

# Teens & Social Networking in School & Public Libraries:

## A Toolkit for Librarians & Library Workers

Created by:



For nearly 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](mailto:yalsa@ala.org)

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## 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. 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.

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 math teacher has students serve as scribes on class blogs. Students post notes, visuals, formulas, activities and comments related to each day's lesson. They also post reflections about their learning at least once before each test. Using the technology in this way gives students the chance to process learning and as a result better understand the content. See <http://pc4sw06.blogspot.com/>
- 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/](http://www.uni.uiuc.edu/gargoyle/)
- An author creates a blog 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](http://www.sparksflyup.com/weblog.php)

### 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 often referred to as the read/write web.

- Two biology teachers in different parts of the country are working with students on the topic of water quality and ecology. The teachers create a joint wiki for the unit of study. As students find information on the topic, they post to the water quality wiki findings, observations, and useful resources. Together students build an online resource (their own encyclopedia) on the topic.
- A public library creates a My Space site as a way to connect with teens 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 ImaginOn Library Loft, [www.myspace.com/libraryloft](http://www.myspace.com/libraryloft)  
Hennepin County Library, [www.myspace.com/hennepincountylibrary](http://www.myspace.com/hennepincountylibrary)

**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](http://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 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 **role models**.

- A high school student creates a My Space site for a British poet she needs to study. As she gathers information, she enters it into the poet's My Space profile. She uses the blog function to post the poems she analyzes. Before long, other MySpace authors and poets (some real, some not) befriend her poet. They comment on what is written and lead the student to more resources. The student has to adopt the persona of her poet and imagine what the poet's responses might actually be.
- An author creates a My Space account as a way to keep in touch with teen readers. The author's space includes biographical information, book information, and reflections on reading and writing. Teens interested in the author can communicate with him or her via My Space and are able to perform primary source research via the author's My Space site.  
See Rachel Cohn,  
[www.myspace.com/rachel\\_cohn](http://www.myspace.com/rachel_cohn)

## 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 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. One example of proposed legislation is the Deleting Online Predators Act (DOPA). Invite local experts on both sides of the issue to participate the debate. Provide handouts and background information for attendees.

### **Commonly Accepted Sites That May Be Affected By DOPA**

There are many sites currently used by adults and teens that may be filtered in schools and libraries if DOPA passes. These include:

- Amazon.com which allows commenting, author blogs, wikis, and ratings.
- Book review sites such as FlamingNet.com, SmartGirl.org, & TeenInk.com.
- DoSomething.org that encourages discussion about issues that directly relate to teen lives.
- Library blogs that are hosted on Blogger.com and other commercial hosting sites. For example, Framingham Public Library YA Blog at <http://fplya.blogspot.com/>
- Library IM reference services that use AOL, Yahoo, or other commercially distributed IM 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

**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, 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.

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.

- Inform 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. Many schools and libraries are cash-strapped or operate without a lot of in-house technical expertise. With free blogging software a school librarian or teacher can create a website without learning how to code and can update and maintain that website with no extra training.
- Produce a podcast for teachers, administrators, parents, and community members that focuses on the positive aspects of social networking technologies. The podcast might be distributed weekly and 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, 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.

## 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).

- Offer a class to teach teens how to use Blogger.com. When teens set up their blog you can facilitate a discussion about how to be safe when blogging, whether or not it's a good idea to have open comments on the blog, 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 who 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 and tagging site. As a part of the uploading and tagging process, discuss with teens 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.

### Social Networking Sites

#### **del.icio.us**

[www.del.icio.us](http://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/](http://www.flickr.com/)

A photo-sharing site that allows users to tag images.

#### **My Space**

[www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)

Users build their space on the web and then invite others to be their friends.

#### **Technorati**

[www.technorati.com/](http://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/](http://www.wikipedia.org/)

A wiki encyclopedia that gives anyone the ability to add to and change entries.

### Authors Using MySpace

**Rachel Cohn**

[www.myspace.com/rachel\\_cohn](http://www.myspace.com/rachel_cohn)

**John Green**

[www.myspace.com/greatperhaps](http://www.myspace.com/greatperhaps)

**Cecil Castellucci**

[www.myspace.com/cecilseaskull](http://www.myspace.com/cecilseaskull)

**Sara Dessen**

[www.myspace.com/sarahdessen](http://www.myspace.com/sarahdessen)

**Melissa de la Cruz**

[www.myspace.com/melissadelacruz](http://www.myspace.com/melissadelacruz)

**David Levithan**

[www.myspace.com/davidlevithan](http://www.myspace.com/davidlevithan)

**Brian Sloan**

[www.myspace.com/bmsloan](http://www.myspace.com/bmsloan)

**Ned Vizzini**

[www.myspace.com/nedvizzini](http://www.myspace.com/nedvizzini)

### Libraries Using MySpace

**Bethpage Public Library**

[www.myspace.com/bethpagepubliclibrary](http://www.myspace.com/bethpagepubliclibrary)

**Hennepin County Library**

[www.myspace.com/hennepincountylibrary](http://www.myspace.com/hennepincountylibrary)

**Lansing Library**

[www.myspace.com/lansingpubliclibrary](http://www.myspace.com/lansingpubliclibrary)

**Library Loft**

[www.myspace.com/libraryloft](http://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 write their thoughts, ideas, and feelings related to photos that you've uploaded.
- 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](http://www.blogger.com), or download and customize software with Word Press, [www.wordpress.com/](http://www.wordpress.com/)

#### **Wikis**

Setup a wiki with a free tool such as Wiki Spaces, [www.wikispaces.com](http://www.wikispaces.com), or download and customize software with MediaWiki, [www.mediawiki.org/](http://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 you're 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:

Prensky, Marc. **Adopt and Adapt**. Edutopia, 2005. Available at: [www.edutopia.org/magazine/ed1/article.php?id=Art\\_1423&issue=dec\\_05#](http://www.edutopia.org/magazine/ed1/article.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](http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0553.pdf)  
A look at why using technologies that are of interest to students improves learning and engagement.

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

#### **The Gateway to Educational Materials**

[www.thegateway.org](http://www.thegateway.org)

Search with the term "internet safety" to locate educational resources (including lesson plans) about internet safety

#### **The Internet & Teens: Social Networking Safety, by Bill Erbes**

[www.opal-online.org/archivelis.htm](http://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](http://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](http://www.lii.org/pub/subtopic/4679)
- Internet Safety: [www.lii.org/pub/subtopic/948](http://www.lii.org/pub/subtopic/948)

#### **Teens Content Creators and Consumers**

[www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/166/report\\_display.asp](http://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.

#### **Weblogg-ed**

[www.weblogg-ed.com/](http://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](http://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 other parents can help guarantee their teens are safe when using social networking technologies.

### **Wired Safety.org: Blog Sites, Profile Sites, Diary Sites or Social Networking Sites**

[www.wiredsafety.org/internet101/blogs.html](http://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](http://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](http://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.