

## Social Networking and Privacy

Bahamians like millions of people around the world are caught up in social networking on the internet in a big way.

Parents should know that online chatting, texting, blogging and spending time on sites like Facebook and Myspace are part of everyday life for many of our young people, particularly students.

Most of us post information about ourselves to stay in touch with friends. We think about our personal sites as private, when in reality, many of them can be seen by friends, employers, schools/college officials, and even parents. Our information may be seen and used by someone we don't even know.

### What can you do to protect yourself and to avoid embarrassment?

Never expect absolute privacy. Know what you're getting into any reading the privacy statement and policies. Many sites allow all registered users to view all the information you post on your site with no exceptions.

Before you join a site and post your profile, find out if you can join a closed network, where only those with an email address from your school can register, for example. Find out if the site allows others to see your profile without your consent. Choose the highest and most restrictive security setting available and do not give out information like your birthday, full name, phone number, National Insurance Number or address.

Take a second to think about what you're posting about yourself and your friends. Is it something you would post if your headmaster/professor, boss, kid sister or arch rival was standing right behind you? Even though we tend to think about our personal sites as private, in reality, many can be seen by just about anyone. Is there information about you that is embarrassing or that fraudsters could use? Remember that what you post could be online forever.

Keep in mind that even sites with extensive privacy options may be required to make your personal information available to certain authorized persons, including law enforcement agencies. Actually, you might want to remember to call your parents regularly before they resort to checking your Facebook page for updates.

(Adopted from the Privacy Commissioner of Canada)