

**Sheri Bauman, Ph.D.**, is an associate professor and director of the school counseling program at the University of Arizona, Tucson. E-mail: [sherib@u.arizona.edu](mailto:sherib@u.arizona.edu)

**Tanisha Tatum** is a professional school counselor at Children Reaching for the Sky Elementary School in Tucson, AZ. Additional tables are available from the first author.

# Web Sites for Young Children: Gateway to Online Social Networking?

*Traffic on Web sites for young children (ages 3–12) has increased exponentially in recent years. Advocates proclaim that they are safe introductions to the Internet and online social networking and teach essential 21st-century skills. Critics note developmental concerns. In this article, we provide basic information about Web sites for young children, discuss developmental issues, and make recommendations for school counselors to be proactive and aware of the advantages and dangers inherent in these sites.*

Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and MySpace are now part of the social fabric of the lives of American teens and young adults. Although such sites only emerged in the past few years, they were rapidly embraced by large segments of the population. Educators and parents have been alerted to the potential for cyberbullying inherent in these sites (Chibarro, 2007), but what has been absent from the discourse is any discussion of the increasing availability and presence of Web sites designed for younger children that have components of social networking (e.g., Club Penguin, Webkinz, Kidzworld). While these sites are like many children's Web sites, with appealing graphics and games, they include chats and other interactive components, such as instant messaging, similar to elements found on adult social networking sites. These elements allow children to meet new friends and form online relationships.

Like the sites for teens and adults, these sites have many attractive features and perhaps provide important skills in a technological world (including reading and keyboarding). However, these sites also have elements that may be misunderstood or misused, and it is essential that school counselors understand the benefits and hazards of such sites. As school leaders who are central to the school's mission—which includes fostering a positive school climate, fostering positive social and emotional growth, and a focus on positive development—school counselors collaborate with teachers, administrators, parents/caregivers, and the larger community. They are in a central position to provide information and guid-

ance on the advantages and drawbacks of new technology. This article provides information about these Web sites and additional resources school counselors may access for current and more detailed information.

Although developers of these children's Web sites proclaim that children learn valuable Internet social skills, as well as literacy, problem solving, and finance management (Fryer, 2009) in a safe environment, it is important to examine the arguments of the critics as well. In this article, we first define SNS and then discuss developmental considerations that school counselors should keep in mind when thinking about students' involvement on these sites. We describe the major children's sites that include typical components, and then provide specific information about some of the most popular sites visited by younger children. We provide summary information in an appendix. In addition, we revisit the pros and cons of these activities and make recommendations for professional school counselors with respect to SNS for children.

## DEFINITION

The defining characteristic of social networking is the interactive nature of the communication (Livingstone, 2008). No longer is the user of technology a passive receptacle for the content (as in television viewing), but the content is cocreated by the users and the platform (Greenfield & Yan, 2006). The Web sites to be discussed in this article appeal to younger children and have elements of SNS, and we suggest that younger children may not be developmentally ready to understand the dynamics of these kinds of relationships and communication.

## DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many children are now introduced to computers at a young age, and they use them for both entertainment and educational purposes (Mazzarella, 2005). One survey found that 18% of children under age 7

**School counselors  
are in a central  
position to provide  
information and  
guidance on the  
advantages and  
drawbacks of new  
technology.**

go online (Rideout & Hamel, 2006). Children ages 2 to 6 are able to manipulate the mouse, and on the older end of the range, they can type short words or phrases. However, the use of currency systems to acquire things on the sites is beyond most of their cognitive abilities at this age (Buckleitner, 2008). Critics have argued that early access to computers threatens to replace the normal social interactions essential to social development, and to promote inappropriate patterns of thinking and relating (Attewell, Suazo-Garcia, & Battle, 2003). Very young children have little understanding of computer problems, and they may become very frustrated if their play is interrupted (Buckleitner).

