

MEMO TO ALL PARENTS OF ADOLESCENTS:
IT'S TIME TO CREATE YOUR OWN MYSPACE PAGE

Short Report 2006-02

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In June 2006, I collected data from 267 pairs of teens and parents in the Los Angeles area. Parents and teens were asked questions concerning perceptions, attitudes and behaviors concerning MySpace. This report examines the impact of parents having a MySpace presence. Further information about data collection can be found at <http://www.csudh.edu/psych/lrosen.htm> by clicking on the article entitled SEXUAL PREDATORS ON MYSPACE: A DEEPER LOOK AT TEENS BEING STALKED OR APPROACHED FOR SEXUAL LIAISONS.

Overall, only 17% of parents had created their own MySpace page. Parents with a personal MySpace page:

- ✓ Were more likely to have seen their teen's MySpace page.
- ✓ Were more likely to have seen the pictures on their teen's MySpace page.
- ✓ Looked at their teen's MySpace page often.
- ✓ Were more likely to be sure of how many days their teen was on MySpace.
- ✓ Were less concerned about sexual predators on MySpace.
- ✓ Were surer about whether their teen had given out personal information on MySpace.
- ✓ Were more likely to feel that sexual predators were rare on MySpace.

Interestingly, when all usage and demographic variables were combined to make predictions the following results were found:

- ✓ Whether a parent had seen their teen's MySpace page was predicted by a combination of whether the parent had a personal MySpace page and whether the computer was located in their teen's bedroom.
- ✓ Whether a parent had seen their teen's MySpace page was predicted by a combination of whether the parent had a personal MySpace page and whether the parent talked to their teen about MySpace.
- ✓ How often a parent looks at their teen's MySpace page was predicted by a combination of whether the parent had a MySpace page and the teen's age [parents viewed MySpace pages of younger teens more often than older ones].

Parents had quite different perceptions of MySpace. When asked what worries parents and their overall impression of MySpace, here are typical responses from those parents who have a MySpace page:

- *He is really a smart kid who is internet savvy I really don't have any concerns what so ever really.*
- *None. He's a big kid can handle himself.*
- *Nothing. She tells me everything.*
- *A very good way for kids to keep in touch and say things that they may not be able to say in person.*
- *I don't mind it as long as homework done, chores are done and dinner is eaten and cleaned up together with family.*
- *It is a place in which my daughter can talk to her friends, and have fun, but all at once I must keep my eye on her like anything else.*
- *It is more for the better if you can advise your child on what to look out for.*
- *MySpace is a good thing as long as it's used for the right reasons, but a person must be cautious when using the site.*

Parents who did not have a MySpace page said the following worried them about MySpace:

- *Access to personal information...access by users not known to my teenager, or the availability of random access by my teenager of sexual exploited material.*
- *Adults seeing private information.*
- *Either my daughter or my son going out to meet someone they never met, and that individual may hurt them.*
- *Although I understand why my daughter likes to use MySpace I think it is mostly used for kids to talk smack about each other and meet strangers.*
- *From the media coverage, I am a bit concerned. I would probably be much more concerned if she were younger.*
- *I never thought about it much until I saw Dateline's internet predator stories, that made me worry a bit. But ultimately I trust my daughter and I keep an eye out for awkward behavior.*

Overall, out of 267 parents, 43 (16%) mentioned that they were worried about sexual predators on MySpace. Of these, only two (5%) were among the 44 parents who had their own MySpace page, while 41 (18%) came from parents without a personal MySpace page. One of these parents summed this up perfectly when she said, ***“I don't know much about it other than the horror stories I've seen in the news about sexual predators.”***

Although the sample in this study is small and was not collected randomly, the results are clear: Parents who had a MySpace presence were more actively involved in their teen's MySpace activity and had a more realistic view about their teen's MySpace usage. Although not causal, these results suggest that one strategy parents should adopt to keep their children safe is to create their own MySpace page. This allows them to view their teen's page and also provides the knowledge and experience to talk intelligently with their teen about MySpace.

Anyone can create a MySpace account. Simply go to www.myspace.com, enter your email address, create a password, and a MySpace page is automatically created for you. There is no need for you to do anything with your page. Having a personal MySpace page grants you access to other MySpace pages and will give you an idea of what adolescents are doing. Once you sign up, you will be assigned your first friend, Tom Anderson, the co-creator of MySpace. If you click on his picture you will be taken to his web page. I recommend that you scroll down to where people leave comments and click on any of their pictures. That will take you to that person's personal page. Spend an hour visiting a sample of MySpace pages to get a feel for what is out there.

Do not use your own account to spy on your children — this will just make them more likely to mistrust you and be unwilling to talk with you. One recent phenomenon is for children to create shadow pages where they let their parents view their safe MySpace page while maintaining another where they really reside. Further, these children are amazingly adept at switching and closing screens as they hear a parent coming to check on them.

You absolutely need to ask your child to show you his/her MySpace page. When I asked parents if they did this, 38% said they had never done so (nor had they talked with their children about their MySpace use), another 14% said they almost never checked it and 16% stated they only glanced at it every few months. Only one-third of the parents actually checked their teen's MySpace page on a regular basis. In addition, more than 40% of the parents had never seen the photographs that their teenager posted on MySpace. Interestingly, more than 70% of the adolescents said they would feel comfortable having their parents look at their MySpace page.

It is critical to ask your children to see how they represent themselves in their virtual world. You need to read comments on their page and check who is listed in their Top 8. If there are people listed who you do not know, ask your child who they are and why they are on the Top 8, click on their pictures and visit their web pages. It is also important to see what information your child is giving out and talk about the ramifications of making

private information public. In my research, I asked the children if they gave out personal information on MySpace and asked the parents if they knew whether their children were giving out personal information. The results are in the table below and clearly show that at least one-third of parents are simply not sure if their child is giving out any of the information and when they are sure, they drastically underestimate how often that information is revealed by their teenager. For example, the final row of the table indicates that 41% of parents are not sure if their teenager has given out information about social activities and their location; 24% knew their teens gave out this information, but, in reality, nearly half (45%) did so. This is a crucial area of future discussion for many parents and their children.

INFORMATION GIVEN OUT	PARENT PERCEPTION		TEEN REALITY
	Not Sure	Yes	Yes
Full Name	33%	34%	45%
Address	32%	5%	43%
School Name	34%	43%	73%
Telephone Number	34%	8%	21%
E-Mail address	35%	33%	49%
IM Name	39%	37%	56%
Information about Social Activities and Their Location	41%	24%	45%

It is also important to stay aware of how much time your child is spending on MySpace. In my research, 43% of the parents were not sure how many days per week their child was on MySpace. Overall, 39% of them said they thought their child was on 5-7 days a week while 61% knew they were on less than 5 days a week. In reality, 70% of the children were on MySpace 5-7 days a week, with only 30% on less often. Obviously, parents need to be more aware of their children's visits to MySpace.

In summary, MySpace is not going to go away and teens are going to want and need to be on MySpace to communicate with their friends. Given this prospect parents need to be

aware of what MySpace is, and become more active in their teenager's use of this social networking system.