

# Parenting in a digital world

By Chuck Lasker

It's difficult enough to keep up with what your kids are doing with other kids at school and at play. But these days you have to deal with their online activities, too. Kids are joining the "social web" at younger and younger ages. Despite the Facebook minimum age of 13 to create an account, a recent Pew Internet survey\* found that almost half of American 12-year olds have Facebook accounts.

It might be tempting to take the simple path of shutting your children out of the social web completely. However, they could end up falling behind in the online skills they will need for their education and careers. Instead, you could use this opportunity to help your kids become responsible online users while encouraging open communications.

There are steps you can take to protect your kids while encouraging responsible digital citizenship.

1. **Watch the video and review the comments** at this Phineas and Ferb web page: <http://bit.ly/Cybersmart>. There is a link near the bottom for parents, too.
2. **Sign up on Facebook and start using it yourself.** Ask your kids to help you understand it as a way to encourage communication.
3. **Insist that your kids make you a Facebook "friend."** Tell them you will not post embarrassing things on their pages (and then be sure you don't).
4. **Regularly review what your kids post and their friends list.** Ask about friends you don't recognize.
5. **Be a good digital citizen yourself.** How you behave online will influence how your kids behave online.

6. **Keep learning and talking.** The digital world is changing fast. Keep asking your kids to help you along.

By encouraging responsible Internet use and showing your kids you are enjoying learning about social media with them, you will set yourself up as the first place they will go when they have concerns with anything that is happening online. And that's the most important thing we can do as parents.

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\* <http://bit.ly/pewstats>

