Facebook for School Counselors

Introduction

Rapid growth and innovation of the technologies we use is a fact of life today. In a world that is becoming more connected and more social, this advancement is having a profound impact on people's lives – from the way they share to how they learn. Nowhere is this shift clearer than in schools. Social networking can have a productive function in education. When confrontations arise, social networks empower people to raise issues and address them together. The transparency enabled by social media can also create positive social norms that impact kids online and off.

However, with the opportunity afforded by exciting new technologies comes a new responsibility for people to learn how to use them safely. School counselors are on the front lines, helping kids navigate this new and changing world. They play a vital role in helping students learn to make safe, smart and responsible choices online. Whether helping students understand the impact of sharing personal information or address incidents of bullying, school counselors are helping to create a new generation of "digital citizens."

> "I find that I am more willing to allow my students to use technology in the classroom once I feel confident they understand the positive and negative consequences. Educators can empower students to be safe and smart online."
>
> *Bill Snow, Pittsburgh, PA*

If you are a school counselor and have never used Facebook, we encourage you to experiment with it so that you can better understand why your students value it and so you can be prepared to counsel them on issues that might arise. Adults who teach teens to drive do so having years of experience themselves; we think it's prudent to use and understand the technologies your students are using.

There are also many ways in which your role as a school counselor overlaps with issues that teachers face in the classroom. In the spring of 2011, Facebook collaborated with education experts Linda Fogg Phillips, Derek E. Baird, and Dr. BJ Fogg to publish the Facebook Guide for Educators that can be found in Facebook's Family Safety Center. We encourage you to reference it as a supplement to this guide.

We know that as a school counselor you face many issues in your job. We created this guide to help you better understand Facebook, so you can more effectively address and resolve any problems that may arise.

Four Suggested Actions for School Counselors

1. **Helping develop school policies**
2. **Responding to online incidents that impact conditions for learning**
3. **Assisting the community in detecting at-risk behavior**
4. **Addressing digital citizenship: technology literacy, privacy, reputation and social awareness**

School Policies for Internet and Social Media Use

One role you may encounter as a school counselor is helping craft your school's policy for Internet use in general and social media use in particular. Typically, this is an area where teachers, school counselors, school administrators – and sometimes families and students – get involved.

As the Facebook Guide for Educators discussed, Stanford University took a novel approach to creating its social media policy. In 2008, nearly the entire Stanford student population was on Facebook, yet the university had no policy about social networking on campus and no discussion about how use of the site could enhance learning. In response, the administration brought together student and faculty groups from all over campus to discuss how social media should be used to achieve university goals. Today, this group still meets four times a year to discuss the constantly changing world of social media and to update university policy.

Stanford's well-rounded approach to creating a social media policy is a great example for any school to follow when creating its own policy. A key to this model's success is bringing many different stakeholders together and meeting regularly to review the policy and keep it up to date as technology changes. Additionally, in developing your school's policy, we recommend considering several aspects including access, communication, collaboration, legal requirements and the policies of any site or service.

While, there is no "one size fits all" approach to creating a social media policy for your school, there is plenty of help. For a full list of resources we encourage you to check out these sample policies.

Areas to Consider for Your School's Policy

☐ Is your school's position on Internet access and use up to date?

☐ Does your policy show school staff how to preserve their online privacy while using social networks in the classroom?

☐ Does your school's policy outline how to teach students about online privacy?

☐ Are acceptable social media policies, including consequences for misuse, provided to the students and their parents caregivers?

☐ Are the age guidelines of social media websites that your school uses articulated and enforced?

It is not only important to know your own school's policy, but to understand Facebook's policy as well, so you can discuss it with your students. Facebook grants people the opportunity to use its site provided they meet the age criteria and adhere to Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities (SRR). In addition, students should be required to read Facebook's Community Standards. Coupling the privilege and responsibility elements of using social networking sites is a critical cognitive step in developing socially responsible digital citizens.

As a school counselor, you may be on the front line in addressing cases where students fail to follow rules the school has set. Understanding Facebook's SRR, how to use the service itself, and the school's acceptable use policy, are critical elements in your ability to take clear informed steps. You may find that Facebook is a world in which your students are comfortable. If you embrace their world and get involved, you can model responsible use and find common ground.

