



A Parents' Guide to Google+

by
Larry Magid and Anne Collier
Co-Directors, ConnectSafely.org

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
What is Google+?	3
What do teens use it for?	3
Social media & teens	4
Are social media services like this safe for teens?	4
What are the risks involved in social networking?	4
Other things we've learned from the research	6
Parenting social media users	6
How you connect on Google+	8
Signing up	8
Your profile	9
Your circles	10
What you can do on Google+	13
Sharing text, photos, video and links	13
Photos	17
Games	18
Music	18
Privacy settings	19
Special safety and privacy features for teens	19
Reporting abuse	20
Blocking someone	21
Google+ and search	22
Turning off social search results	22
Google+ on smart phones	24
Conclusion	25

Introduction

What is Google+?

Google+ is literally Google with a plus. The "+" is the social networking piece it adds to all of Google's other services, including Web search, Gmail, and YouTube. Google+ brings popular social-media features like comments, photo- and music-sharing, videochat, etc. to your social circles. It's basically what any user chooses it to be, from an ongoing conversation to a platform of self-expression, with tools for making it as individual or collective as you want.

What do teens use it for?

On Google+, people share ideas and personal news, post photos and videos, stay in touch, play games, plan get-togethers, send birthday wishes, do homework and business together, find and contact long-lost friends and relatives, review books, recommend restaurants and support causes. The list goes on – you can see how individual its use is. Social networking also includes getting and giving validation and emotional support, lots of informal learning, as well as exploring personal, academic and future professional interests.

In fact, there's very little of human life that doesn't get expressed in a social network site. It's sometimes called a "social utility." Like a power grid, it provides the supporting infrastructure for the constantly changing everyday activities of millions of users, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In effect, the "product" called Google+ is a living thing that changes constantly. Unlike the media we parents grew up with – books, newspapers, and even radio and television – it's extremely "user-driven," the collective product of its millions of users' lives, updated spontaneously, moment by moment around the world and part of the social Web that increasingly mirrors all of human life.

Parenting Tip: *It can really help to take what you see of teen social networking with a grain of salt. We've noticed that adults often take what they see literally – more seriously than the situation sometimes warrants – which can cause overreaction. Just like in "real life," sometimes they're just joking around. Always, there's context to what we're seeing, context we usually can't understand because it's their context, not ours. So if something really bothers you, it's a good idea to ask them about it calmly (with curiosity rather than confrontation) before deciding anything.*

Social media & teens

Are social media services like this safe for teens?

Yes, just like in public spaces in the physical world, Google+ is largely safe for teens. But also like in the “real world,” safety depends a lot on the people involved. Because it’s a user-driven, shared experience, the users themselves – who they are, how they think, what they say or “post,” how they act – make it positive or negative. And when we say “the users themselves,” we mean collectively, not just individually. Whether on computers, tablets or phones, safety in social media is truly a shared responsibility – and sometimes a negotiation – among users as much as between users and the service.

Google provides special safety and privacy features for teens that we’ll go into shortly, but it’s up to each user to set them so they’re just right for him or her – and parents can be a big factor in helping to make that happen. It helps to learn about the safety and privacy tools yourself so you can ask your children informed questions about how they’re using the site. And if you’re concerned about whether or not they’re taking full advantage of privacy settings, you might ask them to show you their Google+ profile and how they use the privacy tools. But no matter what, keep the parent-kid lines of communication open. It can really help.

***Parenting Tip:** You’ve heard it before, but it’s true online too: Our kids definitely learn from what we do as much as what we say. What are we modeling for them when we’re on our phones or using digital media? Are we fully present for the people around us? If we’re respectful and polite, they’re more likely to be. Learning how to be good to each other is protective online.*

What are the risks involved in social networking?

- **The most common risk is social aggression.** Research shows that youth who behave aggressively online are more than twice as likely to be victimized online, so your children’s own behavior, civil or not, is key to how positive or negative their own experiences are.