This early involvement worried professor Susan Greenfield (Derbyshire, 2009), who observed that these sites engage children’s brains in the same manner by which they engage the external world—using sounds and lights to capture their attention, encouraging short attention spans and immediate gratification. Developmentally, young children must first learn to assimilate detail and context in an image in order to understand meaning. Greenfield commented that she fears that the brain itself may develop differently in children who have spent a great deal of time on these activities. This is supported by recent advances in brain neurobiology. Davidson (2007) has demonstrated that the brain changes (in both structure and function) in response to experience, a feature known as plasticity. Another expert observed that while technology and computers have positive contributions, children should have ample experience with in-person relationships before they start using social networking sites (Derbyshire). Face-to-face interactions are the “most emotionally maturing experiences” (Cordes & Miller, 2000). Sociologist Shelley Turkle, quoted in Cordes and Miller, observed, “Computing and cyberspace may blur children’s ability to separate the living from the inanimate, contribute to escapism and emotional detachment, stunt the development of a sense of personal security, and create a hyper-fluid sense of identity.”

Children who are ages 6 through 8 have more advanced skills. They understand that an avatar represents a person with whom they can compete or befriend. They pay attention to rules, and may be distressed when rules are broken. Their tolerance for frustration has increased somewhat. They also are now more skilled at computer use in general, and they may use bookmarks, right mouse-clicks, and passwords proficiently (Buckleitner, 2008), making navigation of the sites easier and more efficient.

Addie Schwartz, an executive with a company geared to preteen girls, observed that pre-adolescents (age 8 to 12) are very interested in MySpace and Facebook, although those sites are designed for,

and technically limited to, adolescents and adults. She described this age group: “Born with a mouse in her hand, today’s tween is more comfortable online than ever before. Some kids learn to use the Internet before they can read” (“Too Old for Webkinz,” 2008, ¶ 7). Schwartz continued, “Sites like Club Penguin and Webkinz are giving children a taste of social networking, whetting their appetite for the more sophisticated fare” (“Too Old,” ¶ 8).

Livingstone (2008) described a developmental trajectory for use of technology. Early childhood (up to about 8 years old) is a time of high physical activity and low media use with media use at home increasing beginning at ages 9 through 11. However, Shellenbarger (2006) observed that social networking sites compete for subscribers as young as 8. A video guide to Webkinz for parents ([www.common.sensemedia.org](http://www.common.sensemedia.org)) recommends that 8 years old is the minimum age at which children use the site, but usage data from Quantcast ([www.quantcast.com](http://www.quantcast.com)) suggest that not all parents follow that recommendation.

The little scholarly attention to young children’s Web sites with social networking components has largely focused on protection from online predators. This concern extends to youth who subscribe to Web sites such as MySpace and Facebook by falsifying their birthdates. The Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998, which became effective April 21, 2000, protects children under 13 from having personal information (such as birthdates, addresses, etc.) collected from Web sites by requiring that the Web site must make it clear what information is being collected and how it is being used, and requiring that “verifiable parental consent” be obtained for the “collection, use, or disclosure of personal information from children” (Child Online Privacy Protection Act, 1998).

Young children are in the process of developing and refining social skills as they learn to work and play with others. Some of the skills that young children are in the process of acquiring are the abilities to express their wishes and preferences clearly, to share and compromise, to take turns, to join in with other children in an existing activity, to manage anger and frustration in an appropriate way, to understand another child’s point of view and feelings, and to handle rejection (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). In face-to-face play situations, children are more likely to be in the vicinity of adults who can monitor interactions and be alert for the need to coach, remind, or redirect children as needed. When young children interact on Web sites with social components, the adults are less likely to be observing each interaction, and so the opportunity to monitor their interactions is absent.

Some of the Web sites allow only scripted communication (the child selects a prewritten statement

such as “Do you want to play?” from a pull-down menu) while others allow both scripted and user-generated statements. Some of these sites require parental consent (via e-mail, usually), and efforts to restrict inappropriate words may lead to frustration. For example, some sites do not allow numerals as a way to protect children from providing addresses or phone numbers, but there may be cases in which a numeral is the answer to a question. While sites claim they have monitors checking for inappropriate comment (and certain words are automatically blocked and the attempted “user” suspended), Estroff (n.d.) noted that words such as “weirdo” and “nerd” are not blocked. And clever subscribers find ways to circumvent the rules and say hurtful things to other users. Children may be hurt by such experiences, and may not learn from them to develop positive coping strategies without adult intervention.