> "The biggest issue I have with principals is overreaction. When one teacher found that cyberbullying was occurring she called me to see if she should call the police. We need to establish consistent policies and communicate to all involved parties."
>
> *Kathie Kanavel, Santa Clara, CA*

Online Incidents that Impact Schools

School counselors can also become involved in incidents that happen online when they impact school life offline. Schools can struggle to identify where the boundaries of their responsibility lie. Essentially, if any activity online causes a change to even one student's safety or ability to focus, it becomes a school issue.

As with any situation on the Internet, conflicts can arise that impact the learning and safety of both students and staff members. Incidents may include problems with bullying, reputation or privacy settings. Other issues may also occur, for example, fake profiles (timelines) where someone impersonates someone else, sexual misconduct, threats against teachers, evidence of self-harm, evidence of crimes or evidence of harm against others.

These issues can be amplified as other students post photos or add comments about the incident. This puts an added burden on students, as school can feel less safe after public disclosure of the incident.

Did You Know?

The Facebook Profile was renamed Timeline in September 2011. You may hear students refer to both. For more information, visit **www.facebook.com/timeline.**

Reporting Abuse

As the school counselor, it is important that you know not only how to deal with online and offline issues in personal meetings, but you need to know how to report incidents to Facebook so the service can take its own remedial steps. If you see something on Facebook that you believe violates the SRR, you can report it easily using this link: www.facebook.com/report. Facebook has also introduced social reporting, a reporting system that gives people more options to resolve disputes. See below for more information on this new reporting tool. Facebook's community is diverse, and it is possible that something could be disagreeable or disturbing to a student without meeting the criteria to be removed or blocked. For this reason, Facebook also offers features to give users more control over what they see and to involve a member of their own community. In the most extreme cases, there are other tools for addressing abuse. Students can unfriend the person to remove him or her from their friends' list or block the person from contacting them.

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Fake Profiles (Timelines)

Facebook is based on a real name culture so that you are accountable for your actions. The SRR requires that a person use his or her real name and identity. However, young people can use impersonation and fake profiles (timelines) as a way to harass or intimidate others. Recently, Facebook streamlined the process for reporting these fake profiles (timelines). You can learn how to deal with fake profiles (timelines) in the Help Center. You can also submit a request to find out more information about the profile (timeline) through Imposter Account Information Requests.

Bullying

Another issue that school counselors should be prepared to handle is bullying. Counselors can teach students how to identify bullying and how to report it, and provide a clear outline of steps that will be taken after a report is made. This transparency is critical as students and their parents are far less likely to report incidents if they aren't confident that reporting will help the situation rather than make it worse.

The next step is to guarantee consistency. This means working with every teacher and staff member to confirm that they know exactly what to do when an incident occurs, and that they will address all conflicts. All school staff members need to know when an incident can be addressed by the teacher or staff member who received the report, when it should be escalated within the school or district, when parents should be notified, and when the website and law enforcement should be brought in to investigate. Harassment or bullying is prohibited on Facebook and we encourage everyone to report inappropriate content using the report links available throughout the site.

How Communities Can Detect At-Risk Behavior

As the adage goes, "It takes a village to raise a child." Sometimes the best way to handle online issues, just as we handle them offline, is to help the community detect signs of at-risk behavior. That way, anyone a student interacts with online – from friends to teachers and parents – can step in to get the student help. Online issues can be a reflection of offline problems like bullying, depression or violence. School counselors can simply sit down with students to review posts and comments, and advise on appropriate actions to take.

Social Reporting

Online issues are frequently a reflection of a larger offline problem, and by encouraging people to seek help from friends, the hope is that many of these situations can be resolved face-to-face.

- In March 2011, Facebook pioneered a tool called social reporting, which allows people to address both the online and offline impacts of bullying.

- Social reporting enables people to report problematic content to Facebook, so that it can be quickly removed, and at the same time report the content to trusted friends or adults who may understand the offline context of the situation and be able to provide extra help.

