

VIRGINIA CHILD INJURY LAWYER REVEALS DANGERS  
OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

IS YOUR CHILD BEING **TOO** SOCIAL?  
BY SANDRA ROHRSTAFF

We all want our kids to be happy, healthy and socially involved. However, electronic social media can cause big problems for unsuspecting teens and younger children.

Young people can now get more information than we ever knew existed from sources so varied our heads spin. And, they get that information with just a few clicks on a computer – or more likely a smartphone -- keyboard. Parents now have new challenges, including how to help their children safely use social media.

The big gorilla is Facebook. It has something like 800,000,000 active users. That's 800 **million**. But there are other online social gathering places that are ripe for creating problems for users, too, like [eharmony.com](http://eharmony.com) and other dating sites. Here are a couple of examples of what I mean.

REVEALING TOO MUCH. Last spring, I spoke to high school classes about how to use (and get in trouble by using) social media. Here are some of the things we talked about.

- Unlike Las Vegas, what goes on Facebook and other social media sites stays there. Forever. Even if you “delete” it. Job applicants can be sure that prospective employers will go find you on Facebook.
- I recently did not hire a bookkeeper applicant after checking her out on Facebook. She spent a lot of time playing a Las Vegas gambling game. Someone who played gambling games to handle my firm's money? No, thanks. She never got a chance to convince me otherwise.
- “Sexting” (teens exchanging pictures of each other in various stages of undress) seems harmless to teens and some parents. Young people have natural curiosity about what other people's body parts look like, BUT it is unlawful to possess pictures of nude minors. They may be considered to be

child pornography! (Sometimes pictures are taken without the subjects' knowing they've been photographed.) The teenagers wanted to know whether they could get in trouble even if a nude picture of someone appeared on their phone without their asking for it. The answer is, technically, yes. And they could be in more trouble if they send it on, since that would be distribution of child pornography.

For better and for worse, the rules have changed; the world is a different place than it was a decade ago. It's up to us to learn how to be socially safe – and to teach others, as well.

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