



## MySpace, Facebook attract online predators

Experts say be careful what you post online — somebody is always watching

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Several times a day, Olivia Walker, a California high school sophomore, logs on to a Web site called MySpace.com to keep up with her friends.

"It's a way for them to instant-message," Walker says, "or learn something more about somebody they didn't know previously."

Walker is among the more than 40 million users of MySpace. Their postings are part diary, part photo album, with gossip, favorite music, pet peeves — sometimes even phone numbers and home addresses. And occasionally, revealing pictures.

"You can create relationships on MySpace," Walker says, "or you can create friendships."

It's a huge hit, too, at Newton North High School in Boston, where Andrew Crede is a junior.

"Pretty much most of the kids in my school use MySpace," Crede says. "You put pictures up, you meet girls. You meet guys."

But police nationwide warn that it's not just young people who are searching these immensely popular Web sites. They say potential sexual predators are, too.

A month ago, police in Connecticut arrested a 21-year-old man, accusing him of raping a 14-year-old girl he found on MySpace. On Long Island, investigators say another man found the work address of a 16-year-old girl on one of the Web sites last fall, lured her to a parking lot, and sexually assaulted her.

MySpace declined an on-camera interview but warns users never to post any personally identifiable information and says it's determined to provide a safe place for young people.

Facebook, a similar Web site, one especially popular with college students, says it blocks access to outside users not connected to a specific school.

"We protect the viewing of the profile to only students or other people with valid e-mail addresses from those universities," says Facebook's Chris Daly.

Even so, middle and high school principals in Boston, like school administrator Judith Malone Neville, are warning parents to monitor what their children put online.

"They would be presenting themselves as potential prey for people who don't have good intentions at heart," Malone says.

Police and school officials nationwide urge parents to remind their children that when they post

their private thoughts online, strangers are definitely watching.

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