



ERIN
HARREL

of Cape Coral has a Ph.D. in education and is the mother of three children.

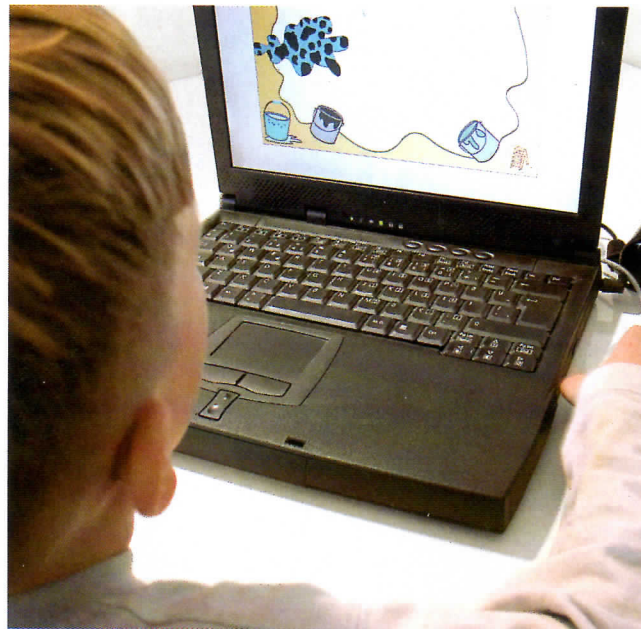
Facebook frenzy

To let your kids or not

All too often, “no” is the easy answer. Usually, it’s to keep our kids safe and healthy. Sometimes, it’s because we’re too tired, stressed or overburdened to deal with the request. I assume I am not alone when I initially told my 12-year-old son, Jude, “no” to having his own Facebook page, “no” to having his own e-mail account, “no” to having a cell phone and “no” to creating an instant messaging account.

No, no, no... Jude, of course, was taking note of all of the noes. One night as we sat and chatted, he asked why he couldn’t have a Facebook account. I really wanted to answer “because I said so” but knew that wouldn’t resolve the issue at hand. Hence, we began to discuss the numerous reasons that he wanted one.

Of course, the first line was the standard pre-teen statement: “because everyone has one.” That line usually falls on deaf ears in our house or is followed by the motherly retort, “I don’t care what everyone else does.” That night, I held my tongue and delved into a deeper discussion of what it meant to have a



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Facebook presence.

Jude explained that being on Facebook was like talking on the phone. He added, “You know, Mom, you use to talk on the phone when you were 12. Well, nowadays things are just easier; we chat on Facebook.”

At that moment in the conversation, I realized the social networking skills kids are learning today are totally different than that of what my generation was accustomed to. Modern day social networking provides instant gratification and instant contact with all of their friends.

After conducting some research on the dangers of digital networking and thoroughly navigating the settings on Facebook, my husband, Greg, and I decided to honor Jude’s request for a Facebook account. Just as our parents set parameters for phone usage, Greg and I quickly realized we were going to have to set some ground rules for Facebook. These rules are simple:

- No Facebook until after homework is done.
- We must have access to his Facebook page and we’ll occasionally monitor for strange individuals.

• The only people who are to be given permission to view his Facebook page are people he knows. We asked that Jude not even include friends of friends until he has met them in person.

By learning more about Facebook and the social networking opportunities it provides, I was able to say “yes” to one of the many requests that come with raising a pre-teen. It did take some time to do the research and some coaxing on Jude’s part, but overall the Facebook experience has been positive. Jude treasures his time on Facebook and we have a great tool to help motivate him to do his homework and other chores.

As with any technology, there are always risks involved. Learning more about the settings and the security measures provided by Facebook helps to minimize the risks. The rest is up to parents to encourage children to make positive choices and not to abuse the privileges they are granted. As Jude is learning, the more he exercises his ability to make good decisions, the easier it is for us to say “yes” to his requests. 