Young children may have difficulty distinguishing between reality and the virtual world (Baumgarten, 2003; Buckleitner, 2008; Shellenbarger, 2006). Attachments to virtual friends or pets may be disrupted for a variety of reasons (an online friend is no longer on the site, an online pet gets ill), and young children may not really appreciate the ephemeral nature of these relationships. When a child is distressed by virtual losses, adults may not appreciate that the loss is real (Fryer, 2009) even though the relationship may not have been with a corporeal individual.

Like with adults, face-to-face communication among children involves many clues to the speaker’s intent that enable a listener to interpret the content. Nonverbal gestures and facial expressions convey a considerable amount of information during usual communication, and even in audio-only situations (such as telephone), variations in tone, emphasis, and other things augment the semantic content. With less experience with social communication, young children might have more difficulty than adults in interpreting messages that lack these additional clues. A child may mistake a joke for an insult, for example, and respond in kind, escalating a benign interaction to a hostile exchange (Dwyer, 2007).

Greenfield (2004) identified developmental issues that affect young children’s ability to interact appropriately on the Web sites. First, she noted that advertising on sites designed for young children exists in such a way that the ads are integrated with the content of the site. This is salient because children younger than 5 years old are unable to distinguish between commercial and noncommercial content on television. She maintained that because ads on children’s Web sites are integrated (on the same page) with the content, that difficulty is likely to be compounded. Further, children younger than 7 or 8

do not understand that commercials are shown in order to sell things. Thus, Web sites designed for young children that include advertising (which is the case for many of the sites) are likely to capitalize on this developmental characteristic. Greenfield cited studies showing that 37% of online children had either researched or purchased items online; susceptibility to advertising may be greater for children than for adults. There is evidence that children are more likely to click on Internet ads than are adults.

Greenfield (2004) also noted that many of these sites promote materialism. With Club Penguin, for example, children earn virtual currency in order to purchase various accoutrements for their avatars (penguins) and their igloo. The site has a free option, but members (who pay a monthly or annual fee) have privileges that nonmembers lack. Greenfield is concerned that this arrangement fosters the belief that one’s success and status are based on “wealth” or the accumulation of possessions. The following are excerpts from children’s reviews of the site that support that position (with original spelling and punctuation maintained):

- “Members get everything. They do not treat people fairly. Members can ONLY buy those bad graphic shirts, more pets, furnishings ... etc.” ([www.kidconfidence.com/interact/Review/196/club-penguin-com](http://www.kidconfidence.com/interact/Review/196/club-penguin-com))
- “Okay it’s really not fair like what if your poor and you cant afford then you cant even do anything fun on the clubpenguin and theirs all these cool looking penguins judging you because you are not a member so but theres no way you cant become a member without money and it isn’t fair but ohh well ☹.” ([www.crunchbase.com/company/club-penguin](http://www.crunchbase.com/company/club-penguin))

The final two issues noted by Greenfield (2004) are sexuality and aggression. Concerns about sexual predators receive considerable media attention, but messages about “being a couple” for this age group also are developmentally inappropriate. Young children are still learning how to develop and maintain friendships. The suggestion that being part of a “couple” is important encourages developmentally inappropriate patterns. The following comment was made by a child who visits Club Penguin:

- “Hey im 11, and i play club penguin. And club penguin does have people that ask, ‘wanna be a couple.’ Sometimes i say yes, sometimes no. but the point is that moderators always block swearing and mean things. Also, a tip: being a member makes others totally respect you more. That’s why i am a member. Bottom line: PLAY CLUB PENGUIN, IT TOTALLY ROX!”

