On Line Social Networks and Your Student
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Chances are, if you search for your student online you will probably find them on www.facebook.com or www.myspace.com. Of course, before you get too curious and begin “e-parenting”, there are a few things to know. Websites like Facebook, Myspace, Xanga, LiveJournal, and other blogs are social networking sites that can be great ways for students to keep in touch with one another, network with other students, and express themselves. However, it is becoming more frequent for students across the country to be confronted with some of the information and photos they have posted on the web. For some students it is costing them jobs, some have been arrested, while others have been stalked or harassed via the computer or in person.

Unfortunately, posting “funny” drunken pictures of oneself online has become a popular fad for college students throughout the country. As you might imagine, this can pose all sorts of problems for students. Online profiles may be the first or only impression that professors, school administrators, prospective employers, police, or other students get of an individual. Even if a student decided to remove those pictures at a later date, there is no telling how many people may have copied it, downloaded it, or printed it beforehand.

Another online concern is the written information that students display on their page. Students will often have too much of their personal information accessible online. On many of these pages there are spaces for them to fill out their email address, phone numbers, class schedules, birth date, home town, employer, and other personal information that will be displayed to anyone who stumbles across their page. Posing an additional problem are the messages that students send back and forth to each other on their pages that are visible for others to see. Professors have seen comments on students’ pages about how they were able to cheat in their class, while police have contacted students who have (believe it or not) openly discussed their level of involvement in illegal activity.

So, what can you do? Simply having a conversation with your student about it could go a long way! Most students create their profiles on these sites without thinking about any of the aforementioned consequences, so merely pointing out how some of the content on their page might be perceived by other people is very helpful. There are privacy settings on all of these sites that will allow users to restrict certain information as well as block their page from any visitors that they don’t know, so you can encourage them to enhance their security settings as well. A lot of students conceptualize these online social networks as a place that is just between them and their friends, and they are often surprised to hear that Mom, Dad, or even a CSU staff member has seen their page. Once they realize how many people are viewing their pages, students are typically quite willing to adjust the content and enhance their privacy settings. If your student’s site is managed properly (and if they allow you access to it), it can be a great way
for you to keep connected to them and get a glimpse of the good times and wonderful memories that they are creating here at Colorado State University!