



'Oil & Water' Teachers & Students & Social Media www.besafe-online.co.uk

From Twitter to Facebook, social networking websites have become a vital part of our lives. They offer us the opportunity to connect with our friends and loved ones and to share our personalities with the world. However, social networking websites also present a certain risk. In an age where your Google search results define your identity, oversharing, or accidentally sharing something that should be kept private, is a sure-fire way to ruin your online reputation. This is especially true for teachers.

Because they're entrusted to educate and to provide a positive influence for our children, teachers are held to an extremely high standard of professional conduct. After all, no parent wants to look up his or her child's teacher online and find profanity-laced blog posts or drunken Facebook photos. In some cases, even the most innocuous image can lead to a firing (such as the teacher who was fired for posting a picture of herself labelled "drunk pirate" in which she was holding a plastic cup and wearing a pirate hat).

Because social networking is a much more sensitive endeavour for teachers, here are some basic tips that all teachers should take into account before setting up their Facebook, Tumblr or Twitter accounts.

Info 1: Why you should never "friend" your students

The ability to "friend," or to connect with other members of a social network, is the main purpose of setting up a social networking account. However, not all friends are created equally. Many teachers, especially those fresh out of college, maintain friendly relationships with students. This is a definite no-no when it comes to social networking.

If students gain access to teachers' social networking profile, they're gaining access to their teachers' entire life — likes, dislikes, family, friends, photos and more, thus altering the student-teacher relationship in such a way that teachers lose credibility as authority figures. As a general

rule, teachers should never accept student friend requests on social networking sites, and they should keep their profiles hidden from general view.

Info 2: What is and isn't OK to share in your social networking profile

Would you drink, swear or use inappropriate humour in the classroom? If the answer is no, you should also avoid doing those things on your social networking profile. Your Facebook profile may be yours, but that doesn't mean you're the only person who can see it. The argument that what a teacher does in his or her spare time is no one else's business is nice in theory, but in the real world, if parents see something obscene online, they will report it.

As a general rule, teachers should avoid posting any pictures, updates, links or videos that could upset a student or a parent. Before you post anything to your social networking account, always consider who can see it and how it reflects on you as a teacher.

Also remember that once something is posted, even if it's quickly retracted, it might not be gone entirely. A parent could have made a copy or screenshot of the content, or a student could have quickly passed it on to a friend. The best bet is to simply not post anything risky to begin with.

Info 3: keeping your account secure

Because of their popularity, social networking websites have become attractive targets for scammers and hackers. As such, all social network users need to be careful about installing applications and opening suspicious links. Teachers in particular must be careful about avoiding cybercriminals online, especially if they're using school computers to access their social networking accounts.

It's likely that the school district will already have rules in place prohibiting the use of school computers for personal browsing. The rules exist for a reason. Malware and other forms of computer infections can cause significant damage and put personal and school information at risk.

Another reason not to log in to your social networking account during school hours is even more obvious; it shows that you're not working when you should be. Because social networking interactions are typically time-stamped, it's easy for a third-party, such as a parent or administrator, to see when you're online. To avoid this hassle altogether, simply don't log in to your account during the school day.

Like it or not, the things we do online, and especially on social networking websites, play a vital role in shaping our reputations. If you're a teacher, you must use caution when joining and using social networking websites, two profiles, one for personal use and another for professional use is always a good idea.