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Special feature:

[Internet Safety Update: MySpace.com](#)

Internet Safety Update:
MySpace.com

 By now, most parents have heard of **MySpace.com** - a free website which allows members to create their own online diaries (called *blogs*) to promote themselves and enhance their social networks. These blogs can contain music, photos, and text, and many contain sensitive or offensive information about their authors. **The astounding popularity of MySpace and other similar sites warrants a close examination of the risks involved when young people access these type of websites.**

A. At Web Wise Kids, our biggest concern with MySpace lies in its potential to expose vulnerable children to millions of strangers each time they log onto the site.

MySpace currently has over 47 million members and gets about 4.6 billion hits per month. Parents cannot afford to overlook the possibility that cyberbullies, child predators, scam artists, and other unscrupulous characters are among the millions of users who log onto MySpace every day. In just seconds, a predator can skim a child's blog or online profile for bits of information which he can compile for his own use. Even something as simple as a picture of child in a school uniform can assist a predator to learn where the child lives and goes to school.

In Middletown, Connecticut, police are currently researching five cases of sexual assault linked to MySpace. In each case, the girls (ages 12 to 16) were abused by men they met on MySpace who turned out to be older than they claimed. Middletown Police Chief Bill McKenna described MySpace as "**a predator's dream come true. Not only can you see young girls, but you can also see their friends and find out where they go to school.**"

B. Certain features of MySpace enhance a predator's ability to target a child.

The MySpace Terms of Service agreement instructs its members that their blogs and profiles may not contain confidential information such as telephone numbers, street addresses, and last names. Interestingly, at the conclusion of the registration process, age and city/state are automatically inserted into each member's profile.

MySpace also requires that potential members be at least 14 years old. However, since there is no verification of membership information, it is easy for minors under 14 to

obtain membership accounts. Likewise, it is also easy for adults and children whose accounts are revoked as a disciplinary measure to create new accounts using false information.

MySpace has a feature called Classmate Finder. Using the Classmate Finder database, members can search for the names of students who attend a particular school. This exposure of a young person's personal information should be regarded as very dangerous.

C. MySpace is too large to have a sufficient number of moderators to prevent your child from seeing offensive material.

With members of all ages using MySpace, it stands to reason that not all content posted on MySpace is suitable for younger members. Whether accidentally or on purpose, your child will not find it difficult to encounter pornography or offensive material on other member's sites. Just this week, a WWK staff member visited a social networking site called Tagged.com and was shocked to see a video of a nude teen boy behaving lewdly in front of a webcam, right on the site's homepage. Be aware that your child could be exposed to similar content when they explore various member sites on MySpace.

Tips for parents:

Find out if your child has a membership to MySpace with a profile and a blog.

Review your child's MySpace profile to make sure that they have not posted their real name, school name, contact information, any photo of themselves (especially sexually suggestive photos), or any other type of information which someone could use to find them.

If you discover that your child has posted sensitive or private information about themselves, remind them why such information is dangerous and have them edit their profile.

Establish rules against emailing and meeting strangers. A 14 year old girl in Texas was tragically murdered in January after arranging a meeting with an older MySpace member.

MySpace allows members to link to each other's sites - check up on whose sites your child is linked to in case one of their friends has posted information about your child which might endanger them. Have your child disable these links or get their friends to modify their text.

Continue to monitor your child's site regularly. This is not a violation of their privacy, this a safeguarding measure.

For more information about this important issue, click on the link to "Predator's Playground" below. This will redirect you to a January 26, 2006, Newsweek article featuring an interview with Monique Nelson, Executive Vice President, Web Wise Kids.

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