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Cyberbullying

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Technology now allows people — often children — to bully online. Social messaging sites can open up the user to a variety of bullying techniques outside of the playground. How parents and other adults can help reduce bullying over the Internet is examined in this NebGuide.

Technology has opened the world to us. We read the daily news, search for information, communicate with each other, and shop online. We share our lives and instantly communicate through "smart" phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) like Blackberries, text messaging, instant messaging, chat rooms, bulletin boards, blogs, social networking Web sites and interactive games. Computers with Web cameras allow instant face-to-face communication around the world with family, friends, and coworkers. We can check on our children with our computers and through nanny cameras.

Technology can be very positive and rewarding, but the opposite is also true. Scam artists, stalkers, and bullies use technology for fraud, intimidation, and harassment.

Bill Belsey, creator of *www.cyberbullying.org* and the term *cyberbullying,* defines it as the use of technology for deliberate, repetitive, and hostile behavior toward an individual by another person or group to disgrace, embarrass, threaten or terrify an individual.

Information posted on Web sites or blogs, sent through mass emails and cell phones, group instant messaging, texting, chatting, and so forth can reach worldwide audiences in a very short time. Cyberbully Alert (*http://cyberbullyalert.com/blog/2008/08/top-5-technologies-used-to-cyberbully/*) also notes that anyone adept at using photo editing software can take a hidden photo of someone he or she wants to victimize, and change it so the person appears to be in a compromising position, or doing something illegal or immoral. The photo can then be spread instantly across the Internet.

Although we think of bullying as a schoolground activity, the home is no longer a safe refuge from the bully in today's digital world. Cyberbullying has increased in direct relationship to the number of teenagers with access to technology.

Studies at the Kamaron Institute indicate that cyberbullying incidents have quadrupled in five years.

In a 2006 Harris Poll, 43 percent of all teens reported being cyberbullied. Fifteen-year-olds reported the highest incidences of bullying, with 54 percent reporting being victimized.

I-SAFE America Inc. found that 58 percent of youth had admitted that they had not shared with a parent that mean or hurtful things have been said to them online.

When does bullying begin? "Young children model the behavior of older children and adults," according to John DeFrain, UNL Extension Specialist, Family and Community Development. "If they live in a world where people use verbal and physical violence to gain power over others, they are likely to pick up these behaviors at an early age. Fortunately, thoughtful and dedicated adults can create a more loving and caring environment where bullying is minimized."

Bullying is a growing problem in many middle schools when children are trying to find acceptance, and continues through high school and beyond.

The cyberbully might be motivated by retaliation for actual physical bullying. In some cases, cyberbullying may be related to ethnicity, culture, religion, physical characteristics, or a backlash after the breakup of a personal relationship. Cyberbully victims can be boys, girls, teachers, parents, and other adults.

Nancy Willard, of the University of Oregon College of Education, states that technology can affect young people's ethical behavior because they feel that they can't be identified in an anonymous environment, nor will they have to endure feedback and the personal consequences of their behavior.

Because they don't necessarily see the victim's response, youngsters cannot connect what they have done with the harm they have caused, nor do they understand the long-term impact of their impulsive decisions.

When we think of boys who bully, we think of someone with more physical power over a victim. Online techniques used by boys often include one-to-one intimidation such as making threats, stealing passwords, and posting offensive pictures. The Media Awareness Network found that 60 percent of students pretended to be someone else while online; they use stolen passwords or another person's screen name. Once identified for cyber crimes, these youth claim innocence and implicate the individual from whom they have stolen the password.

Girls were about twice as likely as boys to be victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying, according to Margaret Ross,

president of the Kamaron Institute and preemptive bullying expert. Motivation for cyberbullying may be anger, revenge, power, entertainment, or because the bully sees himself or herself as righting a wrong, according to Parry Aftab, Internet privacy and security lawyer.

