

LEADING EDGE YOUTH MINISTRIES

theParentLinkSM
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We exist to REACH students with the gospel to CONNECT them with other Christians to help them GROW in their faith to CHALLENGE them to use their gifts for God and to HONOR God with their lives.

What Impact Does Social Networking Have on Teens?



With the surging popularity of social-networking sites, chances are that your teenagers spend the bulk of their online time connecting and chatting with friends. (Chances are that you've jumped on the bandwagon, too.)

At Facebook, the most popular social-networking site, users make and keep in touch with friends, post pictures, and update their online "profiles." Other social-networking sites include MySpace, Friendster, and Xanga. Twitter, another fast-growing network, combines interconnectivity with "microblogging." Users write frequent, short bursts of information (also known as "tweets") to keep up-to-the-minute current with one another.

All this online friend-forming is affecting teenagers' development, according to experts. Researchers say social-networking sites are shortening attention spans, encouraging instant gratification, and making young people more self-focused. A British neurologist warns that extended use of the sites actually rewires the brain, causing teenagers to require constant reassurance that they exist. Other dangers are more subtle. Kids may no longer spend time completely alone, enjoying the benefits of reflection and solitude. Yet they may feel isolated because they're less likely to be communicating with the real humans in their homes, schools, and churches. Finally, teenagers may focus even more on all the worries that accompany adolescence. So instead of escaping from their problems, kids dwell on them even more.

Use this issue of "The Parent Link" to start exploring your teenagers' social-networking habits.

Leading Edge Focus

The focus of our ministry is the students and their relationships with Jesus Christ. One of our main goals is that when these students graduate from high school, they do not graduate from their relationship with God; they would take Jesus with them. Because of this goal, we have designed a platform for them to learn how to have a relationship with God beyond church. Our weekly teachings are about focusing on their relationship with God by:

- F** - Faithfully spending time with God
- O** - Obedience to God's word
- C** - Commit to accountability
- U** - Use your talents
- S** - Stay connected

This month's series: Church As It Should Be – Walking Through the Book of Acts.

For more info: www.tracycommunitychurch.com/leym



Here's a snapshot of online social activities:

- Teenagers spend an estimated 40 hours online each week (or 5.7 hours each day).
- 65% of online teenagers have profiles on social-networking sites.
- 31% of social-networking teenagers have "friends" on their profiles whom they haven't personally met.
- The average number of "friends" in a Facebook network is 120.



Talk about "Sexting"

What Is "Sexting?"

When people take sexually revealing picture of themselves and send them as text message attachments, it's called "sexting." And recently the practice has been increasing exponentially. Kids "sext" to show off, to entice someone, to show interest in someone, or to prove commitment. The problem with that, is that the moment the relationship ends (and most of them do) someone is in possession of a highly compromising image that can be easily posted on a social networking site or sent around via email or text.

There have been some high profile cases of sexting -- including *High School Musical* star Vanessa Hudgens, who sent a nude picture to her co-star/boyfriend, Zac Efron, that ended up all over the Internet and made headlines. And in July 2008, Cincinnati teen Jesse Logan committed suicide after a nude photo she'd sent to a boyfriend was circulated widely around her high school, resulting in harassment from her classmates.

Why It Matters

In a technology world where anything can be copied, sent, posted, and seen by huge audiences, there's no such thing as being able to control images. Even if a photo was taken and sent as a token of love, the intention doesn't matter -- the technology makes it possible for everyone to see your child's most intimate self. And in the hands of teenagers, when revealing photos are made public the subject almost always becomes the object of ridicule and name calling. Furthermore, sending sexual images to minors is against the law, and some states have begun prosecuting kids for child pornography or felony obscenity.

Advice for Parents

Don't wait for an incident to happen to your child or your child's friend before you talk to your kids about the consequences of sexting. Sure, talking about sex or dating with teens can be really uncomfortable, but better to have the talk *before* the fact.

Remind them that once an image is sent, it can never be retrieved -- and they *will* lose control of it. Ask teens how they would feel if their teachers, parents, or the entire school saw the picture, because it happens all the time.

Talk about pressures to send revealing photos. Let teens know that you understand that they can be pushed or dared into sending something. Tell them that no matter how big the social pressure is, the potential social humiliation will be hundreds of times worse.

The buck stops with them. If someone sends them a photo, have them delete it immediately. Better to be part of the solution than the problem. Besides, if they do send it on, they're distributing pornography -- and that's against the law.

What's Up With Kids

Youth-culture expert Walt Mueller chats up social-networking sites.

