

Facebook or Fakebook?

It can be fun scrolling down your Facebook page to read the status updates, vacation pictures and posts of your Facebook “friends”. But it can also make you feel a bit depressed – especially if you feel your life is in a bit of rut. Viewing pictures of a friend’s second exotic vacation this year, when your budget doesn’t allow for a trip anywhere, can spark feelings of resentment. Reading happy comments about other people’s fabulous spouses or boyfriends/girlfriends can sting if your own relationship is rocky – or over. Posts about fulfilling jobs, perfect kids, grand new houses and fabulous social lives can make you feel inadequate, unloved and a complete failure... which you’re not. But when you compare your life to those of Facebook friends, it’s easy to feel that way.

Facebook is NOT reality

Social networking sites, like Facebook, allow people to be in control of how the world sees them. And most people want to project a certain image of themselves – so they tend to post only the good news or upbeat or witty comments and edit out the not-so-great things. For example, someone may proudly post pictures of their trip to Thailand but won’t divulge that it cost a fortune and they’re now in considerable debt. People are not likely to let the world know that their marriage is experiencing issues or their children are having problems. It’s not what we see on Facebook, it’s what we don’t see – the everyday challenges we *all* face at work and at home. There’s a reason why Facebook is often referred to as “Fakebook”.

Keep Facebook fun

All social media platforms are about communication. They enable us to stay in touch with far flung family and friends, make new connections and even find people we thought we had lost forever. We can engage in conversations across borders and time zones. Facebook specifically can bring us a lot of happiness when we “share, not compare”.

Try these tips to make Facebook fun again:

- **Spend more time on your own page.** Perusing your own profile (reading old status updates and flipping through photo albums) can raise self-esteem, because it can rekindle positive memories and experiences.
- **Practice gratitude.** Instead of analyzing others, think of all the things in your life you are grateful for and would not trade with anyone else – your child, your partner, your health, or even your best friend. Many people find it helpful to keep a gratitude journal, in which they write down things they are thankful for every day. If you keep these positive memories written down each day, you will be able to look back and smile at some of the happy moments you may have forgotten by the time Sunday night rolls around.
- **Make plans with friends.** Instead of reading about other people’s lives online, call a friend or family member and make plans to have dinner, see a movie or just go for a walk. If people are not calling you, call them. Those with busy social lives are usually the ones who do the calling and planning.
- **Accept what you can’t change and change what you can’t accept.** Comparing yourself to others online can actually be a great motivator to change what you don’t like about your life. For the things you can’t change, try to accept and embrace them.

- **Seek help.** If you think you need some support to improve your self-esteem or overcome a challenge you feel is holding you back, call your Employee and Family Assistance Program and ask to speak to a counsellor.

“The only person you should be comparing yourself to is the person you were yesterday.”

Teaching online civility

Every family has a moral code – what they consider to be right and wrong, how they treat people, and what behaviour is acceptable. Children learn this moral code at home through their parents and other family members. Every family is different, but all want their children to be kind, compassionate, respectful and responsible.

However, social media, smartphones and tablets have added a new challenge for parents. These tools and devices make the virtual world accessible from anywhere at any time. Inappropriate sexual and violent material can easily fall into the wrong hands. But parents are fighting back; like businesses, they are creating social media policies for their families.

Creating your family’s social media policy

The core to any social media policy – be it in the workplace or at home – is that the same rules that apply to offline behaviour apply to online behaviour. The only difference is that a mistake online is seen by many more people and is often challenging to fix.

The Mayo Clinic posted a [12-word Social Media Policy](#) to give businesses a starting point. However, their guidelines can apply to us all. They are:

- Don’t Lie, Don’t Pry
- Don’t Cheat, Can’t Delete
- Don’t Steal, Don’t Reveal

But families need to add two more: don’t be mean, keep it clean. Why? Because cyberbullying and sexting (sending sexually explicit messages and images, primarily between mobile phones) are a real concern.

Cyberbullying

Bullies have always existed. Most of us remember a child who tormented us in the playground or in our neighbourhood. Today, social media allows bullies to remain anonymous and to spread vicious comments or photographs not just around a school, but into cyberspace where it remains forever for anyone to see.

While parents can’t control the behaviour of other children, they can teach their own kids not to be passive bystanders and thereby, intentionally or unintentionally, part of cyberbullying. It is, after all, the bystander who is most complicit and who has the most power to stop the cycle of violence.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can help. You can receive support through a variety of resources. Call your EFAP at **1 800 387-4765** or visit workhealthlife.com.

In her book, *The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander*, Barbara Coloroso quotes a holocaust survivor who lists three actions that will change a bystander into a witness: "Pay attention, get involved and never ever look away."

As part of the family moral code and social media policy, children should be encouraged to be witnesses who will speak out against injustice.

Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Have a discussion with your children and teens about bullying and cyberbullying, emphasizing that neither is acceptable behaviour.** Talk about why it takes more courage to stand up to bullying than to do nothing. However, they should not put their own safety at risk. If they feel unsafe, they should tell a parent or a teacher.
- **Discuss the difference between telling and tattling.** If someone's safety or well-being is at risk, it's not tattling.
- **Encourage them to support the person being bullied.** Verbal and emotional support can go a long way in the recovery process for the bullied victim.
- **Talk to them about what they post and share online.** Written comments, photos and videos all form part of their 'digital footprint' and remain in cyberspace forever.
- **Tell children and teens to avoid emotional posting.** This can inadvertently hurt them and others. Advise them to take a deep breath and calm down before expressing feelings and thoughts to others – either face-to-face or online.
- **Make a zero-tolerance policy about discussing sex online or through texts.** Teach your kids to disengage immediately and block any unknown people who make contact with them, and report any inappropriate texts or images sent by people they know, like school mates.
- **Be a role model.** Children emulate the adult behaviours around them so let them see you treat people with courtesy and respect and speak out against behaviours that hurt and victimize others.

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