Teens & Social Networking in School & Public Libraries:

A Toolkit for Librarians & Library Workers

updated and expanded: March 2007

Created by:

For 50 years YALSA has been the world leader in recommending reading listening and viewing for teens.

50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611
1.800.545.2433 x4390
yalsa@ala.org

Table of Contents

Information to share with community members:

Resources for librarians & library workers:

How Online Social Networking Facilitates Learning in Schools & Libraries:

What are social networking technologies? They are software that enables people to connect, collaborate and form virtual communities via the computer and/or Internet. Social networking web sites are those that provide this opportunity to interact via interactive web applications. Sites that allow visitors to send emails, post comments, build web content and/or take part in live chats are all considered to be social networking sites. These kinds of sites have come to be collectively referred to as "Web 2.0" and are considered the next generation of the Internet because they allow users to interact and participate in a way that we couldn't before.

Social networking technologies have many positive uses in schools and libraries. They are an ideal environment for teens to share what they are learning or to build something together online. The nature of the medium allows teens to receive feedback from librarians, teachers, peers, parents, and others. Social networking technologies create a sense of community (as do the physical library and school) and in this way are already aligned with the services and programs at the library and/or school.

Schools and libraries are working to integrate positive uses of social networking into their classrooms, programs, and services. By integrating social networking technologies into educational environments, teens have the opportunity to learn from adults how to be safe and smart when participating in online social networks. They also learn a valuable life skill, as these social networking technologies are tools for communication that are widely used in colleges and in the workplace. Here are a few examples of how teens are being introduced to the positive uses of social networking technologies:

- A school uses blogging software to publish its newspaper. The blog format allows for timely publication and the ability to make updates easily. This format also allows for comments from readers and easy navigation to archived stories. Publication costs are minimal (no color print costs!) and there is no limit to the length of the paper, allowing for more student participation. See www.uni.uiuc.edu/gargoyle/

- An author creates a blog and/or MySpace account as a way to reflect on the reading and writing experience. Teens who enjoy the author's work keep up on what the author is writing and thinking through the blog. The author blog is used as a research source and as a way to communicate with the author about books, reading, and writing. See www.sparksflyup.com/weblog.php and www.myspace.com/rachel_cohn

- A school librarian works with teachers to encourage student reading. As a means of getting students actively involved in their own reading, the librarian creates a wiki where students can post their own book reviews. As they add and revise content on the wiki students write, read, analyze, and think critically. See

> **Literacy & Social Networking**
>
> Social networking tools give teens meaningful ways to use and improve reading and writing skills. All social networking software requires teens to read and write. When a teen:
> - Creates a profile on a social networking site
> - Posts or comments on a blog
> - Adds or edits content on a wiki
> - Searches for social content
> - Consults peers online as a part of research
>
> reading and writing skills are required. This is why these technologies are referred to as the "read/write web."

www.pps-nj.us/wiki/index.php/Leeds_Avenue_Library#Student_Reviews

- A public library creates a My Space site as a way to connect with teens ages 14 and older in the community. The space includes quick and easy access to the library catalog and other research tools. It also includes information on programs and services at the library in which teens can take part. Teens who are not traditional library users learn about and use the library through My Space because they are familiar and comfortable with the technology. Teens make the library one of their My Space friends and then are reminded of the library whenever they log onto their space. See www.myspace.com/libraryloft

- A public library works with its Teen Advisory Group to set up an online del.icio.us account where teens can collect and share web sites of interest as well as web sites to assist with completing homework assignments. Teens hone reading, web searching and critical thinking skills as they evaluate which sites to include on their del.icio.us account. See http://del.icio.us/homrteens.

Developmental Assets & Social Networking

When schools and libraries help teens use social networking tools safely and smartly, they also help teens meet their developmental assets as defined by the Search Institute (www.search-institute.org). For example when teens:

- Learn how to use blogs, wikis, and My Space sites within an educational context they learn about **boundaries and expectations**.
- Are able to use social networking tools in learning they have a **commitment to learning.**
- Have the opportunity to communicate with peers, experts, authors, etc. via online social networking they develop **social** & **cultural competence**.
- Work with adults and peers on developing social network sites and teaching others how to use these sites they are **empowered.**
- Have a voice in the future of the school or the library they gain a sense of **personal identity** and value.
- See how librarians and teachers use social networks they are presented with **positive role models**.

- A student creates a My Space site for an author she needs to study. As she gathers information, she enters it into the writer's My Space profile. She uses the blog function to post stories or poems she analyzes. Before long, other MySpace authors and poets (some real, some not) befriend her author. They comment on what is written and lead the student to more resources. The student has to adopt the persona of her author and imagine what the author's responses might actually be. See http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=89691844

Tips for Talking with Legislators About Social Networking

Even though librarians are respected members of the community, the competition for the attention and time of elected officials is great, as is the competition for funding. It is important that librarians reach out to elected officials and educate them about the needs of libraries and library patrons.

