



Subject: Assuring a Safe Environment for Student Internet Use

▪ **Internet Safety** sites:

www.netsmartz.org – Fantastic site with many links with information for parents and students

www.netlingo.com – NetLingo – the Internet Dictionary. Want to know what all those letters/acronyms are on your kids text message/IM screen? This is a must see site for all parents.

www.inobtr.org - Internet Safety for kids, parents, and educators.

Technological and communications advances pose new challenges to parents today in their efforts to keep their children safe. Although the Internet can be a tremendous resource for information, it can also be a dangerous place that puts young people at risk. As you may have heard or read in recent news features, the various social networking websites that exist pose a special challenge.

Be aware that if your children have a profile on one of these social networking sites, the information they post is out on the World Wide Web for anyone to see. Students frequently share more personal information than they should, including pictures of themselves and others, what school they attend, where they live or work, and when and where they will be participating in athletic or social events. Strangers can misuse these facts. As Los Angeles County Sheriff Lieutenant Rocky Costa, project director of the Southern California High Tech Task Force, explained in a December 19, 2005, article in the *Los Angeles Times*, “The biggest group using MySpace is 13 to 25 . . . but they're not the only folks in there. Police are accessing it, parents are accessing it, and so are the predators and pedophiles. We're all there.”

While many messages on the networking sites are age appropriate, many are profane, demeaning or of a sexually explicit nature. Because these messages are recorded in the public domain, they pose a potential threat to all users. Even messages that are innocent when standing alone can become objectionable when seen in the context of profane and sexually explicit language and pictures. They then reflect poorly on the character of the user and any organization to which the user belongs, like the family, the school and the Church.

MySpace.com members create personal profiles online to communicate with each other in a bulletin board format. Xanga.com has a similar arrangement. Messages are posted to members and anyone may reply, with their postings open for the public to read, whether or not they are registered members. You have to be at least 14 years old to register for MySpace.com and at least 13 years old for Xanga.com. You must be 18 to be eligible for certain additional services. Our information suggests that students under these ages have registered as members and receive all services.

Talk to your children and investigate their use of Internet networking sites, including MySpace.com. For example, you can inspect MySpace.com by logging onto the site and conducting a search by entering your children's email addresses, or by going to "groups" and conducting a search by name of the school or any other organization to which your children belong. If you have children who are under the eligible registration or full service ages, you have an obligation to shut down or modify their use for many reasons, one of which is that they will have lied about their ages when they registered. Instructions on how to shut down a site are attached.

A form letter addressed to MySpace.com – the most popular site – is provided for you to use to request that your child's site be taken down and to report offensive material. You can also contact MySpace.com by email by clicking on the "FAQ" on the site's home page to find the appropriate contact for the subject you wish to address. (The enclosed form letter can be adapted for other networking sites.) The school also reserves the right to shut down all sites that refer to the school even if parents do not pursue the matter.

General information and guidance about children's online use, is available at the Federal Trade Commission's "Kidz Privacy" website:
<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/edcams/kidzprivacy/index.htm>. You can keep your children safe by:

1. Becoming educated on the matter.
2. Getting rid of email accounts for your elementary and middle school children. Limiting personal email accounts to high school or later. Letting younger students use your family email address to talk with relatives and approved friends.
3. Putting passwords on all your computers and changing the password frequently.
4. Making sure you have firewalls and software loaded to restrict the sites your children can visit on the computer. Software such as Spectorsoft records and reports what is said and posted online. Information about internet filtering and monitoring software is available at Software4parents.com.
5. Putting the computer in a room where it is in plain sight of all adults.
6. Teaching your children how to report and deal with intrusive emails and telephone calls.

MySpace.com Account Cancellation Instructions

1. Have the student log into his or her MySpace.com account.
2. On the first screen you will see the student's profile. There will be a box on the left hand side of your screen with the following options:
 - a. **View Profile**
 - b. **Edit Profile**
 - c. **Upload/Change Picture**
 - d. **Account Settings**

e. **Safe Mode**

Select **Edit Profile**.

3. This will take you to a new page; the new page will have a box on the left hand side entitled: **My Account Settings**. Above that box there are three options:
 - a. **View My Profile**
 - b. **Edit My Profile**
 - c. **Cancel My Account**.

Select **Cancel My Account**.

4. This will take you to another page that simply wants to confirm your selection. There will be a box that is entitled: **Confirm Cancel Account**. Inside the box are two options: **Keep My Account** and **Cancel My Account**. Select **Cancel My Account**. This will permanently delete the account from the MySpace.com website.

Information on how to delete an account from Xanga.com can be found here: <http://www.xanga.com/private/sitestatus.aspx>.

Facebook is a more restricted Internet networking service that provides access only to students who have a valid high school or a college-affiliated email address. On its face, Facebook does not suffer from the obvious public exposure problems of MySpace.com or Xanga.

SAMPLE LETTER FOR PARENTS TO SEND TO MYSPACE.COM OR XANGA.COM

[Date]

MySpace.com
6060 Center Drive, Ste. 300
Los Angeles, CA 90045

[Xanga.com
parents@xanga.com]

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am the parent of a MySpace.com [Xanga.com] user, and am writing to MySpace.com [Xanga.com] to notify you of offensive material posted on the MySpace.com [Xanga.com] website (the "Material"). The Material is located here: [**describe the location of the offensive material (preferably with the URL – the address that starts with <http://www> near the top of the webpage)**]. The posting of this Material violates Paragraph 5 of the MySpace.com Terms of Use Agreement and should be removed. [The posting of this Material violates Xanga.com's Terms of Use on Member Conduct and Personal Information.]

[Use this paragraph if applicable.] MySpace.com should also be aware that content on the following location **[describe the location by URL]** has been posted by a user under the age of 14, in violation of Paragraph 1 of the Terms of Use Agreement. [Xanga.com should also be aware that content on the following location **[describe the location by URL]** has been posted by a user under the age of 13, in violation of your Terms of Use.

Please be advised that if this Material is not removed, I shall require my child to terminate his/her account with MySpace.com [Xanga.com]. A number of other parents in my community are also aware of this situation, and I shall encourage them to take steps to cancel their children's accounts, if the offensive and impermissible material remains. We believe and hope that MySpace.com [Xanga.com], as a company that promotes friendship and positive relationships among its users, will not continue to allow offensive or impermissible material to remain accessible.

I urge MySpace.com [Xanga.com] to take appropriate action at its earliest convenience to ensure that it remains a place where users can continue to share interesting, enjoyable, and positive interactions, and where parents feel comfortable allowing their children to spend time.

Sincerely,