- This tool helps people communicate about and resolve issues privately and quickly. While the tool is designed for anyone, teens find this system especially useful; they are statistically more likely than adults to use it.

Early indications are that a significant amount of the content reported to Facebook through the social reporting feature is actually taken down by the person who posted it, presumably after an offline discussion. When people ask their friends to take down content that is potentially embarrassing or inappropriate, they will typically comply.

Digital Citizenship: Technology Literacy, Understanding Privacy Building a Reputation, and Social Awareness

Technology Literacy

It is commonly accepted that students know more than their teachers and school counselors when it comes to technology. However, this isn't universally the case. While there are students who are truly tech-savvy with almost all sites and programs, there are also students who are technically comfortable with the core features in the services and programs they most commonly use. If they want to do something outside their immediate scope of use, they either look it up online or ask a friend for help. Another cohort of students are technology novices, who have had limited access to computers, consoles and Internet-enabled phones.

What is generally true is that no matter their level of technical sophistication, most students use the Internet on a regular basis. So, what should you do?

Educate Yourself

One of the best ways to teach and guide your students about technology is to educate yourself. To help you get started on Facebook, go to www.FacebookForEducators.org, a site that provides quick-start tips and step-by-step instructions for getting the most educational benefit vfrom Facebook's tools. There are also several tutorials you can find online using the search term "how to use Facebook."

In addition, Facebook offers a variety of resources school counselors can use, like the Facebook in Education and Facebook Safety pages as a place to learn about and share best practices, counselor strategies and tips on how to use Facebook or other social technologies in the classroom. These pages have become a professional development hub, where thousands of educators share ideas, inspiration and solutions. Facebook's Family Safety Center offers information, tools and tips for parents, teens and educators and provides answers to hundreds of frequently asked questions.

You can also help educate the parents of your students. If you suspect issues like depression, violence, bullying or others, and working with the student isn't productive, you may want to encourage the parents to join Facebook and help them learn how to "friend" their teens.

Another way to learn about Facebook is to 'like' the pages that relate to school counseling and online safety resources so you can save time by having their updates and stories surface directly into your Facebook News Feed.

You can also create a group on Facebook for the staff in your school, district or subject matter association. This provides an easy mechanism for professional development, knowledge exchange and the sharing of content or files with others in the group. Learn more about groups here.

Help Students Understand that with Privilege Comes Responsibility

Using any online service isn't a "right," it's a privilege extended to people under very specific conditions laid out by the companies who own and operate these sites. It is important to help your students understand that just because a service is free does not mean the people who use the site are entirely free to do anything they want on it.

More Resources	
American School Counselor Association	www.facebook.com/pages/American-School-Counselor-Association/77096899005?ref=nf
School Counselor Blog	www.facebook.com/schcounselor
Our School Counselor	www.facebook.com/pages/Our-School-Counselor/133295633415002
Center for Excellence in School Counseling and Leadership	www.facebook.com/pages/Center-For-Excellence-in-School-Counseling-and-Leadership/399746875931
Childnet International	www.facebook.com/childnetinternational

Remember to Assess Ignorance vs. Intent

You should start by considering whether a student's misstep was made because he or she did not fully understand how to appropriately use the tools or if there was a deliberate choice made to ignore the terms and conditions of Facebook, and/or your school's policies. If the latter is the case, clear and immediate steps need to be taken in accordance with your school's policies to halt the negative behavior and help the student accept the prescribed consequences of his or her actions.

> "As youth become more prolific with technology, it's critical that we, as educators, adapt and learn about emerging technology so we can empower them to be safe digital citizens."
>
> *Mike Sorenson, Seattle, WA*

Understanding Privacy

Profile (Timeline) Privacy

As a school counselor it is key to understand the privacy settings of your profile (timeline) on Facebook. People who use Facebook can control the audience they're sharing with by selecting from a number of privacy options and permissions each time they post content like a status update or a photo. These controls can restrict who can see posted content, but they do not guarantee that any information you post will remain private. Because, like any content shared online, whether through an email, a text message or online chat, what people post can be easily copied and reposted. You can learn more about Facebook privacy settings at: www.facebook.com/help/privacy.

