Quick Clicks

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You, Your Safety & Cyber Communities
How This Relates 2U

- You are probably a member of one of the fastest growing communities in the world, a community that encourages people to interact through the virtual environment of the World Wide Web.

- Whether you have a profile on a directory-type site in order to meet other people, use a journal-type site as an outlet for your thoughts, or chat with classmates through an academic “chat room,” chances are you’re part of the growing trend of using virtual communities to build real relationships.

- They can help you express yourself and learn about others around you, but it is important to keep in mind both the benefits and risks inherent with use.
Ask yourself...

- What are the risks?
- Is there really any risk in joining a community that is not “real”?
- Have you considered how many people are able to see your information?
- How does your profile reflect your true identity?
- Can your professors or future employers see photographs posted on a photo-type community site?

The goal is to inform you about the many benefits, challenges, and critical issues surrounding virtual communities so that you can make the best choice for yourself when deciding to join and engage in this fast-growing community!
Benefits of Cyber Communities

- Convenient way to connect with other students on campus from the comfort of your home.
- Learn about other students who may share your interests.
- Advertise events to a wide audience.
- Meet people in your classes.
- Communicate quickly and easily with friends.
- Have fun meeting and interacting with people.
Challenges of Cyber Communities

- People can be artificial/insincere about information.
- Personal and often private information is available to a large population of people you do not know.
- Spending too much time online can interfere with school work.
- Don’t judge a person by their profile!
Living the Virtual Life

- Many people find that they are less inhibited when interacting online. You might say or do something online that you wouldn’t normally do in the non-virtual world.
- Doing this can lead to many problems such as losing touch with reality.
- Escaping the stresses of every day life is necessary sometimes but, when it begins to interfere with your perception of reality, it can be dangerous.
- Online interactions does not allow you to understand tone or see non-verbal cues. It is easy to misinterpret another person’s meaning.
- Don’t lose interpersonal skills!
Are words just words?

“I am so tired of stress from my family and academics… I think I’ll just end it all.”

- Is the person suicidal?
- Are they joking or being dramatic?

It’s impossible to tell and it should definitely be taken seriously.

Ask yourself:
- What do my words mean?
- What message am I trying to send?
- How might someone interpret what I write?
Risky Business: Online Safety

- Think before you write!
- Check privacy settings.
- Be vague about your location.
- Be careful with what you write.
- What are you joining?
  - If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is!
  - Companies are counting on the majority of people unsuccessfully completing the offers for free electronics, but still signing up and spending money on other offers.
You and Your Reputation Online & Off

Who’s Looking at You?

- Almost anyone in the world can access information that you post from a personal computer in your living room or your residence hall.
- Your reputation is at stake!
- It isn’t difficult for anyone to gain access to this information on the web, even when it may appear to be an anonymous arena in which to express yourself.
- The key is to ask this question:
  - Is this a true representation of who I am and of how I want everyone in the world to see me?

In today’s world, web search engines can narrow down any topic or area of interest. If someone has reason to be interested in knowing you, the Internet might be the first place they look! It’s a good idea to make sure your online profile is squeaky clean, even behind the ears.
Online Danger Zones

- If you see something, say something!
- Sometimes you may see something that will make you feel uncomfortable or that you believe is unsafe.
  - It may be an Instant Message or a blog entry.
- If that happens, it’s a good idea to let someone know.
  - You can save and print the information that concerns you and bring it to the attention of a staff member.
Cyber threats, harassment, aggression, and stalking are real problems that take place in both the virtual and non-virtual world.

Keeping the safety tips we mentioned in mind is a great way to help protect yourself.

When your personal safety is threatened or in danger from another Internet user, report that user to the service provider.

The only way to reduce these dangerous behaviors online is to be **proactive** in responding to them if they happen to you or someone you know.
Warning Signs of Internet Addiction

- Due to the nature of interactions people have online, it can be addicting to spend time on the internet.
- There are some activities available online that can be addictive such as fantasy gaming, gambling, and social networks.
- If you recognize these signs in yourself or someone else, contact your institutions counseling center for assistance.
Warning Signs

- Feeling preoccupied with the Internet.
- Choosing to spend time on the Internet rather than with friends or family.
- Spending more time than originally intended online.
- Using the Internet as a way of escaping from problems.
- Jeopardizing school, relationships, or career because of time spend on the Internet.
- Having a hard time connecting directly with other people and choosing to interact online instead.
- Denial of amount of time spent online, or using the Internet alone so others do not know how much time is spent.
- Checking for messages repeatedly.
- Inability to spend any length of time away from the Internet.

Remember, none of these signs are an immediate indicator of a more serious problem but, when they are combined or happen repeatedly, it’s good to seek outside assistance.
Meeting Online Friends

Tips for First Meetings with Online Friends

- Choose a public place like a coffee shop for your first meeting.
- Set a time to meet so that your time together has a definite end point.
- Let someone know where you will be and make a plan about checking in with that person at an agreed upon time.
- Remember, people are not always as they appear! It may be a good idea to plan your first few meetings using the three steps listed above.
- Until you develop trust, take your time in giving out personal information.