**Many children are now introduced to computers at a young age, and they use them for both entertainment and educational purposes.**

**Studies show that 37% of online children had either researched or purchased items online; susceptibility to advertising may be greater for children than for adults.**

Estroff (n.d.), an adult, described her experience on Club Penguin. She noted that comments like “Will u be my girlfriend?” are commonplace. She exchanged heart emoticons with a boy on the site, and shared “mwah mwahs” (kisses), played a kissing game, and so forth. She found a strong sexual “undercurrent” on the site but others argued that this provides a safe place for preteens to act out the sexual themes they see in real life. Regardless of one’s position on that question, it behooves adults to recognize that this type of activity is prevalent on the most popular, and widely lauded, children’s Web site. Even on Webkinz, a user commented on the sexual tone of the communication (see below).

Greenfield’s (2004) final concern is aggression. Although many sites prohibit swear words or aggressive language, this quotation illustrates that despite the controls in place, children can make verbally aggressive comments on the site:

- “If I had to say, Club Penguin is mainly for preteens and teens (11 and up) because of the language. The moderators also don’t work all the time, and swears do get through occasionally. Things also like, ‘your a loser,’ gets through very often.”

A mother who posed as a child and joined Club Penguin in order to evaluate the site reported being called a “weirdo” by other penguins and being excluded from a “party” that was for “members only” (Estroff, n.d.). Although Club Penguin and some other sites have built-in mechanisms to monitor and control behavior, determined and tech-savvy children find ways around these restrictions. Estroff discovered that negative words are allowed if some children describe themselves using them (e.g., geek, nerd). Further, penguins can tell others to “go away,” display mean-faced emoticons, and throw snowballs at others. The fact that adults are not likely to witness these exchanges (and children are not likely to report them to parents for fear of the obvious solution—stop going to the site) means that the cumulative impact of these events may be unnoticed by adults. The behavior exhibited on these sites might be called bullying if the same interactions occurred in real life. One concern about online bullying is that the anonymity afforded by these sites encourages some children to say or do things they would not do in a face-to-face situation.

Estroff (n.d.) speculated that the development of creativity and imagination may be stifled by these sites. Although children have some options in designing their avatars (online personas that are graphically represented on the site) or virtual dwellings, they choose from available components rather than dreaming up their own creations. The “worlds” on the sites also are created by graphic

designers, rather than the children themselves. The long-term effects of this type of play have not been studied, although it is reasonable to assume that there could be a dosage effect.

Another developmental issue is the effect of participation in these online sites on real-life friendships. Friendships encourage positive social and emotional development, but we do not yet know whether online friendships are simply another avenue to interact with friends. In fact, some children who meet face to face to play may choose online activities as the vehicle for their interaction, as this has become customary for them (Estroff, n.d.). No research has yet been published to evaluate the impact of technological activities on friendship development among young children and preadolescents. This suggests that adults should be alert to the impact on friendships in the absence of empirical evidence.

Children in elementary school are developing prosocial behavior (Baumgarten, 2003) and this process is influenced by the behavior of peers. Potential modeling of inappropriate or antisocial behavior on these Web sites could negatively impact the development of these skills. Baumgarten also noted that children vary in their ability to respond to stressful situations (such as may occur in these Web environments), which means that some children will be more adversely affected by such experiences as exclusion or rejection by peers on these sites.

## OVERVIEW OF POPULAR SITES

Young children are flocking to social Web sites from home, school, friends, and the library for entertainment and social purposes learned from family, friends, and peers. Data from 2007 show that monthly visits to Club Penguin more than doubled to 4.7 million in the previous year (Buckleitner, 2008), with children spending an average of 54 minutes per visit, and monthly traffic on Webkinz increasing from one to six million in that same period, with the average visitor spending 2 hours and 8 minutes per visit from April 2006 to January 2007 (Hawn, 2007). Although the most famous and popular social networking Web sites are MySpace and Facebook, their membership is restricted to teenagers and adults, so we do not focus on them in this article. However, we want to include the following comment by a youngster (spelling is as in the original), which illustrates that many younger children are eager to advance to these social networking sites:

- “We should be aloud to use my space im only a little more than a year too young it’s not fair at my age, we need to communicate! Everyone thinks life starts at 14, but it doesn’t! it starts in middle school. Thanx a lot, tom!”

(Tom is the owner of MySpace.com.) This suggests that the commentator equates “life” with social networking sites.