1. Communicate via phone, fax, or in person. If you're hoping to meet with a legislator in person, set up an appointment in advance. (By the way, don't be disappointed if you end up communicating with someone from the legislator's staff.)

2. Be polite, respectful, professional, and friendly.

3. Introduce yourself, identify your job title, and state your purpose.

4. Stick to the point: communicate ONE message—the benefits of social networking for teens.

5. Use specific examples from your own work with teens to illustrate your point. If you're meeting the legislator in person, you might even be able to take a well-spoken teen and/or parent with you who can talk about the benefits of social networking.

6. Ask for action. For example, ask the legislator to vote against any legislation that attempts to restrict or ban social networking sites in libraries. Or ask the legislator to support any legislation that supports social networking and Internet access, like the E-rate.

> **Before You Visit**
>
> Do your homework. Find out what legislation is before the state senate and be aware of what it says and where the person you are going to talk to stands on the issues related to social networking.
>
> Gather personal stories relating to the issue from your teen library patrons and their parents to share with the legislator.
>
> Visit or contact your legislator as soon as you hear about pending legislation.
>
> You can find out about state and national social networking legislation at http://wikis.ala.org/iwa, or go to www.ala.org and click on "Take Action."

7. Offer to provide additional information about social networking. Take such materials with you if you're meeting the legislator in person.

8. Listen carefully and courteously.

9. Invite the legislator to visit your library. Provide a calendar of events.

10. Remember to say "thank you."

Educating the Community about Online Social Networking

In the media there are many examples of how social networking has played a dangerous role in teen lives. However, positive examples of how this technology supports teen literacy skills and developmental growth are not so readily found. For that reason, librarians should play an active role in educating parents, teachers, and other members of the community about the positive benefits of social networking in teen lives. The following examples of how you can educate your community provide a starting point. When planning these events, be sure to enlist your Teen Advisory Group (TAG) to help you plan and implement the workshops.

- Create and distribute brochures and post information online about what your library is already doing to ensure that children and teens are safe online. Include information about Internet filters and Internet Acceptable Use Policies that your library has.

- Invite parents and educators to a workshop where they can learn about My Space, Facebook and other social networking tools. In the workshop have librarians and teachers discuss how My Space is being used in the classroom and library. Have law enforcement officials talk about how to help teens stay safe while participating in social networking online. Have teens with well-designed MySpace spaces demonstrate the positive ways they use social networking tools.

- Host Do-It-Yourself Days for adults to learn how to use Social Networking sites and tools successfully. After an introduction about what social networking is, and why it's an important part of a teen's life, teens from your TAG could work with adults on using the tools in a way that enhances their own lives. Teens might show adults how to set up: a blog that showcases a hobby or special interest, a My Space space to keep in touch with friends, a Flickr account so they can share family photos, an IM account to conduct live chats with family members overseas, etc.

- Create an online demo or class that gives adults the chance to test out and discuss social networking technologies at their leisure and in a somewhat anonymous setting. Make the demo available from your library's web site. Use your TAG group to help develop the demo.

- Host a community debate about local, state and/or national legislation that seeks to regulate social networking web sites. Invite local experts on both sides of the issue to participate the debate. Provide handouts and background information for attendees.

> **Sites That May Be Affected By Social Networking Legislation**
>
> There are many sites currently used by adults and teens that will be blocked in schools and libraries if legislation prohibiting access to social networking sites passes. These include:
> - Photo sharing sites like Flickr.com, which patrons use to share photos with family members who are far away.
> - Health related sites like PsychCentral.com, which allow users to get important medical questions answered during live chat sessions.
> - Educational sites like LegalGuru.com, which allows users to get free legal advice.
> - Library reference sites, where patrons can get questions answered via instant messaging that use AOL, Yahoo, or other commercial services.

- Use social networking technologies as an access point for your library's services. Create a My Space space as a place for adults and teens to learn out about programs and materials. Set up a blog where adults and teens read about what's going on in the library and can add comments about programs, materials, and so on. Develop a booklist wiki where adults and teens can add titles of books on specific themes.

> **Social Networking Defined**
>
> The following definitions of social networking tools should help you explain to your community what it is all about.
>
> **Blog:** a web page where you can write journal entries, reviews, articles, and more. Blog authors can allow readers to post their own comments. No web design knowledge is needed to create a blog.
>
> **Podcasts:** audio files that are available for download. They are usually available for free via subscription so that you can automatically download it to a computer or MP3 player (like an iPOD).
>
> **RSS:** a way for subscribers to automatically receive information from blogs, online newspapers, and podcasts.
>
> **Social Networking:** in the online world, this refers to the ability to connect with people through websites and other technologies, like discussion boards.
>
> **Tagging:** refers to the ability to add subject-headings to content in order to organize information in a meaningful way and to connect to others that tag similar content in the same way.
>
> **Wiki:** a collaborative space for developing web content. No web design knowledge is needed to create a wiki.

