A PROGRAM AND SERVICE OF
THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC RISK RETENTION GROUP, INC.

# VIRTUS®Online

**Toolbox**    **My Diocese**

## Toolbox

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Training

Acronyms and Other Internet Shorthand

What is VIRTUS®?

VIRTUS *Online*

Protecting Children

USCCB Current Resources

**Update My Account**

Contact My Coordinator

My Local Coordinator

My Report

### 🖨 Technology Safety

Learning the details about how the social networking sites that are popular with teens and young people work is becoming "required" education for responsible adults. Learning about the positive aspects of the sites and the opportunities they provide for communication, growth, and development of social skills is only one aspect of that education. Parents also have to learn the risks of participating in this type of online communication. In addition to educating themselves, they must teach their children about the sites and the risks involved with participating.

In addition to screening information for the site before posting it in order to assure that there is no personal information or identifying information on the site, parents need to pay particular attention to details in photographs that could provide a predator with clues about where the teen lives, goes to school, or works. They also need to talk honestly and openly with their young people about the risks of expressing emotions online. Responsible adults have probably already discouraged children from communicating with strangers online. However, you, and they, may not realize that the thoughts, feelings, and ideas that they share through online journals or poetry posted on their social networking site can be accessed by anyone on the Internet. This means that predators can and do read their private communications—even when they are marked private. Predators use this information to target specific children or young people as possible victims. Social networking sites are a great source of information for predators. Make sure children and young people are fully aware of the risks and dangers attached to putting information on these sites and using them for communication with their friends.

An essential part of Internet education and the "house rules" about using the Internet is consistent reinforcement of a very important message. "Never agree to meet in person with someone you met on the Internet." In a cyber communication, strangers can become like "friends" rather quickly. They have the same interests. They seem really nice. They seem to really care about the young person and what is happening in his or her life. Young people have trouble seeing that these people are still strangers. They are not people known by the family or the young person. Remind your teens and young people that those they meet online are strangers and they would never willingly go off with a stranger in any other venue. Online conversation does not make this person less of a stranger.

Eliminating social networking sites from a child's life is an unrealistic expectation. As caring adults it is more important than ever to understand these sites and communicate with young people about the benefits, risks, and dangers of this form of communication.

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**Other articles by this author:**

The Devastating Effects of Verbal Abuse

Creating a Safe Christmas Celebration

Helping Young People Cope

Playground Safety

Common concerns about investigations

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