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The Promise and Perils of Blogging

A place to write down your thoughts and feelings, your secret desires and hopes for the future—one that is open for anyone to read and comment on. Welcome to the Blog.

Blogs, or “weblogs” (“web” + “log”) are journals posted on the Internet. These online diaries are often hosted free of charge by companies who get money by placing click-through ads on the blog pages. What distinguishes the blog from any other web page is the format. The entries are posted in reverse chronological order, and each entry contains an area for comments from the readers. This enables topics to be discussed among the readers in an ongoing dialogue.

Blogs can be written by anyone, about anything: the school lunch, how to kill a spider, etc. The over four million bloggers leave no conversational stone unturned. Typically, a blog contains links to other blogs

The appeal of blogging to

teens is natural. Blogging has become a social event. A way to reach out and connect and share ideas of a personal nature in an impersonal forum. This private diary broadcast to millions of strangers is a way of getting attention while hiding behind a computer. It’s not surprising that blogging has so quickly become identified as a “teen” pastime.

The promise of teen blogging is that it nurtures important social skills, fills a need for self-expression, and builds writing ability. And most of the time it does just that. Careless blogging, on the other hand, can be dangerous in many ways.

The online sexual predator can over time glean enough information from a blog to put together a personal profile of the author. School name, names of friends, teachers, physical addresses, street names, town—anything and everything can be used by the sexual predator.

While the teen posts what s/he

thinks are innocent details, s/he is in reality drawing a roadmap to her house. S/he is lulled into a false sense of security by what s/he sees as the anonymity of the Internet.

This perceived anonymity gives rise to the other dangers of blogging: cyber bullying and slander. Without the physical immediacy of an audience, teen bloggers are less likely to see and understand the damage their words can do. Schoolyard gossip finds its way into a blog, and the target of the gossip suffers at the hands of unknown online assailants.

Blogs can be used to the same effect by cyber bullies. The damage done by cyber bullying cannot be overstated—just recently 13-year-old Ryan Halligan committed suicide as a result of cyber bullying. Teens, especially when it comes to blogs, sometimes forget that anything posted on the Internet has an unintended audience, and therefore, unintended consequences

Bloggng: Breaking It Down

- *Blogs: Journals posted on the Internet.*
- *Weblogs: Another name for blogs.*
- *Blogs are maintained in chronological order by date of post. People who read the blog are usually welcome to post replies, their thoughts, etc. This makes most blogs interactive.*
- *Bloggng makes the writer feel like they are writing confidentially because they are behind a screen. However, the reality is that anyone online can read the blog. This can be dangerous.*

Protecting Your Blog

If you're thinking of creating your own online blog, here are some tips you can follow to ensure your safety.

1. Password-protect your blog. Make sure that nobody knows your password other than your parents.
2. Do not include very personal and detailed information (places you hang out, malls, etc.) in your blog.
3. Do not complete a profile or include name, address, phone number, school, zip code, e-mail address, or screen name in your blog. This is exactly the kind of information a predator is looking for, so don't do it!
4. Do not release any personal information about *anyone else* you know either. Doing so would be just like telling a predator "I'm not interested in speaking with you, but my best friend Chelsea would be more than happy to."
5. Pretend that you are a predator. Read your writing and see if you can pick out details that lead to revealing personal info about you. If you come across anything objectionable, change it so it is less identifying to the unknown and potentially dangerous reader.
6. Do not include photos of yourself or others in your blog.
7. Do not leave your blog page open and your computer unattended. Someone could step in and write something as you.
8. Do not spread gossip or slander about your classmates.



A Student's Tips for Safer Blogging

It is important to realize the great dangers that come along with blogs. Unless you want everyone on the Internet to read about your personal life, you want to keep your online blog confidential. Keep in mind that the Internet is very populated, and there are always going to be those people, predators, who want to sneak into your personal life to gain information about you and cause trouble.

Predators are on the Internet 24 hours a day, picking a target and trying to formulate a plan to capture their prey. You may wonder what I mean by "capture." I'm sure you have heard the news stories of

someone (usually a minor) who meets an Internet "friend" in person, and then is hurt or, killed, by the stranger.

“The predator has gained information about his prey, and often his source of information is—you guessed it—online blogs.”

If you aren't careful, you could find yourself in a very uncomfortable and possibly dangerous situation.

Predators love to put puzzles together. Each bit of personal information gives the predator a piece to your life's puzzle. Keep in mind that a little information leads to bigger answers for the predator. Given enough pieces, they would be able to see your entire life story — all from the information you have unknowingly donated to them.

Keep the following tips in mind as you go about creating your blog. These simple measures can, and most likely will, make a difference. Have fun, and more importantly—Stay safe on the Internet!

*By Christopher
A Student from Florida*