Cyberbullying techniques might include:

- Flaming – posting online messages that are insulting and may use angry and vulgar language. It is often designed to provoke a digital *fight* on the Internet, message boards, chat rooms and so forth. The message is a *flame,* which may have been posted by a *flamer* or *troll* as *flamebait,* which deliberately seeks a response back.
- Online harassment – sending repeated rude messages through email, spamming or other online networks.
- Cyberstalking – using technology to stalk someone resulting in the person being afraid for his/her safety. Cyberstalking may lead to or be incorporated with actual physical stalking.
- Denigration or *dissing* (slang for disrespecting) someone online – sending or posting rumors online to damage someone's reputation.
- Masquerading or *impersonation* – posing to be someone else to get the person into trouble or to make him or her look bad.
- Outing – telling someone else's secrets online.
- Trickery – tricking someone to tell you his/her secrets and then spreading them online.
- Exclusion – intentionally excluding someone from communication by not allowing him/her to be on a *buddy list* or online group.

What can a parent do about cyberbullying? First, it's important that parents and youth not reply or respond in any way to cyberbullies. Research indicates that being responsive may, in fact, escalate the activity. Instead, parents will need to think like a detective or lawyer.

Document the activity with dates and times and print out any offensive materials. Keep the original email or other digital information, which can help computer specialists find the digital source. Use this information to report the activity to appropriate authorities, such as the school, local police department, state patrol, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), your Internet service provider (ISP), and/or groups like WiredSafety.

Parents also should consider changing their family's personal email addresses if cyberbullying is occurring online. If bullying gets out of hand through cell phones or text messages, consider getting a different mobile phone and giving the number only to close family or friends.

"Bullying isn't just 'teasing' or 'fun,'" DeFrain says. "It's a nasty business and carries the seeds of even worse things to come. Many bullies are likely to grow up to be abusive spouses and abusive parents."

Whenever bullying occurs, it's important to stop the bullying before it escalates, for the immediate safety of youth and for their futures.

Resources

Cyberbullying Web site: *www.cyberbullying.org*
WiredSafety Web site: *www.wiredsafety.org*
Beware of the Cyber Bully, iSafe.org *http://www.isafe.org/imgs/pdf/education/CyberBullying.pdf*
Cyberbully Alert, *http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/parents/howdoyouhandleacyberbully/*
Educator's Guide to Cyberbullying and Cyberthreats, N. Willard, *http://cyberbully.org/cyberbully/docs/cbcteducator.pdf*
Internet Generation Gap: An Analysis of Student Assessments and Parent Surveys from an Active Internet Safety Environment. *http://internet.suite101.com/article.cfm/netiquette_guidelines* or *http://www.isafse.org/imgs/pdf/internet_generation_gapef.pdf*
Five Technologies Used to Cyberbully, *http://cyberbullyalert.com/blog/2008/08/top-5-technologies-used-to-cyberbully/*
Stop Cyberbullying, Wired Kids, Inc. *http://www.stopcyberbullying.org*
Top 10 Netiquette Guidelines, J. Shoemaker-Galloway. *http://internet.suite101.com/article.cfm/netiquette_guidelines*
Young Canadians in a Wired World – Phase II Overview, Media Awareness Network. *http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/research/YCWW/phaseII/index.cfm*

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Family Journals

Deborah J. Weitzenkamp, Assistant Extension Educator

> Whether you are writing a journal or are helping an elderly relative write, this Neb-Guide will provide tips on how to make that process work.

Have you ever wished that you could read about the lives of your grandmother or grandfather? Where did they live? What were their lives like? How did they meet their spouse? What were the major turning points in their life? A family journal can answer those questions for generations to come.

A family journal provides descendants with a firsthand account of family members' lives, but the benefits begin long before the journal is read.

Research indicates that individuals who pursue reminiscence work, such as writing a journal or verbally sharing personal history, are more likely to implement change in their own lives. Through reflection, they are able to understand who they are in the present and how they are shaped by their past experiences. Research also indicates that elderly participants are more likely to achieve a sense of life satisfaction, reduce signs of depression, and reconnect with their social networks.

When beginning the journaling process it is important to understand that everyone's life is a series of unique events. Everyone has a story to tell, each story being as unique as a snowflake.

For those concerned that their story is not unique, consider this:

- Reviewing your own life can help you understand it better.
- You can pass on family stories and/or your own story to family members.
- You can leave a historical account.

- You can experience the pleasure of reminiscing.
- You can experience the pleasure of writing.
- You can give an honest account of your life.
- You can improve your quality of life.

How to Get Started

Each and every one of us today is a sum of our experiences. We all have made decisions that have been turns in the path of our life story. We do, however, have some common conceptual starting points.

Begin by writing down some important dates. These include significant dates like birth dates, marriage dates, dates children were born and so forth.