- Inform--perhaps via a podcast—educators, parents and community members about how social networking tools allow for schools and libraries to integrate technology in meaningful ways with and for teens at low (or no) cost. Information could include overviews of the technologies, interviews with teens about their use of technology, interviews with experts in technology and teen development who discuss how the technologies support teen growth and literacy development, and so on.

- Create and distribute an information sheet for adults that provides information about the positive aspects of social networking as well as Internet safety tips and that includes annotated lists of resources. You can also post the information on your library's website, blog, wiki, or My Space space.

- Sponsor a scholarly presentation, or series of presentations, for local educators and concerned adults by experts in the field of developmental assets, teen print literacies in the world of technology, and social networking. Ask speakers to focus directly on how social networking technologies have positive benefits for teens.

- Host an evening that focuses on how social networking is being used in higher education and business. Invite faculty from a local college or university to talk to parents and teens about how they use social networking technologies with students to facilitate the teaching and learning process. Invite business leaders to talk about what social networking technologies their employees must know how to use in order to be successful in their jobs.

Educating Teens about Online Social Networking

You can help teens use social networking technologies successfully and safely by sponsoring programs and services that focus on these technologies. The following examples are available to help you get started. Show these examples to your Teen Advisory Group (TAG) and see which one(s) they feel are important to offer in your community. Have your TAG help plan and carry out the event(s). Remember that social networking sites often have minimum age requirements and be sure to honor those.

- Offer a class to teach teens how to use Blogger.com. As teens set up their blog you can facilitate a discussion about Internet safety issues, the importance of guarding against identity theft, online etiquette, etc.

- Host Do-It-Yourself Days for teens where they learn about a variety of social networking technologies. You might have a day for photo-sharing technologies, another day for bookmarking sites, another day for friend building, and so on. During each of the sessions you can talk with teens about how to make decisions about safe use of these technologies.

- Work with teens to produce podcasts on topics of interest. They might review media and books, talk about what's going on in the community, book talk, etc. As a part of the podcast process, have teens write outlines of the content they want to cover and talk with them about whom they want to make the podcast available to.

- With teens create a library books and media wiki as a means for recommending resources to library patrons. Train teens on how to update the content of the wiki and talk about how to evaluate the quality of information in wikis and other types of resources.

- Take photos at the library and have teens upload and tag them on Flickr or another photo-sharing site. As a part of the uploading and tagging process, discuss safety and privacy concerns with teens and decide whether or not the photos should be private or public. As they tag the photos, ask them to consider what the best ways are to describe content in order for friends or the public (if the photos are made public) to find them.

- Work with teens to create a wiki, podcast or web page about Internet safety aimed at children. Post the completed resource on your library's web site.

Social Networking Sites

del.icio.us
www.del.icio.us
Combines bookmarking and tagging. Allows users to network with others in order to keep track of what is being bookmarked by those with similar interests.

Flickr
www.flickr.com
A photo-sharing site that allows users to tag images.

My Space
www.myspace.com
Users build their space on the web and then invite others to be their friends.

Technorati
www.technorati.com/
A searchable database of blogs that gives bloggers the ability to tag content for easy access by others.

Wikipedia
www.wikipedia.org/
A wiki encyclopedia that gives anyone the ability to add to and change entries.

Some Authors Using My Space
Rachel Cohn
www.myspace.com/rachel_cohn
John Green
www.myspace.com/greatperhaps
Cecil Castellucci
www.myspace.com/cecilseaskull
Sara Dessen
www.myspace.com/sarahdessen
Melissa de la Cruz
www.myspace.com/melissadelacruz
David Levithan
www.myspace.com/davidlevithan
Brian Sloan
www.myspace.com/bmsloan
Ned Vizzini
www.myspace.com/nedvizzini

Some Libraries Using My Space
Bethpage Public Library
www.myspace.com/bethpagepubliclibrary
Hennepin County Library
www.myspace.com/hennepincountylibrary
Lansing Library
www.myspace.com/lansingpubliclibrary
Library Loft
www.myspace.com/libraryloft

- Have teens create del.icio.us accounts for collecting resources they can use in school research. The teens can network with classmates and peers in del.icio.us in order to learn about resources their peers have uncovered that support learning on a particular topic. Use del.icio.us networking as a jumping off point for a discussion of evaluating information quality.

- Use Flickr as a platform for creative writing exercises with teens. Upload your own, or teens', photos to Flickr and then have teens tell a story with the photos through captions that they add.

