



Social Networking Tips **for Mentors**

The relationship between a mentor and mentee is very unique and brings its own rewards and challenges. The expanded use of social networking produces a unique challenge for mentors. Should you friend your mentee on Facebook?

Many of today's youth use social networking as one of their primary methods of communication and it can be a wonderful way of keeping the lines of communication open. However, social networking can also blur boundaries and this can be confusing to youth if they are given insight into the lives of their mentor in ways that might not be recommended. It can lead to a shift in how that mentor is perceived by that youth which can change their understanding of the mentor's appropriate role in their life. It is nearly impossible to stop the exchange of personal details about oneself in a social networking arena.

What is the Mentor's Role?

Mentors should consider their role when making the decision to connect with their mentees through social networking. Despite mentors and mentees entering into their relationship on equal terms, there is still a power dynamic because the mentor is responsible for reporting information on the youth's social, academic, and behavioral progress and safety to the program. Obviously, if a mentor sees on a mentee's page that the youth is in danger of harming themselves or others it should be reported to the proper authorities.

However, there are areas of gray that exist – what is the mentor's role in reporting things like school absences, foul language, or indication of sexual activity, particularly if these are things shared between the mentee and his or her peers and not in the context of the mentoring relationship itself? If the mentor shares concerns, how does this impact the relationship?

When determining the appropriateness of becoming “friends” with your mentee, consider the pros and cons:

Pros:

- Youth utilize social networking more than they use email. It may be easier to communicate with a young person if you are connected through social media.
- Your mentee may feel closer to you if you are connected to them through social media.
- Social media provides an opportunity to share information quickly through the use of status statements and messages.

Cons:

- Social networking can blur boundaries.
- Youth who are “friends” with their mentor may see information, language or pictures that are not appropriate for them to see because of the nature of their relationship.
- Mentors may see things on their mentee's profile that are questionable in nature. Questions arise regarding what needs to be reported to the program and to the mentee's parents. Reporting on these things may cause the mentee to lose trust in the mentor.