

## **Consumer Reports WebWatch Cybercrime Prevention Project Fact Sheet #8: Staying Safe on Social Networks**

This is the eighth consumer fact sheet in the Consumer Reports WebWatch “Look Before You Click” campaign, supported by a grant from the New York State Attorney General’s office, to help educate New York consumers about Internet fraud.

Social networking Web sites such as MySpace and Facebook, where millions of minors post personal interests and contact information, are fertile hunting ground for child predators. Recently MySpace, the largest social networking site, owned by media giant News Corp., revealed that thousands of known predators were registered with the service. Several state attorneys general demanded names, citing many cases in which predators had exploited minors contacted through MySpace. The company turned over more than 7,000 names and closed those accounts.

Many of the leading social networking sites have taken steps to reduce this risk, but the danger still exists. In U.S. households surveyed by Consumer Reports, 13 percent of minors registered on MySpace were younger than the minimum age of 14, and 3 percent were under 10. And those were just the ones that parents knew about.

Here are six tips for parents to help protect children from risky situations online:

1. Supervise and discuss. There is no substitute for parental involvement, though the effectiveness of discussion depends on your child’s age and maturity. Some experts say children most vulnerable to online predators share characteristics with troubled children offline: Loneliness, isolation, lack of supervision and parental involvement.
2. Keep the family computer in an open area, where Internet behavior can be observed.
3. Keep track of your child's screen names and accounts, using parental controls supplied by the Internet service provider. Avoid provocative or controversial names.
4. Monitor the child's online posts, and use software that blocks inappropriate sites.
5. If you are helping your child build a Web site, make sure you are aware of privacy provisions when registering a domain name (for instance, purchasing a domain name such as [www.mydaughtercindyswebsite.com](http://www.mydaughtercindyswebsite.com)). Don’t make your home address and phone number accessible to the general public.
6. Discuss privacy with your children. Help them understand that photographs and video they make public online, will remain public and searchable for a long time.

For more information on privacy and protecting your children online, bookmark [Consumer Reports WebWatch](#).