- Invite a technology expert in to talk with teens about how social networking tools work.

Tools to Use to Get Started with Social Networking
Blogging
Set up blogs with a free service like Blogger.com, www.blogger.com, or download and customize software with Word Press, www.wordpress.com/

Wikis
Setup a wiki with a free tool such as Wiki Spaces, www.wikispaces.com, or download and customize software with MediaWiki, www.mediawiki.org/

- Give teens the chance to connect with favorite authors, artists, musicians, and so on via My Space and personal blogs. Teens can search for the spaces and blogs using common searching tools and then comment on the blogs and My Space spaces of those they connect with.

- Build a library My Space space with teens. Have teens meet to plan the space, including what it should look like and include. Work with them to build the site, and develop guidelines for blogging, commenting, and making friends on the site. As a part of this project, talk with teens about how to decide whether or not to accept those who want to befriend them on My Space. Add value to your My Space presence through links to online safety and library resources. Make it possible for teens to add your catalog search on their My Space accounts.

Additional Resources about Online Social Networking & Libraries

FOR LIBRARIANS & EDUCATORS:

Discuss DOPA
http://www.saveyourspace.org/
Articles and information on social networking legislation and a Save Your Space petition.

DOPA Watch
www.andycarvin.com/dopa.html
The latest news on legislation related to social networking in schools and libraries.

The Gateway to Educational Materials
www.thegateway.org
Search with the term "internet safety" to locate resources and lesson plans about Internet safety.

Goodstein, Anastasia. **Totally Wired: What Teens are Really Doing Online.** St. Martin's, 2007

Interactive Web Applications Wiki
http://wikis.ala.org/iwa
A wiki that tracks recent social networking legislation and provides resources for library workers.

The Internet & Teens: Social Networking Safety, by Bill Erbes
www.opal-online.org/archivelis.htm
An online tutorial for librarians about teaching teens responsible use of social networking sites.

Internet Safety
www.ala.org/ala/washoff/WOissues/techinttele/internetsafety/internetsafety.htm
Multiple resources are accessible from this page, including an FAQ on libraries, children and the Internet and a toolkit about libraries and the Internet from ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom.

Librarians' Index to the Internet
Two annotated lists of web sites are particularly useful:
- Social Networks: www.lii.org/pub/subtopic/4679
- Internet Safety: www.lii.org/pub/subtopic/948

Prensky, Marc. **Adopt and Adapt**. Edutopia, 2005. Available at:
www.edutopia.org/magazine/ed1article.php?id=Art_1423&issue=dec_05#
Prensky covers why it's important for schools to integrate new technologies into the classroom.

Prensky, Marc. **Engage Me or Enrage Me: What Today's Learners Demand**. Educause,
September/October 2005. Available at: www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0553.pdf
A look at why using technologies that are of interest to students improves learning.

Richardson, Will. **Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Other Powerful Web Tools for the Classroom.** Corwin Press, 2006.
Richardson explains how and why social networking can be used in the library and classroom.

Teen Content Creators and Consumers
www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/166/report_display.asp
This Pew Internet in American Life report illustrates how and why teens use technology to communicate and create information.

30 Positive Uses of Social Networking
www.leonline.com/yalsa/positive_uses.pdf
Ideas from librarians about how social networking can be integrated into schools and libraries successfully. Use these ideas to educate your colleagues, peers, and government officials about how social networking plays a positive role in teen lives.

Weblogg-ed
www.weblogg-ed.com/
Educator and technology specialist Will Richardson discusses how and why new technologies should be integrated into the classroom and library on his frequently updated blog.

FOR TEENS:

Social Networking Sites: Safety Tips for Tweens and Teens
www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec14.htm
A short and useful list of reminders for staying safe on social networking sites (and online in general). Includes a list of resources for finding out more.

FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS:

Farnham, Kevin and Dale**. My Space Safety: 51 Tips for Parents and Teens**. How To Primers.com, 2006.
Two parents discuss how to ensure teens are safe when using social networking.

Willard, Nancy**. Cyber-Safe Kids, Cyber-Savvy Teens: Helping Young People Learn to Use the Internet Safely and Responsibly**. Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Wired Safety.org: Blog Sites, Profile Sites, Diary Sites or Social Networking Sites
www.wiredsafety.org/internet101/blogs.html
Information on what parents need to do in order to help their children stay safe when using social networking technologies.

FOR EVERYONE:

iSAFE
www.isafe.org
Provides resources about Internet safety. There's a different section of the site for: parents, educators, kids & teens, and law enforcement. There are free online tutorials for young people and adults as well as printable newsletters and other resources.

NetSmartz
www.netsmartz.org. Provides resources about Internet safety. There's a different section of the site for: parents, educators, kids, teens, press and law enforcement. Maintained by the national Center for Missing & Exploited Children.