http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/11/02/kids.social.networks/index.html

# Social networks and kids: How young is too young?

**By Doug Gross**, CNN
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A growing number of children are flouting minimum-age requirements on social-networking sites such as Facebook.

**STORY HIGHLIGHTS**

- Facebook, MySpace require users to be 13, but the sites can't really enforce it
- Study found 38 percent of kids ages 12 to 14 have online profiles
- One Georgia parent allows kids to use networking sites, but with rules, supervision
- Expert: Kids' social networking use is "pretty harmless"

**(CNN)** -- Status updates, photo tagging and FarmVille aren't just for adults or even teenagers anymore.

Researchers say a growing number of children are flouting age requirements on sites such as Facebook and MySpace, or using social-networking sites designed just for them.

Facebook and MySpace require users to be at least 13. But they have no practical way to verify ages, and many young users pretend to be older when signing up.

Some scientists worry that pre-adolescent use of the sites, which some therapists have linked to Internet addiction among adults, could be damaging to children's relationships and brains.

But many other experts say there's not any solid research to back that up and that most children seem to use social-media sites in moderation, and in positive ways.

"For the most part, although there's so much press about all the bad things they're doing, much of what they do on these sites is stuff they would be doing anyway," said Kaveri Subrahmanyam, a professor of psychology at California State University-Los Angeles.
In two surveys reported this year by Pew Internet Research -- of 700 and 935 teens, respectively -- 38 percent of respondents ages 12 to 14 said they had an online profile of some sort.

Sixty-one percent of those in the study, ages 12 to 17, said they use social-networking sites to send messages to friends, and 42 percent said they do so every day.

The data in the study was from 2006, so it's not a stretch to assume those numbers are higher this year. Research on younger children is limited, but anecdotal evidence shows that many of them are also logging on.

CNN iReport: How much do you let your kids reveal on social networking sites?

"Of course they are," said Amanda Lenhart, a senior researcher at Pew and one of the report's authors. "They're using them because that's where their social world is. Because there's no effective way to age-verify ... children very quickly realize, 'I just say I'm 14 years old, and they'll let me use this.' "

Marc Bigbie, a software salesman who lives near Savannah, Georgia, said he has three children -- 14, 12 and 11 -- who all have accounts on at least one social-networking site.

His oldest daughter, then 11, was the first in the family to create an account, on MySpace. And it was without her parents' permission.

"It was kind of a negative thing at first," he said. "We kind of took it away from her. But, finally, we said, 'You can have it, but we need the password so we can be on there at any time.' "

Since then, all three of the kids have gotten Facebook accounts, with their parents even agreeing to fudge their ages.

Bigbie said he makes sure his children's accounts are set to provide as little personal information as possible, and they allow their activity to be seen only by confirmed friends. He and his wife monitor the pages to make sure they know the friends that their children have added.

He said the oldest daughter is the only one who uses the account almost every day, while the younger children log on briefly every now and then.

In the past couple of years, some scientists have voiced concerns that children are spending too much on these sites and that such online socializing could have lasting negative effects as they mature.

"My fear is that these technologies are infantilizing the brain into the state of small children who are attracted by buzzing noises and bright lights, who have a small attention span and who live for the moment," Susan Greenfield, an Oxford University neurocientist and director of Britain's Royal Institution, told London's Daily Mail in February.

"I often wonder whether real conversation in real time may eventually give way to these sanitized and easier [online] screen dialogues," she said.

Other scientists criticized Greenfield's comments, calling them speculation, not science.

Subrahmaynam said a study of high school students showed that in most cases, the people they interact with most often online are people they also socialize with in person.

Children today have spent their whole lives on computers, and their brains are better adapted than those of adults to integrate online activities with their offline lives, she said.

"You'll always have the small minority of kids who are not using it appropriately," she said. "I do think you're going to have a few people that are doing things that kids probably couldn't do with telephones a generation ago.

"But we don't want to get swept away by the general fear. It's here, and it's pretty harmless.
"
Many parents also worry that younger users of social sites could be targets for online predators. While there are some concerns that kids aren't mature enough to make good decisions about their privacy, Subrahmaynam and Lenhart said most are savvy enough by their early teens to know what, and who, to avoid. Younger children, they say, need more parental supervision.

Alternately, a growing number of networking sites are geared specifically toward younger users. Sites such as Disney's Club Penguin -- mainly a game site, but with limited social functions -- WebKinz and Whyville feature more restricted and supervised networking.

Such kids-oriented sites are "sort of a training ground" for future use of mainstream social networks, Lenhart said.

Children as young as 5 have accounts at KidSwirl, a kids' social-networking site patterned loosely on Facebook, said creator Toby Clark.

Clark said the average user spends about five minutes on the site per visit -- far less than Facebook's average of more than 20 minutes.

He said he limits the amount of time his two children, 9 and 6, spend on the site, but that any parent who bans their children from such sites isn't facing the facts.

"The reality is that we're a technology-driven generation," said Clark, who launched the site in February and said it has about 10,000 users. "That's not going to change."

So what long-term effect will social networking have on children? Scientists say it may be hard to know for sure.

