount of time your children can spend on the Internet
- Discuss what is and is not appropriate to share online and remind your child that nothing is secret in cyberspace
- Advise your children to beware of people they don't know who want to join their network — these "friends" may be predators or cyberbullies who want to do them harm
- Teach them the risks and dangers of sharing passwords, phone numbers, addresses, and other personal information — even with their best friends
- Encourage them not to use their full name, city, school, and age in text or images, so this information cannot be used to locate them offline
- Have them inform you if they notice anything odd or unusual, such as messages from "friends" that seem out of character or photos that your children never posted
- Tell your children that they cannot meet face-to-face with individuals they've met online
- Tell your children to trust their gut if they have suspicions — if they ever feel uncomfortable or threatened, encourage them to tell you
- Emphasize the concept of credibility: not everything seen on the Internet is true and people on the Internet may not be who they appear to be
- Watch for changes in behavior. If your child suddenly avoids the computer, it may be a sign they are being bullied or stalked online
- Review security settings and privacy policies for the social media sites children frequent. These settings are frequently updated so check back regularly

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Fulton County Schools' Student Code of Conduct:
Responsibility Cycle for Cyberbullying, Harassment and/or School Disruption

Bullying, including cyberbullying, harassment, derogatory behavior, racial/ethnic slurs, acts of bigotry, making threats that are posted online via websites, apps, videos, etc. while on a FCS school campus are strictly prohibited and is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct (criminal charges may also apply). Off campus incidents of cyberbullying or behaviors that cause a disruption on a Fulton County School campus may also be a violation of the FCS Student Code of Conduct. Consequences for these offenses may include referral to a disciplinary hearing at which a student could be assigned a long-term suspension or expulsion from Fulton County Schools.

References:

Anderson, Monica, and Jingjing Jiang. "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, 31 May 2018, www.pewinternet.org/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/.

"Stop.Think.Connect." *Department of Homeland Security*, 7 June 2018, www.dhs.gov/stopthinkconnect.