



Now, for what you *should* do

ThinkB4uClick! Suggesting that a teen slow down and proofread their texts or IMs is probably a waste of time. But taking a second to decide if you really want to send that or whether you will regret posting something is a good idea. The only time you can protect yourself from the consequences of things going wrong is BEFORE you click the "send" button. What you post online stays online – forever! (One of Parry's favorite lines, but true.) Deleting it afterwards may not delete it from everyone else's copies, Google or what was already printed out or forwarded.

Use privacy settings on all your profiles and photo and videosharing pages. You want to decide who can see what. But always remember, while you may restrict your Facebook to the group for teens in your high school, most groups have people in them who don't belong there, starting with teachers and school administrators and coaches. Assume they are reading your stuff too when you post to a group.

Respect yourself and others. It's a boring message, but probably the most important one we can share. Put yourself in a mental time machine and fast forward to when you are 30 years old. What will you be doing with your life? Who will be important people in your life then? Now look at your profiles and online posts, pics and videos. Is there anything there that you wish (as a 30 year old) you could erase? The time to do it is now, before it affects your future. What seemed like a good idea at the time, especially if you had a beer or two at a party, may not be when you wake up in the morning. And don't do anything online that you wouldn't do offline – that's the Internet Golden Rule.

Choose a password that is easy to remember but hard to guess. Most teens (and adults) choose passwords based on "20 Questions." They use the same 20 questions to come up with their passwords, like their middle name, their pet's name, their birth date, the town they live in, their favorite movie, their best friend's name, the car they want to drive, the year they graduate, the college they want to attend, etc. The problem is that these are pretty easy to guess when you know someone pretty well. Just think about how many of these you could answer about your friends and others in your class. And if you can guess theirs, they can probably guess yours too, unless you are careful.

Lots of security experts tell you to use a password with upper and lower case letters, numbers and symbols. That might be good for security experts, but it's really hard to remember. So, you have to write it down and stick it on a post-it sheet on your monitor to remember. How secure is that? Not very!

Instead, use a sentence with a number in it. You start it with a capital letter and end it with punctuation (a symbol!). Upper case, lower case, numbers and a symbol. Easy to remember and hard to guess. Just make sure you aren't using your favorite quote or something you have posted on your Facebook page. Teenangels (teen Internet safety experts at teenangels.org) tell other teens

to use a different password for each site. You can use the site name in the sentence and it's different for each site and secure, as well as easy to remember. "Facebook has more than 225 million users!" Wow! (And it's a pretty good password once you leave out the spaces.)

Or choose something only you would know, that is easy for you to remember and no one else can guess (even and **especially** your "BFF"). Choose your favorite character in a book and how old you were when you first read that book, or the best birthday present you ever got and how old you were when you got it. That gives you numbers and letters and is easy for you to remember, but hard for others to guess. Get it?

More than 70% of teens polled said that they had shared their passwords with at least one friend (often their boyfriend or girlfriend). That's one friend too many, especially when friends get into fights or couples breakup. It's not smart since, when armed with your secrets and your passwords, friends can do some serious damage.

It's also not a good idea to click "save my login and password" when using a computer that anyone else can access, like your little brother or sister, your friend's computer or one at school. Let your friends know that friends don't ask for their friend's passwords. Find another way to show them how much you trust them.