common sense media

What are the basic social media rules for middle schoolers?

The reality is that most kids start developing online relationships around the age of 8, usually through virtual worlds such as Club Penguin. By age 10, they've progressed to multiplayer games and sharing their digital creations and homemade videos on sites such as YouTube. By age 13, millions of kids have created accounts on social-networking sites such as Facebook. Here are the essential safety and responsibility guidelines for middle schoolers:

- **Follow the rules.** Many social sites have an age minimum of 13 for both legal and safety/privacy reasons. Encourage kids to stick with age-appropriate sites.
- **Tell your kids to think before they post.** Remind them that everything can be seen by a vast, invisible audience (otherwise known as friends-of-friends-of-friends). Each family will have different rules, but, for middle school kids, it's a good idea for parents to have access to what their kids are doing online, at least at first, to be sure that what's being posted is appropriate. Parents can help keep kids from doing something they'll regret later.
- **Make sure kids set their privacy settings.** Privacy settings aren't foolproof, but they can be helpful. Take the time to learn about default settings and how to change privacy settings on your kids' favorite sites, and teach your kids how to control their privacy.
- **Kindness counts.** Lots of sites have anonymous applications such as "bathroom walls" or "honesty boxes" that allow users to tell their friends what they think of them. Rule of thumb: If your kids wouldn't say it to someone's face, they shouldn't post it.