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Parents join social networking sites to keep tabs on kids

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A couple of months ago Pam Kazmierczak of Battle Ground heard a message on the radio that caught her attention.

The message advised parents that if their kids are on MySpace or Facebook then the parents should also have an account.

The mother of five knew some of her kids had Facebook accounts.

"They talked a lot about them to me but I never thought about joining until I heard it on the radio," said Kazmierczak, who created a Facebook account to keep track of who their friends are and who is talking to them.

Since Facebook, a social networking Web site, started in 2004 it has acquired millions of registered users. But as the Web site that was originally open to college students continues to broaden its member base, the exclusivity has disappeared. Now anyone -- potential employers, co-workers and even parents - can join.

When Kazmierczak joined, she sent a friend request to most of her kids. She didn't expect any of them to decline her request.

When Jillian Kazmierczak received the friend request from her mom she thought it was weird.

"I was like why does my mom have a Facebook account," the 19-year-old photography student at Purdue University said. "I wondered why she got an account."

Jillian accepted, and is not worried about her mom being on Facebook.

"I don't think she's on it anyway," she said. "I don't think she knows how to use it."

Her mom does know how to use it, but has changed her initial agenda.

"I'm not on it to check on them anymore as I am to look at the photos and the things they write to each other and to see when their plays are going on or what events are coming up," she said.

For her it's a way to keep in touch with her children who have left home.

Varying viewpoints

Some students are OK with the idea of other people's parents being on Facebook, but not their own.

Molly Hulsey, a freshman at Lafayette Jeff High School, said her friend's mom tried to "friend" her a year ago.

"You don't know if you want your parents to know what you're talking about," she said.

She said she doesn't think it's bad for parents to be on Facebook, but if her mom or dad tried to "friend" her, she wouldn't accept.

"It's my privacy and they are invading it," the 15-year-old said.

Jordan Hamrick, a 16-year-old sophomore at Jeff, said he already accepted his friend's dad.

"I know him and he's pretty cool and never gets on anyway," he said.

Hamrick said he would accept his parents as friends but it would make him more cautious of how he acts in cyberspace.

Not everyone wants to open the door to parents on Facebook.

"Today's generation is not as honest and is more secretive and the Internet only enhances that," Jack McGrew said. "When you're on the Internet you can do what you want, say what you want without them even knowing."

The 16-year-old said that if parents go on Facebook strictly to see what their kids are doing then it's an invasion of privacy.

But, apparently he has a soft spot for his folks.

"I think I would accept them if their intentions were valid," he said.

Glenn Sparks, a professor of communication at Purdue University, said social networking allows teenagers to hang out with friends in the virtual world.

"Young people are really gravitating to this technology as a sphere of social activity," he said. "For many of these kids the idea of having parents in this world is like having your parents at the lunch table at high school or having your parents with you when you attend the basketball game with your friends."

He said it seems like an unwanted intrusion into that part of their life and parents are simply not wanted.

Alexine Mudawar, a freshman at Purdue University, said having parents on Facebook is creepy.

"I think when you get into college and parents are trying to check up on you it's overdoing it, but for middle school age it's probably good," the 19-year-old said.

Mudawar said her friend's little sister has a Facebook page. "She's like 12 and she has one. It's so weird."

Mudawar prefers the way Facebook used to be, and does not want employers or faculty on the site.

"It could create a big bias especially against religious or political views," she said. "People are getting turned down for jobs because of their Facebook pages.

"The information on there is pieces of you and anyone can take that and not like you," she said.