

Raising kids was so much easier for my parents. Today advances in technology and subsequent changes in how teens communicate warrant more supervision from parents. Good teens can easily make poor choices that can lead to serious consequences. Parents need to be aware of their kids on line behavior and teach them how to be good cyber-citizens. This is a story about a family with two children who are finding their way in the cyber-world.

When my elementary aged daughter Kelly, and middle school son Doug asked for Facebook accounts my wife and I agreed with the understanding that we would have access to their Facebook at all times. A few weeks ago I was checking my daughter's account when I found that she and a friend were posting "mean" comments about their friend Stacie. I was surprised and disappointed to see this. After I took some time to gather my thoughts Kelly and I looked at her Facebook together. I asked her how she would feel if someone said these things about her and what other people could think about her for posting these comments. Kelley understood that this lapse in judgment would likely have negative consequences for her friendship as well as her own reputation.

Often time teens don't think about the potential consequences of their actions before they post comments. Kelly was upset with her friend and impulsively made some remarks that were inappropriate. She did this through a very public venue making damage control a little more complicated. When teens communicate through text messages or on line, they have little control over the information once it leaves their hands. Often time messages/pictures that were intended to be private are forwarded to others. On Facebook a person can put some restrictions on their account through their privacy settings however, even then anyone accepted as a friend can see what is posted.

Kelly's solution was to delete the post which was a good first step, however; I knew we needed to take things a step further. I contacted Stacie's parents to make them aware of the situation and to get their permission to have Kelly come and apologize for her poor choice. Stacie's parents were in favor of this. Kelly on the other hand was very apprehensive. Holding kids accountable for their poor choices is not a pleasant experience. I was uncomfortable and feeling embarrassed. Kelly was tearful and not wanting to face the situation. However; we both knew this was the right thing to do and Kelly was prepared to tell her friend what she wrote and apologize.

Judgment day came. We visited the family. Kelly shared what she did and apologized. Stacie was hurt and needed some time to think it over before she could forgive Kelly. The next day at school the girls visited some more. Stacie forgave Kelly and they played together at recess. This was an ideal outcome for Kelly. She learned a valuable lesson and we moved on. Things don't always work out so well.

Please consider the following when monitoring your teens on line behavior. Your teen will not appreciate your commitment to doing this. He or she may say things like, "That's an invasion of my privacy." or "Don't you trust me?" Parents shouldn't get

caught up in this argument. Simply say, I love you too much to argue. If you would like to have this privilege I will need to have your user name and password. State up front that you will be monitoring his/her activity. Facebook is a public forum where many will see what is posted on line. Parents need to monitor teen's activity to insure that the teen is making good choices in the pictures he/she posts, language he/she uses and information he/she shares. Kelly was very lucky to have parents keeping an eye on her on line behavior. Are your kids that lucky?