Groups, Pages and Subscribe

These tools can help you communicate with students and parents using Facebook without creating friend connections. Pages and Groups are online spaces where people can interact and share with others. Subscribe is a new feature that allows people to follow your public posts even if you are not friends. If you opt-in and set the post privacy to "public," students or parents who have subscribed will see your update in their News Feed. You can find more information on these features by searching these terms in the Facebook Help Center.

Building a Reputation

In today's world, part of students' reputations are comprised of what they write and do online. For young people, it is sometimes difficult to keep their long-term reputation in mind, especially when they can get caught up in the moment. Unfortunately, trash talking, bullying, boasts of misdeeds, questionable photos, locations and over-exposed profiles (timelines) can become part of a fairly permanent and damaging record.

Children need frequent reminders from parents, teachers and counselors to view their online content through the eyes of future friends, schools and employers. As a school counselor, you are in a unique position to work with students and help them understand the long-term positive or negative impact their online reputations will have. One new feature that can help your students maintain a good online reputation is the activity log. The activity log is a place where you can review your posts and activity, from today back to when you first started using Facebook. Activity log enables you to sort by and review a specific type of content like photos or status updates. Once you have reviewed that content, you can quickly adjust privacy settings to either feature, hide or delete items from your timeline.

> "I had a teacher come to me concerned with information her student was posting on Facebook and how this was going to affect her college applications she had already submitted. I was unsure of how to handle it and who to contact. This guide provides a road map of how I should handle the situation with the student, teacher and parents and who I should contact at Facebook to help resolve issues. Thank you! A much needed resource."
>
> *Kate Louis, San Diego, CA*

It may surprise your students to learn that many companies use social media activity as part of a background check when screening potential employees, and that colleges and employers routinely look at their applicants' public online activity.

This means students must be stewards of their own online identity and take swift action if untrue or negative information is posted about them online.

However, for all the damage a bad online reputation can do, it is equally true that honest, positive, respectful posts, pictures and participation can also significantly enhance a student's reputation.

Social Awareness

Service to the greater community and to the world at large is a core principle in education. A 2011 Pew Research Center Report found that people who use Facebook are more trusting than others, have more close relationships, are much more politically engaged and get more social support.

Facebook makes it easier for students to connect with each other around the country and world to share perspectives on current events, customs, and alternative methods of problem solving.

Using the power of digital media and technology, students can study and participate in causes and campaigns or learn about social issues and current events. Social media can raise awareness of opportunities to get involved in volunteering or activism and deepen students' understanding of the needs and perspectives of those who are less fortunate. This understanding can provide the insight and confidence teens need to engage in society and effectively work toward positive changes.

Students can also use Facebook to help pursue their future education and career interests. It can be a resource to research scholarship and internship opportunities for students looking for ways to afford college or get relevant training in a particular field.

Conclusion

Using this guide as a resource, you should feel confident addressing the opportunities and potential issues your students will have with social media. As a school counselor, you are in a unique position to work with students and help them enhance the possibilities that social media provides to their personal lives, their education, their careers, and their understanding of what it means to be a digital citizen.

About Authors

The Internet Keep Safe Coalition (iKeepSafe) is a broad partnership of governors and first spouses, attorneys general, public health and educational professionals, law enforcement and industry leaders working together for the health and safety of youth online. The Coalition provides innovative resources, including parent tutorials and educational materials like the Faux Paw the Techno Cat® Internet safety book series and animated films for children. iKeepSafe uses its unique partnerships to disseminate the safety resources to families worldwide, including its Generation Safe™ program launched in the U.S., Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Vietnam. To learn more, visit www.ikeepsafe.org.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is a worldwide nonprofit organization based in Alexandria, Va. Founded in 1952, ASCA supports school counselors' efforts to help students focus on academic, personal/social and career development so students not only achieve success in school but are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society. The association, which is the school counseling division of the American Counseling Association, provides professional development, publications and other resources, research and advocacy to more than 30,000 professional school counselors around the globe. For more information, visit www.schoolcounselor.org.