The growing number of social networking sites being offered to preteens (children of 12 years and younger) are continuously changing to generate features to improve the navigation and appeal of the sites. A recent listing of social networking Web sites that have no minimum age, and are designed for young audiences, included 18 such sites (Social-mediamom, 2008). We describe the most popular Web sites below, and provide a summary of essential information about the sites in Appendix A. Note that the information was current at the time of this writing, but the interested reader is encouraged to regularly check the Web sites themselves or the resources listed in Appendix B for more information.

### Club Penguin

Club Penguin, launched in 2005, has 2.3 million unique visitors per month, according to Quantcast (usage figures are updated daily, and these figures were reported June 18, 2009, on [www.quantcast.com](http://www.quantcast.com)). The largest group of visitors is children ages 3–11 years old, with the next largest group ages 12–17. Although this is primarily a game site, it includes instant messaging and chats, and it allows users to accumulate clothing and furnishings for their igloos. Although one can play for free, a membership is available (monthly or annually) that gives access to many features unavailable to free users. Users can chat with pre-scripted content or generate their own content (with parental approval, usually by e-mail). Members with experience can become “secret agents” who patrol the site looking for bad behavior. Violators may be suspended from the site for days.

### Kidzworld

Kidzworld has more features of SNS, including message boards, chats, profiles, photos, and videos, and reports more than 392,000 visitors per month, the largest majority of whom are under 18 years old.

### Webkinz

Webkinz are small plush toys that come with an attached “secret code” that allows the owner to access the “Webkinz World” Web site. The secret code allows the user to own a virtual version of the pet for virtual interaction. Webkinz World began on April 28, 2005, and continues to grow on a daily basis and is updated every 2 weeks ([www.webkinz.com](http://www.webkinz.com)). Webkinz currently has an estimated 3.6 million visitors per month ([www.quantcast.com](http://www.quantcast.com)). The largest group of visitors is children ages 3–11 years old, with the next largest group ages 12–17. Webkinz World is an online play area where users can play online games; shop for food, clothes, toys,

and furniture using Kinzcash; and communicate with friends via the peer-to-peer network. Accumulating a large number of friends is important to many children, as can be seen in some children’s comments below.

One teacher’s response to a podcast about teaching kindergarten students how to be safe on the Internet is illuminating:

- “One of the kids had lost control of her Webkinz password for several months, and during that time someone (she never found out who) sold all her Webkinz furniture and did other things to mess up her account. The level of engagement of the students when we were discussing Webkinz was off the charts. Over 90% of the kids there in attendance (there were about 60) reported that they owned a Webkinz.” ([www.speedofcreativity.org/2008/03/27/exploring-differences-in-preteen-social-networking-sites](http://www.speedofcreativity.org/2008/03/27/exploring-differences-in-preteen-social-networking-sites))

The following are comments about this site found on [www.topix.com](http://www.topix.com), another source of children and adult reviews of Web sites:

- “Webkinz rock except at 1:13 am a message comes up and does not let you log in!!!!!! i mean COM ON give me a brake i always stay up late and play on Webkinz is all i want to do but i CAN’T!!!”
- “It is awesome! my username is jellita. please please add me on your friendlist. bye.”
- “Everyone stop talking sexual!!!!!!!!!!!!”

### Imbee

Imbee launched its social networking Web site in 2006 to offer a “safer” environment (as opposed to MySpace) for young children who wished to participate in social networking. Imbee currently has approximately 8,000 visitors per month ([www.quantcast.com](http://www.quantcast.com)) consisting of young children, parents, and teachers. Twenty-six percent of Imbee users range from ages 3–11 whereas 51% of users are ages 12–17. Adults make up the remainder of the membership. Following are some comments about the site, from [www.mashable.com](http://www.mashable.com):

- “Yea i know it is much safer than myspace cause it is for kids like us.”
- “You are doumb to have a my space.”
- “N\*\*\* SHUT THE F\*\*\* UP” (words spelled out in the original post).

These comments illustrate how easily benign comments can escalate online. Note that the use of capitals is “netspeak” for shouting.

