

Parents, let's keep young adolescents off of Facebook

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I would like to share with you a relatively new danger targeting the welfare of our children: Facebook. I wonder if you are aware of the risks it presents.

Facebook has infiltrated the lives of many of our school-aged children. I believe that there is absolutely no educational value in its use by young adolescents. From vast experience dealing with students who have been hurt by messages or posts on Facebook, I have found that kids prefer this medium to insult or bully a classmate.

It is easier to write words on a screen than engage in a verbal encounter. By using Facebook, kids feel less accountable for their actions because they don't see the result of their insults or attacks immediately. With a quick click, posting messages on Facebook also allows for a large audience to see what is posted. This can be attractive if you are trying to get your peers' attention or gain popularity. Kids often do not fully understand that their typed words can be so hurtfully permanent.

Facebook itself mandates that "you will not use Facebook if you are under the age of 13." In addition, it bans online bullying and harassment. But we all know that people us-

ing Facebook are not closely monitored for violating its policies. Many parents help their children sign up for Facebook, bypassing the official terms and conditions in place to protect our youngsters.

Parents can and should say no to permitting their children to create a Facebook account. Parents who let their under-aged children join Facebook are condoning their children's lying and breaking rules. What message does this send your child? If you ask me, it sends the message that lying to get what you want is acceptable.

Facebook is using our children's Facebook accounts to gather information (age, e-mail, likes and dislikes) that lets the company market products targeted to our children. Research shows that young people provide an alarming amount of personal information on Facebook. Online blogger Karlie MacBradshaw notes how Facebook sees your child as a valuable statistic; the company is only interested in your child's information for marketing purposes. By the time your child is 16, Facebook may know your child better than you ever will.

Think about how many teenagers and young adults have disqualified themselves as potential candidates for jobs by posting unsa-

very words or photos on Facebook. College admissions and employers routinely search Facebook to screen and reject applicants.

Do we not owe it to our children to take a stand to let them know that Facebook should not be such an important part of their lives? Didn't we, as young adolescents ourselves 20 or 30 or 40 years ago, have enough challenges growing up without the useless negativity that arises from adolescent trash-talking on Facebook? Are we not teaching our children the value of face-to-face personal relationships? There is so much to learn from non-verbal communication, seeing someone's reaction when we make a mistake and perhaps say something that we shouldn't.

As parents we all want our children to be accepted, but we have to be careful about how far we are willing to go to achieve this approval from others.

School administrators like me are wasting taxpayer dollars by spending our time in schools dealing with student issues that start outside of school on Facebook and trickle into school to disrupt the learning environment.

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