

Navigating Facebook: A Guide for Parents

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By Alicia Eames

Time magazine recently named Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, [2010 Person of the Year](#), noting some staggering statistics. "One out of every dozen people on the planet has a Facebook account. They speak 75 languages and collectively lavish more than 700 billion minutes on Facebook every month. Last month the site accounted for 1 out of 4 American page views. Its membership is currently growing at a rate of about 700,000 people a day."

As an educator, chances are that parents have asked you about Facebook. They may want to know where to go to learn more, and the conversations they need to share with their teens. If so, introduce them to a (free) timely online tool for navigating this service that allows users to chat, share photos, join causes, make friends, socialize, collaborate, and more.

[A Parents' Guide to Facebook](#), by Anne Collier and Larry Magid, the Co-Directors of [ConnectSafely.org](#), is a 34-page resource available online as a printable PDF file. It begins with an introduction to Facebook's features and uses, addressing topics such as "How do we parent Facebook users?" and "Digital footprints & good reputations," along with sensible suggestions. For example, "...the No. 1 safety tip is 'Talk with your child.'"

While Facebook is designed for users aged 13 and older, there's nothing to stop younger children from side-stepping that guideline with a few simple, albeit dishonest, clicks of the mouse. The authors note, "A July 2010 survey found that 37% of U.S. 10-to-12-year olds were on Facebook, which means that every one of these children had to lie about their age to get on the service."

That eye-opening statistic clearly demonstrates the importance of communication, reminding parents (and other adults) of the need for conversations about civic responsibility and online security. Throughout the guide, key issues and main ideas are clearly summarized in highlighted blue boxes. Consider using these to jumpstart discussions among children, teens, parents, and colleagues.

The second half of the *Guide* takes readers step-by-step through the network's settings with an eye toward "safety, privacy and reputation." Certain features are already in place on the Facebook site to protect minors, such as limiting "Everyone" to mean only "Friends, Friends of Friends and people in any verified school or work networks," but basic life lessons, such as choosing friends wisely and being mindful of the power of words, should be applied online too. While Facebook provides lots of opportunities for

sharing personal information and opinions, it also allows users to keep them private. It's all in knowing how to set privacy settings so that posted items have a limited audience. An interactive feature, "[Recommended Facebook Privacy Settings for Teens](#)," is available at [ConnectSafely.org](#) to help parents and teens choose the privacy levels that suit them best.

Finally, the authors acknowledge the dynamic nature of Facebook, noting that their guide uses "the latest available information at time of publication (fall 2010)," and are currently at work on a revision. Consider linking to this useful guide from your school website or library or classroom page.

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