What is Facebook? Developed in 2004 by then Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook is a social networking site used by more than 800 million active users in every country on the planet, so far in 70 languages. The site's minimum age is 13, but teens represent only a minority population on Facebook. It's used by a lot of adults, certainly including parents. But not just individuals – Facebook's also used by businesses, organizations and governments all over the world, to send marketing messages, seek charitable funding and communicate with customers and constituents.

Why do young people use Facebook? For as many reasons as adults do. The research of psychologists and sociologists shows us that they use social networking sites for:

- Socializing or "hanging out" with their friends, for the most part friends at school
- Day-to-day news about their friends, acquaintances, relatives, and peer groups
- Collaborating on school work
- Validation or emotional support
- Self-expression and the identity exploration and formation that occurs in adolescent development
- What sociologists call "informal learning," or learning outside of formal settings such as school, including learning social norms and social literacy
- Learning the technical skills of the digital age, which many businesspeople feel are essential to professional development
- Discovering and exploring interests, both academic and future professional interests
- Learning about the world beyond their immediate home and school environments
- Civic engagement – participating in causes that are meaningful to them.

Is Facebook safe? Just like communities in the physical world, no social networking site, virtual world, online game, or any other social-media service can provide a guarantee of 100% safety, Facebook included. Why? Because this is the social Web and safety depends a great deal on users' behavior toward one another. Facebook provides safety and privacy features and education for its users. Parents would benefit from visiting Facebook's Safety Center, a comprehensive resource for all Facebook users with special areas for teens, parents, educators, and law enforcement. That in-site safety information and this guidebook are important for the very reason that Facebook's "product" is produced by its users. Parents need to know that, on the social Web, safety is a shared responsibility – a negotiation between users (for example, between people in a family photo posted by one family member in it), between users and the site, and between teen users and their parents. So the short answer to that question is that, in this new, very social media environment, a user's safety depends on the user as much as on the site. That's why parents need to be informed and keep

communication lines with their children wide open – because youth, like all Facebook users, are constantly communicating, posting, and sharing content on the site.

What are the risks involved in social networking? Youth-risk research has made five key findings:

1. Young people who behave aggressively online are more than twice as likely to be victimized online, so children's own behavior on Facebook or any social space online or on phones is key to their well-being there.
2. The most common risk young people face online is peer harassment or aggression – in other words hurtful, harassing, or defamatory behavior.
3. A child's psychosocial makeup and physical environment (for example, home and school) are better predictors of risk than any technology the child uses, so...
4. Not all children are equally at risk online, and the children who are most at risk online are those who are most at risk in "real life," or offline.
5. Although, for the vast majority of youth, online social networking is largely a reflection of offline life, it can also amplify, perpetuate and widely distribute real-life problems or conflicts – very quickly. Something posted in anger or on impulse is extremely difficult to take back, so it has never been more important for users (of any age) to think before they "speak," post, or send a text message.

Specific social networking risks include...

- Harassment or online bullying ("cyberbullying") on the part of your children or others'
- Posting information about themselves that:
  - a) could be used to embarrass or manipulate them;
  - b) could cause psychological harm;
  - c) could be used by criminals to steal their identity or property or – though very rare – determine their physical location to cause physical harm
- Damage to reputation or future prospects because of young people's own behavior or that of their peers – unkind or angry posts, compromising photos or videos, or group conflict depicted in text and imagery
- Spending too much time online, losing a sense of balance in their activities ("too much" is subjective, which is why parents need to be engaged)
- Exposure to inappropriate content (this too is subjective) – although, typically, worse content can be found out on the Web at large than on Facebook or other responsible social networking sites
- Potential for inappropriate contact with adults (parents need to ensure that social networking does not lead to offline contact unapproved by them and other caring adults in their children's lives).

How do we parent Facebook users? Just as in your child's offline life, you are key to helping him or her form a positive identity, maintain good relationships, and create a positive reputation on the social Web. We'll get specific in the how-to section, but here are a few basic social-Web parenting tips that would be very helpful to keep in mind: Facebook use is very individual, which is why the No. 1 safety tip is "Talk with your child." Don't believe everything you see or hear about youth on Facebook or in the news media, which often present a very negative picture.

Ways to monitor your child's Facebook activities- If you haven't already, consider creating your own account on Facebook so you can "friend" your child. That's probably the best "monitoring tool" you could use. After that, you can establish a family rule that says something like, "No one can block other family members from content any of us posts on Facebook." Family members can always send each other messages, which are private like email messages. Some kids might be willing to have their parents friend them but are reluctant to have their parents' names show up on their friends list. Some parents solve this by creating an account under a different name, although it is a violation of Facebook's terms of service not to use your real name. Another approach some parents take is to require that they know all their children's passwords (email, instant messaging, social networking, etc.). We suggest this works better with younger children, because many teens would rather "go underground" (use other sites secretly) than allow parents that level of monitoring capability.

Another option is to subscribe to one of the online reputation-monitoring services, which can help you find out what your teen is posting online without your having to friend them on Facebook; some of them charge a monthly fee.

Special safeguards for teens Parents may want to know that Facebook has safety and privacy settings for users under 18 which provide them with more protection. These include:

- Search: Teens can't be listed in public searches. Adults can, though they have the option to opt out.
- Tagging: Only friends and friends of friends can tag teens. Anyone can tag adults. If a friend tags a minor, the tag is visible to anyone who can see the post on Facebook or within apps and games. If a friend of a friend tags a minor, it's more restrictive. In that case only the teen's friends will see a link to the tagged content. The ability to review tags is on by default for teens and off by default for adults.
- Audience: The maximum audience that a teen can share with is friends of friends. Adults can share with the public. Teens can, however, post in a public

forum, and any comments they make to a post can be seen by anyone else who can see that post.

- Location-sharing is turned off by default, but teens can turn it on. For adults it's on by default.
- Subscribe: It's not possible to subscribe to a teen's posts or timeline because they can't post to the public from their timeline. Teens can, however, subscribe to anyone's posts.
- Friend requests: Only friends and friends of friends can send messages to teens.
- Messages is turned off by default, but teens can turn it on. For adults it's on by default.
- Chat: Teens can only chat with friends.
- Advertising: Facebook will not display advertisements to teens about adult content, alcohol, dating, gambling and lotteries, health and fitness and subscription services.