"We've lost the control group," Subrahmanyam said. "How do you find a group of kids that are not using the computer?"

https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/03/facebook-children-join-social-network

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# Facebook patent reveals plans for children to join the social network

The company has designs for a system that allows children younger than 13 to be supervised by parents, according to a new patent

Facebook is working on a way to allow children under 13 years old join the social network.

The company has designs for a system that allows children younger than 13 to be supervised by parents, according to a new patent, to comply with the US Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (Coppa), which prohibits children under 13 from using online services that collect data without explicit "verifiable parental consent".

Facebook currently bans users under 13 from joining the social network.

"Child safety advocates, policymakers and companies have discussed how best to help parents keep their kids safe online," said a Facebook spokesperson in a statement sent to the Guardian. "Like any responsible company, we looked at ways to tackle this issue, but a patent application based on two-year-old research is not a predictor of future work in this area."

**Parental controls and authorization**

The patent application filed in November 2012 was published last week by the US Patent Office describing a system that allows parents to authorize and supervise Facebook accounts for children.

The parent would first have to verify their own identity, followed by their relationship with the child before allowing the creation of a child's account. Parents would then have parental controls tools to restrict access to certain content, friends and third-party applications such as Facebook games Farmville and Candy Crush.

Child accounts would also have strict privacy controls privacy and permissions allowing parents to approve certain actions.

A system proving the identity of a parent and their consent for children under 13 to join any service that collects data would likely have to be approved by the US Federal Trade Commission, which enforces Coppa.

Access to children's data and their access to online services is governed under the Data Protection Act in the UK, with extra guidance from the UK data protection watchdog the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). ICO is currently promoting the education of information rights to children to help them decide what is appropriate and safe to share online.

Any new system to allow preteens to join a service like Facebook would need to meet ICO guidelines.

While Facebook currently prohibits children under 13 from joining the service, many children already join and use Facebook as verifying a person's age is difficult online, especially for those without official government-issued identity documents or other age-related identities.

"The truth of the matter is that children are, in fact, now on Facebook, with or without parental oversight. They won't stop getting on there, regardless of whether or not Facebook is kept from straightforwardly accepting preteen members," explained Lisa Vaas from security company Sophos in a blog post.

Facebook actively attempts to remove underage children, with around 800,000 preteens removed from the service through a tiered screening process in 2012 alone, according to data from Consumer Reports, which also estimated that there were still 5.6 million underage accounts on Facebook, many created with the help of parents.

Facebook said it has nothing to announce regarding allowing those under the age of 13 to use the social network and that the patent was in response to research being conducted in the area but is not indicative of future work.

http://www.pcworld.com/article/228348/kids_under_13_are_already_allowed_on_facebook.html

# Kids Under 13 are Already Allowed on Facebook

By Tony Bradley

PCWorld | May 21, 2011 6:48 AM PT

Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg has sparked a minor controversy by suggesting that children under 13 should be allowed to join social networking sites. The thing is, there is nothing stopping Facebook from allowing children to join now...except Facebook.

As it stands, the Facebook terms of service dictate that members be at least 13 years old to set up an account. However, a recent Consumer Reports survey indicates that as many as 7.5 million Facebook users are under 13, and two-thirds of those kids are under 10. Either they, or their parents, simply lied about their age to set up the account.



The only thing stopping kids from joining Facebook is FacebookAnd, why not? Facebook is an awesome platform for kids to stay in touch with friends, grandparents, or cousins that live across the country. Sure, there are a myriad of other ways--email, instant messaging, video chat, etc.--to accomplish the same thing, but Facebook is different. Rather than having to initiate one on one communication, Facebook lets kids simply share what is going on in their lives so that friends and relatives can all be connected and involved.

Zuckerberg seemed to imply that the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) is preventing Facebook from allowing children to join, and suggested that Facebook might one day take on the challenge of altering or repealing that legislation to change the rules. But, COPPA doesn't prevent Facebook from allowing children to join, it just requires a little extra effort from Facebook.
COPPA puts protections in place that require a site operator to obtain verifiable parental consent before collecting, using, or disclosing any personal information related to the child. It doesn't ban such activity. It just means that Facebook would have to make a reasonable effort to ensure that a parent or guardian is aware that the child is joining Facebook, and that the parent or guardian grants permission for information to be collected and shared.

I know that other sites manage to do this because I have had to give my permission time and again for my kids to join sites like Neopets, or Club Penguin, or Wizard101. All Facebook has to do is add a step that sends a consent verification e-mail to a parent or guardian when someone under 13 sets up an account. What's the big deal?

Not only do I believe that COPPA doesn't get in the way of allowing children on Facebook, and that Facebook should allow accounts for children under 13, but I think COPPA doesn't really go far enough and that such parental consent should be required until age 16.

To let kids on, though, Facebook should develop some additional protection. Implementing a privacy by default model would be a great start. But, Facebook should also provide controls so that only parents can change privacy settings, or accept friend requests on accounts for minors, or something to that effect.