We all hear a lot about **cyberbullying**, but it’s not as common as the news headlines suggest. Most teens have never experienced cyberbullying, but there are other negative behaviors not constituting bullying that happen at school and can be expressed online and on phones: social rivalry, pranks that turn out to be hurtful, embarrassing mistakes, a fit of anger acted out, arguments, etc. These don’t fit the “repeated, intentional aggression” and

power-imbalance that define bullying, but we need to help our kids avoid expressing them online – for their own benefit as well as their friends’.

- **Posting embarrassing or damaging info about ourselves** – text, photos, or videos that could embarrass us now or later, whether posted by ourselves or others. This is the reputation issue. Studies show that most experienced young social networkers are quite aware of the public nature of their online socializing and using the privacy settings. But it never hurts to help them think about how their sharing reflects on them. Embarrassment or reputation damage can be immediate or, because it is tough to take down, harmful to future prospects.
- **The screen-time challenge** – too much time on any one thing can be detrimental to other activities in our lives. Finding where to draw the line with screen time is as much a part of family discussions as balancing other activities like academics and sports. Part of what makes social networking so compelling is that, for teens especially, it’s wholly embedded in their offline social lives and school life. So it can be easy to get caught up in the “drama” of school life in social sites – as well as feel the need to stay on top of it. Screen time today is very different from that of the mass-media era, when it was pure consumption and mostly entertainment. Not only is it participatory, it’s also all about our everyday lives. But there’s a lot more going on in new media than hanging out and entertainment, including plenty of informal learning and interest-driven interaction and production.

***Parenting Tip:** Because the drama at school can get a little overwhelming at times, our kids sometimes appreciate it when we help them get some emotional distance. That can come with giving them a chance to talk stuff out or requiring a little tech downtime – every now and then, when things get intense, or even one day a week.*

- **Risk of inappropriate contact with adults:** The risk of teens being harmed by someone they met on the Internet, much less social networking sites, is very low. There has been widespread misunderstanding of a 2005 study that found 1 in 7 young people had received an unwanted online sexual solicitation, but the authors of that study – the Crimes Against Children Research Center – posted a [fact sheet](#), explaining that these solicitations are typically not from predators and most of the recipients don’t view them as serious. “Most were limited to brief online comments or questions in chat rooms or instant messages. Many were simply rude, vulgar comments,” and “almost all youth handled unwanted solicitations easily and effectively.” Fewer than 1% of those solicitations led to any physical contact, and the study’s authors wrote that “there is no evidence predators are stalking or abducting unsuspecting victims based on information they posted in social sites.”

Parenting Tip: Parents can only go so far to protect their kids in a user-driven media environment. Because social networking is a shared experience – with young people showing up in each other’s posts, photos, and videos – you can’t possibly have complete control over your kids’ experiences online. We need to help our kids be their own best protectors, and that’s an ongoing (not overwhelming) conversation with lasting benefits.

Other things we’ve learned from the research

- **A Web site is not the real context** of social aggression. Because online socializing is an expression of and embedded in the offline kind and most of kids’ waking hours are spent in school, school life is the context. What adults see in social media is usually just a snapshot of the ongoing social dynamic wherever teens spend their time.
- **What predicts risk:** A young person’s psychosocial make-up and home and school environments are better predictors of online risk than any technology he or she uses.
- **So not all children are equally at risk online**, and those who are most at risk there are the youth most at risk in “real life.”
- **Reaction amplified:** Although, for the vast majority of youth, online social networking is largely a reflection of offline life, it can also amplify, perpetuate and widely distribute real-life problems or conflicts – very quickly. Something posted in a fit of anger or reflexive retaliation is extremely difficult to take back, so it has never been more important for users (of any age) to think before they “speak,” post, or send a text message.
- **Risk and harm are two different things** – all sorts of activities, e.g., cooking and riding a bike, have risks involved, but that doesn’t mean harm is inevitable – and learning how to assess risk is a necessary part of child development. As for Internet activities, researchers say they too can be beneficial or harmful, depending on the people and circumstances.

Parenting social media users

Just as in your child’s offline life, you are key to helping him or her form a positive image, maintain good relationships, and have a good reputation on the social Web. We’ll get specific in the how-to section, but here are a few basic social-Web parenting tips that would be very helpful to keep in mind:

Social media use is very individual, which is why the No. 1 safety tip is “Talk with your child.” Don’t believe everything you read or hear about teens in social media, especially in the news, which can present a very negative picture. Adults who don’t understand how kids use social media sometimes think of social networking as a single activity to which young people can get “addicted.” If they’re addicted to anything when using social media, it would be to their school friends or social life.

