

## **What should you know about social networking?**

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## **What is the appeal of social networking services?**

Online social networking services (SNS) have come to stay. Facebook is said to have 800 million users, and it by no means is being used by teens only. Many would know Face, but there are hundreds of other interesting social networking services as well, and more are introduced weekly. What is the appeal? To put it simple, ease at communicating with one's friends and relatives. Some think that SNS is the best way to keep in touch. Social networking services, such as Twitter, can also be used effectively for teaching purposes.

## **Even if you already knew quite something about social networking, why should you reflect on the issue?**

Well, just like driving, only some are ok to drive. Probably you'd agree with that. A license and some level of understanding of the traffic rules and regulations are needed. Similarly, social networking services require a certain age and skill level for them to be used. Would you know what legally is the age limit for using Face?

Furthermore, 90% of Finns think of themselves as better drivers than what an average driver is. Only logically, this can not be true. With new ICT solutions, such as social networking, we and our kids may very easily overestimate our own web capabilities as well as our understanding of a SNS as a communication environment. And even if one had a deep understanding of and experience in social networking there is a need for caution for the security and safety of yourself as well as others, just like in traffic.

Children and parents may also have a very different idea of what privacy is -- what is to be made public and what is to be kept private. In sum, social networking services can be thought of as a chain saw. It is much more effective than a traditional handsaw, but using it also requires special caution.

## **If you and your family choose to use social networking services, ten pragmatic steps for making it a successful experience are:**

1. Create jointly and upfront rules for the internet use.
2. Research any service you plan to use.
3. Pay close attention particularly to its privacy settings.
4. Tune the privacy settings to fit with you.
5. Be cautious with what information or pictures of yourselves you upload into the service.
6. Be cautious with what information or pictures of others you upload into the service.
7. Choose carefully whom you would expect to be your 'friend'.
8. Decide how much time you want to spend in the service.

(And steps nine and ten are for parents.)

9. Monitor regularly what your kids upload or write into a service. 'Befriend' your own child.
10. Be ready and willing to delete your child from a social networking service, if he/she does not follow the rules you've jointly created.

Four questions you should ask about social networking (*Awake!*, Vol. 93, No. 2, pp. 3-9)

Awake! (Feb2012)	What should you know	What can you do	The bottom line
<p><b>How does social networking affect my privacy?</b></p>	<p>You may easily end-up telling too detailed information about yourself. Why? The services are built up to be engaging. In the internet, something intended as a joke may easily end-up being bullying. In the internet, people may fall into the pitfall of slander more easily than in real world. You don't want to be a victim of identity theft. Companies, and many others, will combine bits and pieces of information they find on you. They will know you better than you'd think.</p>	<p>Spend time to really understand the privacy settings. Do NOT stay with default settings (as some 90% people do) just because they are 'default.' Why? The default works for the good of the moneymakers, not necessarily for yours. Decide who can read/write into your page. Let only those you know and trust (not necessarily those you 'like') do it. Do NOT easily reveal your social security number, date of birth, address, telephone number, current location, travel plans, pictures, or even your opinions, interests and habits. Safeguard the privacy of others. Do not publish pictures of your friends without their permission.</p>	<p>Think in advance. Decide If you and your family wanted to utilize social networking systems and if so how. And still be careful.</p>
<p><b>How does social networking affect my time?</b></p>	<p>Social networking services make money out of your eyeballs. The more time you use, the more the provider makes. The more time you spend in social networking, the less time you have to give to more important things. People get easily hooked up. Some have ended up with anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, or even identity crisis.</p>	<p>Time is a commodity that you can't afford to waste. So why not set a budget for it? 1. Write down what is reasonable. 2. Track yourself for a month.</p>	<p>You have to know when to shut it down.</p>
<p><b>How does social networking affect my reputation?</b></p>	<p>What you put up into the web stays there (even if it weren't accessible for each and everyone). Please, note that the effect is long-range (and it does not fade away in a few days or within a week). It influences the jobs you may get. It may influence everything in your life.</p>	<p>Ask yourself the question: "Is this how I really want to be viewed?" Even if you thought of publishing just for a limited audience, think of it as potentially being read by anyone. Beware of not using bad language.</p>	<p>You "will reap exactly what you plant."</p>
<p><b>How does social networking affect my friendships?</b></p>	<p>It happens easily that one accepts an invitation to befriend without really knowing that other person, say, 'friends of friends' as 'my friends'. Sometimes you perhaps just do not want to hurt the person's feelings by ignoring the request. But 'knowing' is different than being an acquaintance. Friendships influence the way how you think and act more than you'd imagine.</p>	<p>Set up a 'friending policy.' Be selective. Know someone well or long time to befriend. Do not accept any strangers. If you find someone's pictures or status updates objectionable, delete that person. Be careful with parties announced at social media. Find out who's responsible for that party? Legally, there always someone who is responsible.</p>	<p>Dr. G.S. O'Keefe: "The best guideline is to only friend people you know and have a connection with offline."</p>