Your journal becomes much more interesting when you start to fill in the stories surrounding these dates. At this stage of writing it is not important to worry about spelling and grammar. Focus on giving an in-depth description of the event. For example, you could simply give the date that your first child was born, or you could talk about the anticipation of your first child, how you decided upon a name, what it was like to hold your baby, and other things you remember from that time. Telling the *family story* instead of just reporting a date helps the reader really understand the story and helps the writer achieve a sense of identity and purpose.

Here are a few of the life story turns that you may choose to include in your family journal:

Early years:
- How did you spend your days as a child?
- What was your favorite subject in school? Least favorite?
- What was your first pet's name?

- What was something you did that you never told your parents about?
- Tell about a day off from school.
- Describe the house where you grew up.
- Where did you go to school? What was the school like? How did you get there?
- What game did you like to play with your brother/sisters? What were the rules?
- What is your full name? How did your parents decide upon your name?
- Did you have chores when you were a child? What were they?

Childhood family and relatives:
- When you were a child, how did your family celebrate Christmas?
- When you were a child, how did your family celebrate the Fourth of July?
- When you were a child, what room did most of the family discussion occur?
- Did one of your family members/friends have an unusual saying, catch phrase or manner of speaking? What was it?
- What were some of the strengths of your family members?
- What were some of the challenges faced by family members?
- Tell a family story that you have heard from an earlier generation.
- How did your parents meet?
- What is a traditional family recipe or food? What was included in the recipe? And who always made it? Why?
- What did your parents do for a living?
- Who was your favorite uncle or aunt. Why?
- Describe a family reunion.

Adult years and vocations:
- Who was the most influential person in your life? How did you meet them?
- What was your first job? (who did you work for, and what were you doing) How much were you paid?
- How did you decide on your career?

Marriage and descendant family:
- How did you meet the "love of your life"?
- Describe the day your child or grandchild was born.

- Think about one of your younger children or grandchildren. If you could write them a letter to be delivered to them in 15 years, what would you tell them?
- Describe a family reunion.
- When and where did you go on your first date?
- What global event impacted your family? How was your family impacted?
- Where did you go on vacation? Who went with you? What did you do when you were there?
- What is your most memorable experience as a parent?

Community activities:
- What community activities have you helped with? Why did you get involved? Who were the people you worked with?

Military service:
- Who in your family served in the military? What did they do? Where did they serve? Do you know any of the friends that served with them, and where their friends were from?

Friends:
- Looking over your life to date, who has been your best friend?
- Who was your best friend in school? Why were you friends?

Big events:
- Describe a weather related incident (thunderstorm, blizzard, flood)
- What is the first birthday party you can remember? Whose birthday party was it? What made it memorable?

Making the Process Easier

Following are a few suggestions to help you with the journaling process:

- Write in small sketches of 5 to 10 minutes on a specific topic.
- Engage family members in the process.
- Join a life story or memoir writing group.
- Tell the stories of how you participated in world history.

- Write your *"ethical will"* (values and beliefs that you would like to pass on to your family).
- Ask someone in your family to help.

The process of writing and sharing your family journal can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. Remember though it's a process and you don't have to write it overnight. Take your time, enjoy the process, and you will learn more about yourself and your family.

Resources

To read more about journaling, look for the following at your local library or on the Internet.

Birren, J., and Cochran, K. (2001). *Telling the stories of life through guided autobiography groups*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University.

Collins, C. (2005). Autobiography Workshop: Personal Narrative as a Wellness Tool For the Elderly. *Journal of Extension*, Retrieved December 28, 2006, from http://www.joe.org/joe/2005august/iw1.shtml

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Protecting Children Online

Deborah J. Weitzenkamp, Jennifer S. Nixon and Phyllis I. Schoenholz
Extension Educators

> This publication explains potential Internet hazards and how to protect children from them.

In an age where children are using the Internet on a daily basis, parents need to be aware of how children use it, potential online hazards, how to recognize signs that their children might be at risk, and steps that they can take to safeguard their children. While it is important that parents be proactive regarding their children's use of the Internet, it also is important that parents not overreact to potential threats. Instead, parents need to take a proactive approach toward protecting their children in a technology-rich environment.