Millions of teenagers now expose themselves, their feelings, and their thoughts in personal blogs (web logs) posted on one of the many social-networking websites. Public online journals have replaced hidden, locked private diaries. Today, both teenage girls and their male peers are openly sharing their "secrets" for



anyone in the world with Internet access to see. Kids use blogs to vent and share commentary about every aspect of teenage life. They also post pictures of themselves, artwork, and personality profiles. Self-expression is encouraged, and the sites are highly interactive. Here are suggestions for dealing with this phenomenon:

First, know what your kids are doing online. Ask if they have their own blog page and if you can see it. Otherwise, spending some time online can usually get you to their online home. Register for free at the homepage of Facebook.com, Xanga.com, or MySpace.com. Then use the site's "search" capability to find your town or school. You'll be flying through a Web of local kids' sites with familiar names and faces. Eventually, you should find what you're looking for.

Second, read carefully without overreacting. You'll probably find some things on these sites that are surprising and alarming. While some of it might be marked by exaggeration and embellishment, most depicts what's going on in kids' lives. Look for clues that will help you discover their problems, challenges, concerns, and struggles. Remember, you're looking through a window into their world.

Third, carefully and prayerfully prepare your response. Warn teenagers about Internet predators. Discuss what you've read with your kids. Assure them that your concern is motivated solely by your love and care for them. Most importantly, bring the light of God's Word to bear on kids' issues and struggles.

MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Green Day has been around for almost 20 years. Their sound remains as pop-punky as ever, but the lyrics have deepened—tackling issues such as war, politics, and organized religion. Green Day has sold 22 million records in the United States and has won three Grammy Awards.

Albums: *21st Century Breakdown* (2009), *American Idiot* (2004), *Dookie* (1994)

What Parents Should Know: Green Day's angry-punk attitude sounds tired, now that band members are middle-aged multimillionaires. Their new album is about a young, disenfranchised couple who feels left behind by the church, the state, and adults. The band's pessimistic outlook believes in self, leaving no room for God.

What Green Day Says: Singer Billie Joe Armstrong reflects on the state of pop culture: "People want blood. They want to see other people thrown to the lions."

Discussion Questions: When have you felt abandoned by someone, and how did it affect you? Read Deuteronomy 31:6-8. Can God's love and presence replace that of a human's? How might God's promise in these verses make it easier to deal with abandonment by others? Explain.

Christian Artist

Background: FM Static is a pop-punk side band started by two members of the Christian hardcore group Thousand Foot Krutch. Two of the band's YouTube videos have become huge Internet hits, garnering millions of views.

Albums: *Dear Diary* (2009), *Critically Ashamed* (2006), *What Are You Waiting For?* (2003)

What Parents Should Know: *Dear Diary* is an interesting comparison to Green Day's latest release. It's also a concept album about two teenagers who are dealing with big issues. The difference is that on *Dear Diary*, these questions ultimately lead to God. FM Static is a positive alternative to Green Day, while addressing some of the same tough issues.

What FM Static Says: Singer Trevor McNeven discusses the album's autobiographical roots: "There are a lot of...things that I remember thinking. Things like big life questions, and also things that seem so big when you're in high school and then you look back at them now and think, 'That's hilarious, it totally didn't matter.'"

Discussion Questions: Read Psalm 37:1-9. Why should we trust God? Is that hard or easy for you, and why? What "big life questions" do you struggle with the most right now, and how can God help?

Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. God will protect your teenagers when they're interacting online.
2. Your teenagers will be prudent about their online socialization and will reflect their faith in everything they do and say.
3. Your teenagers will make authentic, meaningful friends who help them grow as people and as Christians.
4. Your teenagers will stay connected to their families, a church, and other real-life support systems.

September 2009

		1	2	3	4	5
			6pm - WAM 7pm - "The Edge"			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	6pm - Girl's Only: Captivating Study		6pm - WAM 7pm - "The Edge"			
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
9am - HS: Breakfast Club in Kitchen 9am - JrH: Pastor Sam's Class 6-8pm - Core Groups both HS & JrH	6pm - Girl's Only: Captivating Study		6pm - WAM 7pm - "The Edge"			
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
9am - HS: Breakfast Club in Kitchen 9am - JrH: Pastor Sam's Class 6-8pm - Core Groups both HS & JrH	6pm - Girl's Only: Captivating Study		6pm - WAM 7pm - "The Edge"			
27	28	29	30			
9am - HS: Breakfast Club in Kitchen 9am - JrH: Pastor Sam's Class 6-8pm - Core Groups both HS & JrH (Gym)	6pm - Girl's Only: Captivating Study		6pm - WAM 7pm - "The Edge"			

HS = High School
 JrH = Jr. High School
 WAM = Worship Arts Ministry