

There are many social media sites. The site used mainly by our students is Facebook.

What is Facebook? Facebook is an online social space where users can write about their likes and dislikes, along with a blurb about the sort of person they are. They can upload video clips and photos, write messages about how they are feeling and what they are doing and comment on other user's messages.

Comments can only be made and seen by friends if they set their security preferences well. The user adds 'friends' to his/her site and can delete or block 'friends'. 'Friends' are sometimes people who can be defined in the traditional way but often are 'people they know through others' or 'people who go to the same school' or 'people who request to be made a friend and who they don't know' (most concerning). There is a complex set of security settings that allows the site to be quite private but teenagers often overlook this. It is still possible for someone to 'send a message' to your teen from outside their site. A message is different from a comment. It is more like an email. A message can only be seen by the owner of the site. If the teenager doesn't know the messenger then they ignore them. If they do know them, (maybe it is an old friend from primary school), they may choose to add them to their list thereby inviting them to see their site.

Facebook provides teenagers with a fun, creative and safe space to display who they are and they can change this as they grow and read comments from family and friends. Staying connected to others is very important in a teenager's life and Facebook is one way they stay connected.

There are some potential dangers that you and your teenager need to know about and how to guard against them:

1. Set all profile options to 'Friends Only'
2. Choose a photo that doesn't have a provocative look.
3. Do not add anyone you do not know
4. Do not respond to any messages from Facebookers you don't know
5. Don't include personal details like phone numbers, etc.
6. Go through Friends list regularly and delete friends when you are not comfortable with their comments or status

Facebook is for all ages and it is a very good idea for parents to join and become a friend with their teenager.