Are you a Facebook father?

http://www.fathers.com/content/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=819&Itemid=62

Is your child on Facebook? Are you? Many dads have expressed concern about social networking sites because they can be an open door for children to make bad decisions and perhaps even have dangerous online interactions with others. Those are legitimate concerns, and it's important to be involved so you can watch for areas where your child might need help or protection.

But those sites can also be great tools to help you gain insight into your child's interests and connect with him or her in deeper ways. For 21st century dads, here are some safety guidelines, collected from several sources. You may have heard some of these ideas before, but you and your family could probably benefit from a reminder:

- You and your child's mother should have access to all your child's pages and passwords.
- You should customize your child's profiles and settings to make sure what they're doing is safe in terms of privacy, visibility and so on.
- All e-mails related to your child's activity should come to your family's home e-mail address—or else you keep close tabs on your child's e-mail account.
- You have your own Facebook page and have your children keep you as an active "friend."
- Kids may not have any "online only" friends. They may not accept strangers as friends or chat with strangers.
- Children may not share personal information of any kind—including pictures—without permission from a parent.
- They should tell a parent immediately if they see or experience something that makes them uncomfortable—even if it comes from people they know. (Talk about "cyber-bullying.) Then, of course, you will take action to prevent that from happening again, even if it means reporting it.
- If a child steps outside these boundaries, he loses access to his account until he earns back his parents' trust.

Even if you have doubts or questions about one or two of the above ideas, that's all the more reason to discuss them with your kids and their mother. But don't just let things go on and then be surprised one day when you discover something that shocks you. It's vital that you be regularly involved here.

You can make social networking websites a teaching opportunity. Talk with your child about topics like:

- the potential future ramifications of his actions, and being aware of how he presents himself. Who might find and view his Facebook page, and is that how he wants to be regarded? Would he want a college admissions counselor or future employer seeing his page?

- personal boundaries, and the tendency people have to be more relaxed in how they present themselves online in comparison to how they relate in person.

- how easy it is to take things the wrong way or hurt people when communicating through e-mail or texting.

- inappropriate pictures and "sexting." Do not by shy. Build confidence in your children to tell their friends they will not engage in any viewing or discussion of such pictures or messages. **Learn more about this**.

Also, revisit your family's general rules about Internet use:

- Set and enforce a limit for the time they can be online.
- Make sure computers are placed in a common area of the house, in easy view, and require that doors stay open.
- Set up parental controls to monitor sites being visited and amount of time spent - and regularly check on the report.
- Just for fun (and discovery), Google the names of everyone in your family to see what comes up.
- Teach your children how to respond if they encounter something graphic or offensive. For example, have them immediately turn off the power to the monitor—so they don't click anything and risk being exposed to more offensive material—then get a parent immediately.

See **our links** to more resources to **help you with Facebook**, the Internet, and other media.

While you're on Facebook, look us up and **join the *Championship Fathering* cause**.

ACTION POINTS

- Spend time yourself on the websites that your child enjoys.
- If your younger child spends time on networking sites like Webkinz and Club Penguin, watch what he does there and start implementing the safety guidelines mentioned above.
- Be intentional about doing other things with your child that she enjoys, so you can build a relationship that encourages trust and open communication. She'll be more likely to come to you if she encounters something inappropriate or offensive, without feeling like she'll get in trouble for doing it.
- Know your child. Would banning him from a site only motivate him to spend more time there? Or would it be better to educate him or her on how to keep safe in the online world?
- Consider planning an upcoming day—maybe a Saturday—with no "screen time" at all for your family: no TV, computer, video games, etc. (That goes for you, too!) Plan other fun activities instead