**Familiarity with the entire phenomenon of social networking sites is, we believe, a necessary and essential skill for 21st-century school counselors.**

## DISCUSSION

The material provided in this article suggests that professional school counselors should be alert both to the prevalence of children's use of these sites and the potential for problems. Taking a proactive and preventive position regarding these Web sites is consistent with the themes of the ASCA National Model® (American School Counselor Association, 2005). We suggest that school counselors exercise leadership in this area and develop effective prevention programs in collaboration with teachers and parents. We recommend that professional school counselors provide classroom guidance regarding these Web sites to students as early as kindergarten. In addition, workshops for parents and teachers would be useful; both groups need information about the advantages and disadvantages of these sites, assistance in setting guidelines for children's use, and awareness of resources to enable them to keep current as sites and challenges change. There will undoubtedly be a need for individual response services, another component of the ASCA National Model, to individual children or small groups who have had bad experiences on these sites, and school counselors who are armed with information are better able to provide effective assistance. School counselors might conduct needs assessment or do informal surveys of children and parents to identify children who need responsive services. We also encourage school counselors to explore the sites personally to get their own experience of the attractions and pitfalls of this growing type of social interaction.

One of the roles of professional school counselors is that of advocate. In that vein, advocating for appropriate controls would be an important contribution. The European Commission came to an agreement with 17 social networking sites that committed the sites to protecting users of social networking sites. The following are changes made as a result of that agreement: Sites have a one-click feature by which users can report abuse, sites set the default setting for profiles and friends lists to "private" for underage (under 18) subscribers, and sites make navigating the various privacy options more prominent so users can easily check who can see their postings (Chisamera, 2009; Reding, 2009). Similar agreements could be implemented in the United States and advocacy for such measures by school counselors knowledgeable about child development would add weight to efforts to generate such agreements. Contacting the owners of the sites to suggest these changes be made voluntarily would be an excellent first step.

We have not addressed the question of MySpace and Facebook use in this article. It is important for school counselors at all levels to be aware that many

children falsify their ages and have profiles on these sites. Familiarity with the entire phenomenon of social networking sites is, we believe, a necessary and essential skill for 21st-century school counselors. ■

## References

- American School Counselor Association. (2005). *The ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Attewell, P., Suazo-Garcia, B., & Battle, J. (2003). Computers and young children: Social benefit or social problem. *Social Forces*, 82(1), 277–296.
- Baumgarten, M. (2003). Kids and the Internet: A developmental summary. *ACM Computers in Entertainment*, 1, 1–10.
- Broderick, P. C., & Blewitt, P. (2006). *The life span: Human development for helping professionals* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Buckleitner, W. (2008). *Like taking candy from a baby: How young children interact with online environments*. Retrieved June 18, 2009, from <http://consumerwebwatch.org/pdfs/kidsonline.pdf>
- Chibarro, J. S. (2007). School counselors and the cyberbully: Interventions and implications. *Professional School Counseling*, 11, 65–68.
- Child Online Privacy Protection Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 6501-65-6, Pub. L. No. 105-277, 112 Stat. 2681-728 (1998).
- Chisamera, D. (2009, February 11). *EU: 17 social networking sites agree to safety rules to protect young users*. Retrieved March 8, 2009, from [http://www.effluxmedia.com/news\\_EU\\_17\\_Social\\_Networking\\_Sites\\_Agree\\_to\\_Safety\\_Rules\\_to\\_Protect\\_Young\\_Users\\_34750.html](http://www.effluxmedia.com/news_EU_17_Social_Networking_Sites_Agree_to_Safety_Rules_to_Protect_Young_Users_34750.html)
- Cordes, C., & Miller, E. (Eds.). (2000). *Fool's gold: A critical look at computers in childhood*. College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood.
- Davidson, R. (2007, December 10). *The heart-brain connection: The neuroscience of social, emotional, and academic learning*. Presentation at a meeting of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, New York.
- Derbyshire, D. (2009, February 24). Social websites harm children's brains: Chilling warning to parents from top neuroscientist. *Mail Online*. Retrieved July 31, 2009, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1153583/Social-websites-harm-childrens-brains-Chilling-warning-parents-neuroscientist.html>
- Dwyer, C. (2007). *Digital relationships in the "MySpace" generation: Results from a qualitative study*. Proceedings of the 40th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. Retrieved February 10, 2009, from <http://csis.pace.edu/~dwyer/research/DwyerHICSS2007.pdf>
- Estroff, S. D. (2007, January 18). Online social scene clicks with younger set. *The Jewish Journal*. Retrieved February 9, 2009, from [http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/online\\_social\\_scene\\_clicks\\_with\\_younger\\_set\\_20070119](http://www.jewishjournal.com/articles/item/online_social_scene_clicks_with_younger_set_20070119)
- Estroff, S. D. (n.d.). Undercover in a kid's online world. *Good Housekeeping*. Retrieved February 8, 2009, from <http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/family/activities/undercover-club-penguin>
- Fryer, W. (2009, January 4). *A holiday lesson in ethics via Webkinz*. Blog posting retrieved March 24, 2009, from <http://www.speedofcreativity.org/2009/01/04/a-holiday-lesson-in-ethics-via-webkinz>
- Greenfield, P. M. (2004). Developmental considerations for determining appropriate Internet use guidelines for children and adolescents. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25, 751–762.

