

ADVICE FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media sites are becoming increasingly important parts of our social lives. Although these sites can be terrific ways to connect with friends and family members, using them without restraint and preparation can be disastrous. Education professionals in Missouri have been passed over for jobs, disciplined, and even terminated for information posted on social media sites. Below are some tips to using social media sites safely.

“Google” yourself.

The Internet has become a repository for great amounts of personal information. The first step in protecting yourself is finding what information is publicly available about you. Go to your favorite search engine, or one specifically designed for searching individuals, such as www.pipl.com, and search your name. If you are seeing social media information that should be kept private, take the time to modify or delete past information. While you often cannot remove information once it is on the Internet, your awareness of the information can prepare you to answer questions about it.

Separate your personal and professional lives online.

Just as in your offline life, it is important to keep a strict separation between your electronic professional and personal lives. Use the privacy settings available on social media sites to ensure that the information you share is only going to people you can trust. Facebook even has the ability to create lists of friends so that you can be sure that personal information stays with personal friends. Keep in mind that privacy settings often change—so continue to monitor your settings so that your information is not accidentally shared.

Monitor how those around you use social media.

Using social media sites responsibly, or even refusing to use them at all, is not enough to protect yourself from potential online perils. Images or information posted by spouses, tech-savvy children, or even coworkers can lead to discipline. Therefore, it is important to have conversations with your “friends” about their privacy settings and the steps they are taking to protect your information.

Students do not belong on your personal social media sites.

It is not appropriate to “friend” students or otherwise give them access to your personal social media sites. Although many school districts are taking proactive steps to reach students online, there is still extreme skepticism of online, out-of-school interactions. Unless you are working with the explicit consent of your district, you should not be interacting with students on social media sites you have created.