In the end, Facebook is far less shady than a lot of other online destinations that kids can get to just fine without parental consent. As far as I'm concerned, I would rather have my kid safely entrenched in Facebook that out wandering the "back alleys" of the Web.

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http://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/advice/should-your-child-have-a-social-media-account/

# Should Your Child Have a Social Media Account?

Kids are focused on photos, fans, and followers—like it or not.

By Marisa Cohen from Parents Magazine

When Audrey Slater's daughter (we'll call her Katie) was in third grade, she picked up her mom's phone one day and discovered Instagram. It was love at first sight. "She begged me to let her get her own account," recalls Slater, of Brooklyn. She resisted at first but finally gave in, and last year at age 9 Katie began posting silly selfies, videos of herself doing cartwheels, and pictures of her dog. "It's all very age-appropriate and sweet, but I do have to keep a constant eye on her," says Slater.

At ever-younger ages, kids are asking for their own YouTube channel, Instagram account, or even to use Snapchat. Before you say yes, here are some issues to consider.

**Decide Whether She's Ready**

Technically, we shouldn't even be having this discussion. According to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, it's illegal for commercial websites and apps to allow children under age 13 to open an online account without verifiable parental consent. "The law was created to keep companies from collecting data about kids and marketing to them," says Stephen Balkam, the founder and CEO of the nonprofit Family Online Safety Institute. Still, most children are savvy enough to get around this rule by using a parent's e-mail and a fake birth date, often with permission.

Besides the legal issues, however, there are the concerns about maturity. "At ages 7 to 11, children are still thinking very concretely, and they haven't yet developed the ability to consider hypothetical situations," explains Lisa Strohman, Ph.D., founder and director of the Technology Wellness Center and coauthor of *Unplug: Raising Kids in a Technology Addicted World*. "So an 8-year-old girl posting a video about how to do her hair is just thinking, 'My friends will see this and it will be great!' She can't take that next step and think about who else might watch that video and write mean comments or even repost it and use it to sell hair products."

Still, it's hard to generalize about the best age to start. "Some kids may be ready to handle social media under the legal age of 13, but most probably can't," adds *Parents* advisor Michael Rich, M.D., director of the Center on Media and Child Health at Boston Children's Hospital. "You are the best judge of your child. Ask: Can she use it in ways that are healthy and respectful of others?"

**Set the Ground Rules**

When you do decide to let your kid make his first foray into social media, approach it as if you're taking a new swimmer to the adult pool: Go in together at first, and keep a watchful eye on him as he finds his way. Dr. Rich recommends that you join the site yourself (if you're not on it already) and become familiar with the safety issues and its potential uses before allowing your child to jump in.

Next, make sure you have full access to your child's account by learning his username and password, and by following him with your own account. "Not only do I follow Katie on Instagram, but so do my husband and sister," says Slater. "I also go through her list of followers every couple of weeks to make sure they are all people she knows in real life." (If they're not, Slater logs in and blocks them.)

If your child posts on YouTube, you can ask him to make all his videos "unlisted," meaning they can only be viewed by people who use a link that he sends them. If they're posted as "public," remind him that anyone can view and post nasty or inappropriate comments. Another huge safety issue to keep in mind is geotagging (when a photo is stamped with the location where it was taken): Before you let your kid post, go to the settings on his phone and turn "location services" off.

Also, be certain that he knows he can talk to you about anything bad or weird that happens— whether another kid starts bullying him or someone he doesn't know tries to contact him or ask for personal information. "It's a conversation you have to begin before you give him the device or let him join the site, and you must keep the discussion going," says Balkam. Lay down the rules for using technology from the beginning (when and how he's allowed to use it and specific punishments if he breaks the rules).

And as difficult as it will be for your big kid to understand that his actions today can reverberate in the future (such as when he applies for college or a job), stress the "Grandma Rule," says Dr. Rich. "Never post or 'snap' anything that you wouldn't want your grandma to see."

**Help Her Get a Grip on "Likes"**

As any adult who's ever posted on social media knows, it's easy to become preoccupied with how many likes your photo or joke gets, and even the youngest kids are not immune to measuring their selfworth this way. I'll confess that my daughter, Molly, is constantly checking how many followers she has on her Instagram fan page for the Broadway musical *Hamilton* (I allowed her to join at age 11). But the joy she gets from posting videos, trivia, and photos and connecting with fans who share her passion has made it a positive experience.

However, experts caution that most social media doesn't revolve around musical passions and deep thoughts but focuses on photos and videos that put the emphasis on looks. "Constantly viewing images that feature appearance, popularity, and even 'sexiness' pushes a dangerous message, especially to young girls," says Michele Borba, Ed.D., author of *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*. "They can buy into the view that what I look like is more important than who I am." To keep your child's image from sliding too far into the "look how pretty I am" lane, encourage her to post about books she likes, causes she's interested in, and positive messages that she'd like to share.

Right now, Molly seems content with posting pictures and lyrics from her favorite show (with occasional shots of cute animals on her personal account). But if her social-media excursion ever gets in the way of her schoolwork or she starts posting inappropriate pictures, I'll know. After all, I am one of her biggest followers, online and in real life.