Internet Use by Children

In 2004, a study examining Internet use by children found that 98 percent of children ages 9 to 19 used the Internet weekly. Among those Internet users, 92 percent reported accessing it at school, 75 percent reported using it at home and 64 percent reported using it in another location. The same research study found that 36 percent of the children who use the Internet weekly reported that they had not received any instructions regarding how to use it safely. Additionally, 40 percent of the children admitted to having chatroom conversations that were sexual in nature. Children reported that they also were sharing personal information such as their names and addresses with people they had met online. Alarmingly, children also reported that they perceived these online friends to be close and more accepting of their true selves than those friends they knew in person.

Signs of Risky Online Behavior

According to research conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the following are some signs that a child might be at risk online:

- Your child spends large amounts of time online, especially at night.
- You find pornography on your child's computer.

- Your child receives phone calls from men you don't know or is making calls, sometimes long distance, to numbers you don't recognize.
- Your child receives mail, gifts, or packages from someone you don't know.
- Your child turns the computer monitor off or quickly changes the screen on the monitor when you come into the room.
- Your child becomes withdrawn from the family.
- Your child is using an online account belonging to someone else.

Steps for Parents

- Communicate with your child. Have a conversation with your child about Internet safety beforehand and keep the lines of communication open.
- Determine what your child is doing online. Discuss with your child what sites are being looked at and whether social networking sites are being used.
- Supervise Internet friends. Parents should become acquainted with their child's online friends much like they would with friends walking into their homes. Additionally, parents should discuss with their child the dangers of meeting Internet friends offline. If a child is planning to meet an Internet friend in person, the meeting should take place in a public location and a trusted adult, predetermined by the parent, should be with the child during the meeting.
- Establish unrevealing screen names. Screen names, or aliases, frequently are used when communicating online. When determining screen names, parents should actively help make sure that screen names do not use suggestive language or personal information. Make sure your child's screen name doesn't reveal personal information, such as name, age, hometown, or school. Pick a name that is anonymous.
- Monitor online activity. Parents should periodically review the history of online activities. Additionally,

parents should consider setting their browser security to high to reduce the potential exposure to pornography or other inappropriate materials.

- Place computers in a central location. Parents should only allow Internet access on computers that are in a central location of the home, such as a living room. Avoid allowing Internet access in secluded areas of the home, such as a child's bedroom.

- Parents should assist children in establishing secure passwords. Secure passwords include combinations of characters, numbers, and letters as well as upper and lowercase letters. As a part of establishing secure passwords, tell children that passwords are not to be shared with anyone except their parents. Explain the financial and personal dangers of sharing passwords.

- Restrict access to social networking sites. If it's determined that a child will have access to social networking sites, parents should insist that social networking sites not be public. For safety, the site should have restricted access to only a select group of people such as family and close friends. Make sure the people in the restricted access group maintain the privacy of the site.

- Use filtering software. Install filter and blocking software such as Netnanny (*http://www.netnanny.com*) and Cyberpatrol (*http://cyberpatrol.com*). While these may not block all objectionable materials, they do help to reduce them.

- Post only information that both the child and parent would be comfortable seeing online. Help the child realize that many people can see the site, including teachers, police, the college they may try to apply to, and potential employers.

- Model online respect. Parents should model appropriate online behavior as well as discuss with their children that foul language or name calling is intolerable.

- Set up a family Internet use contract. Parents and children should discuss age-appropriate Internet activities and what the family policy is for Internet use both within and outside of the household. By setting up a family Internet use contract, parents and children can discuss the potential hazards of online materials and establish what the expectations are for children's conduct and behavior online. Examples of contracts can be found at *http://www.netsmartz.org/*, *http://safekids.com* and *http://www.isafe.org/*.

- Maintain lines of communication. Make sure that your child knows that you will listen calmly to concerns about online activity and respond in a way that is supportive.

Just as parents set safety guidelines for swimming, crossing the street, and buckling seatbelts, parents also need to be vigilant when their children use the Internet. Parents must stay abreast with technology changes and help guard their children's safety online.

References and Resources

CyberSmart provides free student curriculum at *http://www.cybersmartcurriculum.org/*

Dombrowski, S.C., Gischlar, K.L., and Durst, T. (2007) Safeguarding young people from cyber pornography and cyber sexual predation: A major dilemma of the Internet. *Child Abuse Review* 16.