- Greenfield, P., & Yan, Z. (2006). Children, adolescents, and the Internet: A new field of inquiry in developmental psychology. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 391–394.
- Hawn, C. (2007, March 23). *Time to play, money to spend*. Retrieved July 31, 2009, from [http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2\\_archive/2007/04/01/8403359/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/magazines/business2/business2_archive/2007/04/01/8403359/index.htm)
- Livingstone, S. (2008). Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: Teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy, and self-expression. *New Media & Society*, 10, 393–411.
- Mazzarella, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Girl wide web: Girls, the Internet, and the negotiation of identity*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Reding, V. (2009, February 10). *First European agreement of social networks: A step forward to child safety online*. Retrieved February 27, 2009, from <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/46&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>
- Rideout, V., & Hamel, E. (2006). *The media family: Electronic media in the lives of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their parents*. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation.
- Shellenbarger, S. (2006, October 23). When is a child too young to join MySpace? *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved February 8, 2007, from <http://students.cgps.org/studentssite/grammar/subpages/When%20is%20a%20child%20too%20young%20to%20join%20MySpace.pdf>
- Socialmediamom. (2008, February 2). *February roundup: Social networking sites for kids*. Retrieved March 15, 2009, from <http://www.socialmediamom.com/2008/02/february-roundu.html>
- Too old for Webkinz; Too young for Facebook. (2008, July 29). *Business Wire*. Retrieved March 9, 2009, from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0EIN/is\\_2008\\_July\\_29/ai\\_n27950858](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EIN/is_2008_July_29/ai_n27950858)

**Earn CEUs for reading this article.  
Visit [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org), and  
click on *Professional School Counseling*  
to learn how.**

## APPENDIX A

### Overview of Popular Web Sites Visited by Children

Web Site	Membership Type	Age Restriction	Profile Privacy	Personalization of Profile	File(s) Uploaded	Ads on Web Site
<p><b>Club Penguin</b> (<a href="http://www.clubpenguin.com">www.clubpenguin.com</a>) An online game site where children can chat with other online users, play games, and participate in other activities in the virtual world</p>	Standard—free for all members; Premium, monthly \$5.95; 6 months, \$29.95 12 months, \$57.95	6–14 (but open to all ages)		Yes, only paid memberships have the ability to decorate their igloo (profile)		Yes
<p><b>Hi 5</b> (<a href="http://www.hi5.com">www.hi5.com</a>) A social networking site where users can create online profiles to show information such as interests, age, and hometown; upload pictures where users can post comments; and set up a music player in the profile</p>	Standard—free for all members	Open to all ages	Profiles can be public or only accessible to friends; members can use privacy settings to control who can see their profile	Yes, extensive choice of templates (profile skins) available on site and through third-party sites	Photos, music	Yes
<p><b>Imbee</b> (<a href="http://www.imbee.com">www.imbee.com</a>) A social networking site for tweens where kids can connect with friends, share audio/videos, blog, share pictures, and create profiles</p>	Standard—free for all members	Open to all ages	Profiles can be public or only accessible to friends; members can use privacy settings to control who can see their profile	No, Web site has a standard profile for all members but allows embellishments	Music, videos, photos	Yes
<p><b>Kidzworld</b> (<a href="http://www.kidzworld.com">www.kidzworld.com</a>) An online community for tweens to express themselves through the creation of original content, interact with each other in the chatrooms, and build a profile</p>	Standard—free for all members	9–14	Profiles can be public or only accessible to friends; members can use privacy settings to control who can see their profile	No, Web site has a standard profile for all members but allows embellishments	Photos	Yes
<p><b>Neopets</b> (<a href="http://www.neopets.com">www.neopets.com</a>) A virtual pet site based around the virtual world of Neopia, where members take care of their virtual pets by buying them food, toys, clothes, and other accessories</p>	Standard—free for all members	Open to all ages				Yes

