

# Tips For Parents

## Keeping Tabs On Your Teens' Virtual Social Life

by Regina Lewis

(NAPSA)—These days, your teens' friends aren't just the kids hanging out in your kitchen and family room; they're hundreds of contacts on their "friend" and "buddy" lists.



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More than 50 million teens are online worldwide, and the average number of "friends" is 130. It's not unusual to have hundreds of friends and thousands of photos.

So how can you realistically keep up with your child's vast circle of friends and ongoing status and photo updates? Consider these tips:

**1. Become a "friend" online.** Just don't comment too much or embarrass your child. Remember, his or her friends can see what you write.

**2. Delegate your chores and have family fun doing tasks online.** Planning a family vacation? Looking for driving directions

with best gas prices? Assign the project to your cyber-savvy teen.

**3. Set rules and warn about dangers.** Make sure your teen knows what she's allowed to do on the computer.

**4. Keep communication lines open.** Let your teenagers know they can approach you with any questions or concerns about behaviors they encounter on the computer.

**5. Use technology to learn what your teens are doing online without looking over their shoulders.** Many kids prefer you take this route. One new tool called Safe Social sends parents an easy-to-read report card providing a 360-degree view of their child's social networking—what they're saying and doing and who their friends are.

**6. Watch their friends.** Predators, bullies and sex offenders often masquerade as friends. The Safe Social search engine helps unmask them.

**7. Focus on flagged language and photos.** The system's specialized search engines can also flag specific words that may come up in strings of posted

conversation—sex, drugs, alcohol, suicide and so on, and suggestive or violent language.

**8. Don't let things get out of control.** Teen and preteen online behavior can be unpredictable and have devastating consequences. Specialized search engines can archive posted conversations and all tagged photos of your child, including those posted by others.

**9. Don't discourage social networking, monitor it.** Overall, social networking is an integral part of many teenage lives and an opportunity for your kids to learn to express themselves in a creative and responsible fashion. It's too big a trend to ignore. You can embrace it with these new tools on your side.

**10. Learn more.** For more information, visit [www.safesocial.com](http://www.safesocial.com) and [www.reginalewis.com](http://www.reginalewis.com).

• *AOL Consumer Adviser Regina Lewis is a national TV and radio contributor and Internet trend expert. She knows the tips, tricks, secrets and shortcuts for making technology work for you.*