Kaiser Family Foundation (1999). "Kids & Media: The new millennium." Retrieved March 18, 2008, from: *http://www.kff.org/entmedia/1535-index.cfm*

The FBI offers a parent's guide to Internet safety at *http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm*

The Federal Trade Commission provides information about social networking site safety at *http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/tech/tec14.shtm*

The Pew Corporation discusses protecting teens online at *http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/152/report_display.asp*

The Polly Klaas Foundation discusses Internet safety at *http://www.pollyklaas.org/internet-safety/pkfsummary.pdf*

Wired Safety provides Internet safety information and an active support group at *http://www.wiredsafety.org/*

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Social Networking Sites: What They Are and How to Navigate Them

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Description:

The use of social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn has dramatically increased in recent years. Today, over 50 percent of teens and 35 percent of adults in the U.S. are using at least one type of social networking site. If used well, these sites can have many personal and professional benefits. Social networking can be a fun way to communicate with others, and an effective way to expand one's social and professional connections. It is important to practice good judgment and proper "netiquette" when developing personal profiles and interacting with others through such sites. This community program will introduce participants to social networking sites.

Goal:

Participants will increase their knowledge about social networking sites and how to effectively use them.

Objectives:

- Participants will understand what a social networking site is, including the benefits and potential challenges of its use.
- Participants will visit one social networking site and create a profile.

- As a group, participants will brainstorm possible ways they can use a social networking site in a positive and responsible way.

Before the Meeting:

- Read the Leader and Participant Guides.
- Plan how you are going to conduct the activities. Ideally, activities will be done in person with one or more computers with Internet access. Alternatively, you can assign participants to explore on their own, and then come together as a group to process their experiences.
- Download or bookmark the four videos referred to in this program:
  - Social Networking Sites: The Basics (*http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/hef602/build/hef603basics.m4v*)
  - Privacy and Safety (*http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/hef603/build/hef602safety.mp4*)
  - Create a Facebook Account (*http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/hef602/build/hef603facebook.mp4*)
  - Create a LinkedIn Account (*http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/hef602/build/hef603linkedIn.mp4*)

Introduction:

Social networking sites are websites that allow users to connect with others. These websites differ widely in what they offer, but most are designed to allow users to:

- create a profile that can be viewed by others;
- define a network of connections among other users of the site;
- interact with others in their own "networks" and, sometimes, with people in the networks of their connections (e.g., friends of friends).

Social networking sites provide many benefits. The following activities will help participants learn more about social networking sites, understand the different ways they can use the sites, and learn about responsible ways to navigate these sites.

Activity 1. Social Networking Sites: The Basics

Watch the video "Social Networking Sites: The Basics." This activity will help participants think about whether they want to use a social networking site and determine for what purposes they would use it.

Activity 2. Safety and Privacy

Watch the video "Privacy and Safety." Safety and privacy are two of the biggest issues that face users of social networking sites. This activity is intended to help participants consider and understand how to protect themselves. This includes choosing the types of information they share with the public and exploring the security settings of the social networking site they're using.

Activity 3. It's Time to Sign-On

Watch the video "Create a Facebook Account" and/or "Create a LinkedIn Account." In this activity, the group will choose a social networking site and create an account/profile. Participants can do this as a whole group and choose just one site, or each person can do it on his or her own. There are many different social networking sites but two of the most popular are Facebook (for personal and professional networking) and LinkedIn (for professional networking).

Questions, Comments or for Additional Information

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Social Networking Sites: What They Are and How to Navigate Them

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Description:

The use of social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn has dramatically increased in recent years. Today, over 50 percent of teens and 35 percent of adults in the U.S. are using at least one type of social networking site. If used well, these sites can have many personal and professional benefits. Social networking can be a fun way to communicate with others, and an effective way to expand your social and professional connections. Nonetheless, it is important to practice good judgment and proper "netiquette" when developing personal profiles and interacting with others through such sites. This community program will introduce you to the basics of social networking sites.

Goal:

You will increase your knowledge about social networking sites and how to effectively use them.

Objectives:

- You will understand what a social networking site is, including the benefits of its use, and the potential challenges of its use.

- You will visit one social networking site and create a profile.
- You will brainstorm possible ways they can use a social networking site in a positive and responsible way.