<b>Web Site</b>	<b>Membership Type</b>	<b>Age Restriction</b>	<b>Profile Privacy</b>	<b>Personalization of Profile</b>	<b>File(s) Uploaded</b>	<b>Ads on Web Site</b>
<b>Sanriotown</b> <b>(www.sanriotown.com)</b> A massive multiplayer online role-playing game that focuses on resource collecting and social interaction	Standard—free for all members	Open to all ages				Yes
<b>Social Splash</b> <b>(www.socialsplash.com)</b> A social networking community that allows one to find new and old friends; connect/keep in touch with friends; and share music, videos, and photos	Standard—free for all members	Open to all ages	Profiles can be public or only accessible to friends; members can use privacy settings to control who can see their profile	No, Web site has a standard profile for all members	Music, videos, photos	Yes
<b>Webkinz</b> <b>(www.webkinz.com)</b> A virtual Web site in which you must have an account to use the site—to access the site, a small plush toy must be purchased	Must purchase a Webkinz plush toy in order to participate on site	Open to all ages	Member profiles (room) are private and users must grant permission to enter/view their room	Yes, members have the ability to decorate their room (profile)		Yes
<b>Xanga</b> <b>(www.xanga.com)</b> An online community where you can start your own Web log, share photos and videos, and meet new friends	Standard—free for all members	Open to all ages			Photos, videos	Yes

## APPENDIX B

### Online Resources

#### Web Site

[www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)

[www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec13.shtm](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec13.shtm)

[www.kids.getnetwise.org/safetyguide/technology/socialnetworking](http://www.kids.getnetwise.org/safetyguide/technology/socialnetworking)

[www.onguardonline.gov/topics/social-networking-sites.aspx](http://www.onguardonline.gov/topics/social-networking-sites.aspx)

[www.quantcast.com](http://www.quantcast.com)

[www.social-networking-websites-review.toptenreviews.com/myspace-review.html](http://www.social-networking-websites-review.toptenreviews.com/myspace-review.html)

[www.eschoolnews.com](http://www.eschoolnews.com)

[www.whoswatchingcharlottesville.org/social.html](http://www.whoswatchingcharlottesville.org/social.html)

[www.greatschools.net/content/mediaChoices.page](http://www.greatschools.net/content/mediaChoices.page)

#### Information

An Internet survival guide for parents to help keep kids safe and Internet-smart. Searchable by topic and age group. Includes many informative videos.

The Federal Trade Commission provides facts and information regarding SNS, online safety, and additional sites/phone numbers for various agencies that protect children and their online experiences.

Promotes Internet safety to kids, teens, and families. Provides information on the risks of SNS and promotes online privacy. Includes resources for parents.

Shares tips, facts, and resources with families in order to help kids socialize safely online.

Provides free direct measurement of audiences for sites, blogs, videos, games, widgets, and all forms of distributed content.

Provides written reviews and comparisons for top SNS.

Online newspaper that requires a free membership to view articles that focus on technology for educators.

Provides tips and information on social networking.

Has a section “Media and Your Child” that contains useful articles for parents and educators.