Technology and Social Networking
Fact Sheet

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Technology has changed the way people interact, socialize, and network. With the rise in popularity of Internet social networking Web sites such as Facebook and MySpace, and blogs and photo sharing Web sites such as Photobucket and Xanga, people have made personal information more accessible. Youth have gained independence by creating profiles showing them as they want to be perceived and have the ability to restrict a parent or adult from gaining access to what they are putting out for people to see.

We often hear many bad things in the news about socializing over the Internet, such as identity theft or online predators. If the profiles are not used intelligently, this is a real threat. However, as adults and mentors, we can work with our youth and make them aware of information that should not be published, ways to set safety restrictions on their profiles, and ways to use the sites as fun networking and socializing tools.

These sites can also be used by our 4-H clubs or organizations to create profiles, groups, or blogs. Announcements can be posted, minutes can be distributed, and discussions can be started in efficient ways.

Points to Remember

- Be aware of the privacy policy of the Web site. Even though the text is lengthy, it is important to read and understand.
- Inform youth of what is and isn't appropriate to post on their profiles. It is possible to steal a person's identity with only two pieces of information (name and birth date). Many profiles give the option to post these, as well as phone numbers, addresses, schools, and pictures. Also, make sure youth have limited the access to their profile to only people that they know.
- Social networking sites can be used successfully for clubs or events when used intelligently.

Importance for Youth Development

- Social networking helps youth develop several life skills. These include responsibility, accountability, independence, relationship building, building a community, communication, identity, critical thinking, and social skills.
- Today's youth are building relationships with their peers in new and different ways. Much of this includes less time with face-to-face and spoken communication, and more with virtual contacts.
- Youth are using these sites to explore their personal identities. Never before have scrapbooks and journals been made public to such a wide and diverse audience.