

A Quick Guide to Social Networks

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter can help parents connect with their children, learn how their children communicate with friends and stay in touch with other adults.

Facebook — <http://www.facebook.com>

Users communicate with friends, family and coworkers on Facebook through “status updates” as well as comments, photos, chats, polls, notes, groups and event invitations. When one user invites another user to make a friend connection and that invitation is accepted, the two users are connected. Posts of friend activities are displayed through a “News Feed” on your main page and let you know what people are sharing and doing.

Creating a page on Facebook is easy. Just go to facebook.com, provide information in the form at the right side of the screen and click “Sign Up.”

Once you’ve filled out some profile information about yourself, you can search for people you know that also have Facebook accounts. Under the “Friends” menu at the top of the screen, select “Find Friends.” On this page you can import your contacts from your existing web-based email account or search for people by name. To make a friend connection, an invitation must be made and accepted. If the invited user does not accept your friend request, you will not see their online activity in your News Feed.

Once you complete your profile and connect with friends, you can use Facebook to:

- Share news, information or anything else you find interesting
- Post pictures
- Invite friends to events
- Post messages on your friends’ profiles
- Send private messages to connected friends

The News Feed on the Facebook Home page is made up of many notifications of your friends’ activities. The most common is the Status Update—a description of what your friends are doing or thinking. To make your own Status Update, just write something in the “What’s on your mind?” box at the top of the News Feed and click the “Share” button. You can also use this function to share links, photos, videos and event information.

Twitter – <http://www.twitter.com>

Twitter is designed to be an on-the-go communications tool that lets you read and write messages of up to 140 characters. Like Facebook, parents can use Twitter to build an online relationship with their children and keep communication going during the school/work day or when family members are separated by busy schedules. The difference is that, because it is made up of shorter messages, Twitter allows “followers” to share thoughts quicker and more frequently through the day. These short messages, also referred to as “tweets,” can be used for quick reminders, re-caps or “Hey by the way...” messages.

To create a Twitter account, go to twitter.com and click the green button that says, “Sign up now” then follow the step-by-step instructions.

Once you’ve set up your account, you can click on the “Find People” link at the top of the Twitter Home page to search for friends by name, email or other social network site. Unlike Facebook, you do not need a users’ permission to follow their updates. When you find someone you know, click the “Follow” button on their page below their name. Your Home page will include updates that they post. Although approval is not required, a user can block someone from following them if that user doesn’t want a specific person to see his/her tweets.

Social Media Success

There are dozens of online social media websites out there, so be sure to talk with your children and find out which sites they like to use. Ask your children how they spend time on these sites, how often they check their friends’ updates and how often write their own. Online socializing is not a substitute for offline face-to-face time, but it can be another way for you to stay in touch and be involved in your child’s life.

Want more information? We can help. Visit www.parentupvt.org or dial 211 for tools and resources.