Introduction:

Social networking sites are websites that allow users to connect with others. These websites differ widely in what they offer, but most are designed to allow you to:

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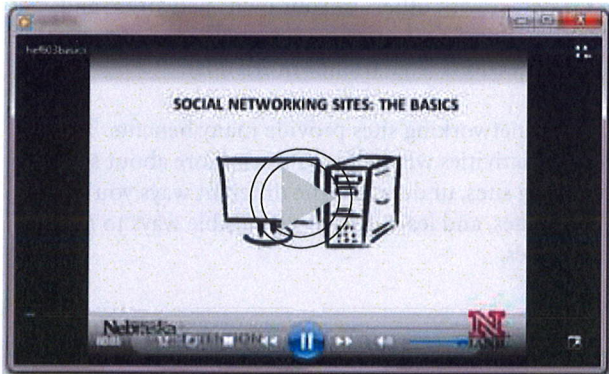### Activity 1. Social Networking Sites: The Basics

Social networking sites are intended to connect you with other people, whether it is for personal reasons or for professional purposes. While there are many social networking sites, two of the most popular sites are Facebook and LinkedIn.

LinkedIn is a site where you can create a profile that highlights your professional experience and activity. It is meant to help you create a network related to your work or other professional interests. Some people create a LinkedIn account to develop partnerships for their current work — for example, to find collaborators and partners. Others use the site because they are looking for a job and want to post their resume online for potential employers to see.

Facebook is by far the most popular social networking site on the Internet today. While most accounts on Facebook are created by individuals, many organizations, media outlets, businesses, and universities have Facebook accounts. Even the White House has a Facebook account.

The reasons for creating a Facebook account are varied. For many it is a way to keep in touch with friends and family — to update others on their lives or to share photos with loved ones. Some use Facebook to find long-lost friends or family. Others use Facebook to keep in touch with organizations they are involved in, or to keep up with information from professional or nonprofit organizations.

Before starting a social networking account, consider what you want to use it for. To help you think about what you want out of a social networking site, or even if you want to have be part of one at all, click on the photo below to watch a short clip explaining the uses and benefits of social networking sites.


Activity 2. Privacy and Safety

Privacy and safety are two of the biggest issues that face users of social networking sites. This activity will help you consider and understand how to protect your-self by choosing what types of information you share with the public and exploring the security settings of the social networking site you're using. Click on the photo to start the video.

Activity 3. Signing On

You have now explored the idea of social networking. You have also considered what you would like to use it for and how to be a responsible user. It's now time to create an account and sign on. As mentioned earlier, there are numerous social networking sites out there; for this activity, we are focusing on using either Facebook or LinkedIn, two of the most popular sites. Both are free. Using a computer with Internet access, watch these videos and follow the directions.
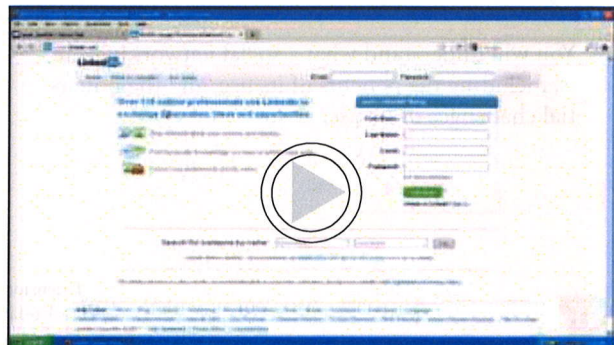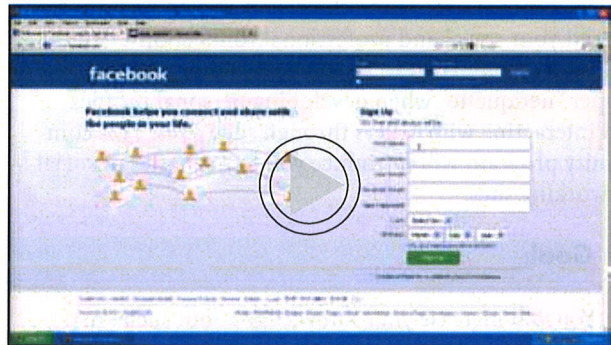
■ Conclusion

As you completed the activities in this community program, you might have decided to start participating on social networking sites, or you might have decided that it is not for you at this time. Either way, hopefully these activities have been helpful in your decision-making. If you have decided to engage in social networking, we hope it will be a positive experience for you.

Thanks for participating in this program!