But even two children of different ages in a single family can use a social site very differently.

Social networking's embedded in their lives. Unlike for most of us adults, social media is not an “add-on” to our children’s lives, or something new and separate from so-called “real life.” Their texting, photo-sharing, chatting, gaming, etc. (which are all part of social networking) are just part of their lives – a place to hang out, express themselves and share interests. So it’s only logical that we just embrace the online and on-phone parts of their social lives in day-to-day family life and parenting – keep it part of the ongoing conversation that parenting really is.

As a parent, you are part of the solution when negative things happen, which is why it helps to be informed not just about Google+ or social media in general but also (and especially) about your children's use of them. They need your back-up when things come up. But remember that, even when they show up online, relationship issues are just that – relational, or social. They’re about our humanity, not our technology. So a problem may be challenging to work out, but it’s never just an online thing or a wholly new challenge parents have never dealt with before.

Try not to overreact if something negative happens – another reason why it helps to be informed. An informed parent is a calm parent, and children are more likely to go to their parents when the conversation can stay calm and thoughtful. We also suggest that parents avoid micromanaging their teens’ online experiences. You can help them more – help them work through issues and find solutions – when they choose to come and talk to you, so you’ll want to maximize those opportunities for communication and support.

Today’s parenting “toolbox” isn’t just digital, of course. It includes your family’s values, policies and house rules (for tech use as well as etiquette for example, how children use their time and when it’s best to turn digital devices off), and sometimes “parental control” tools, such as filtering and monitoring software products. If your child is uncommunicative about his or her online time, sometimes it helps to use monitoring products or services to know what’s going on. It’s usually best to be open with them about your use of monitoring. The reason is, if you do discover inappropriate Internet use and need to talk with them, they won’t be surprised that you know and turn the conversation into an argument about something other than their safety.

Google+ itself can be a great parenting tool. If you’re in each other’s circles, it can give you a rare window into your children’s social lives as well as help you stay informed about their use of the site. In fact, ask your kids to show you how to set Google+’s privacy and safety features – or figure them out together, if they’re just starting. Not only will you learn more about the service, you’ll see how much they know about using it wisely. If they haven’t thought much about the privacy settings, consider going through them together. After that, consider creating your own account on Google+ so you can be in each other’s Circles. That’s probably the best “monitoring tool” you could use, but...

Think before publicly commenting on your child's posts. Public comments from Mom or Dad could be embarrassing and are often out of context – the context of a peer group's conversation of the moment. Public embarrassment, as a result of *anyone's* comments, can create an unnecessary and unwanted communication barrier between you and your child. It can also send kids “underground” online (into other sites or services parents have never heard of) – which can happen all too easily, with all the free services on the Web – so it's best just to observe, ideally checking in only now and then.

Why does Google+ require children to be at least 13 years old? Google and other US-based Internet companies with this minimum age are complying with a law called the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), designed to “place parents in control over what information is collected from their young children online,” according to the [Federal Trade Commission](#), which enforces the law. So COPPA requires general-audience sites like Google's to obtain parental consent if they disclose the personal information of people under 13. Having that minimum age of 13, though, does not necessarily mean that a site is unsafe for kids 12 and under, a misunderstanding we frequently hear.

How you connect on Google+

Parents, if your kids are on Google+, you might consider being there too. Even if you don't spend a lot of time in the service, it can help a lot to understand how they use it. Ideally, you're in their “circles” (more on that later) so you can occasionally see what they're posting. If you're not already on Google+, here's how to sign up. It's really easy....

Signing up

When you first visit Google+, you see a link that invites you to “sign in with your Google Account.” If you already have a Gmail address you're all set. If not, click on “Create an account.”

You'll then be asked to answer a few simple questions such as your real name, a username, a password and your birthday (as we said earlier, to get an account, you must be at least 13 years old in the U.S. and most other countries, and if a child isn't old enough, they won't be allowed to use the service).

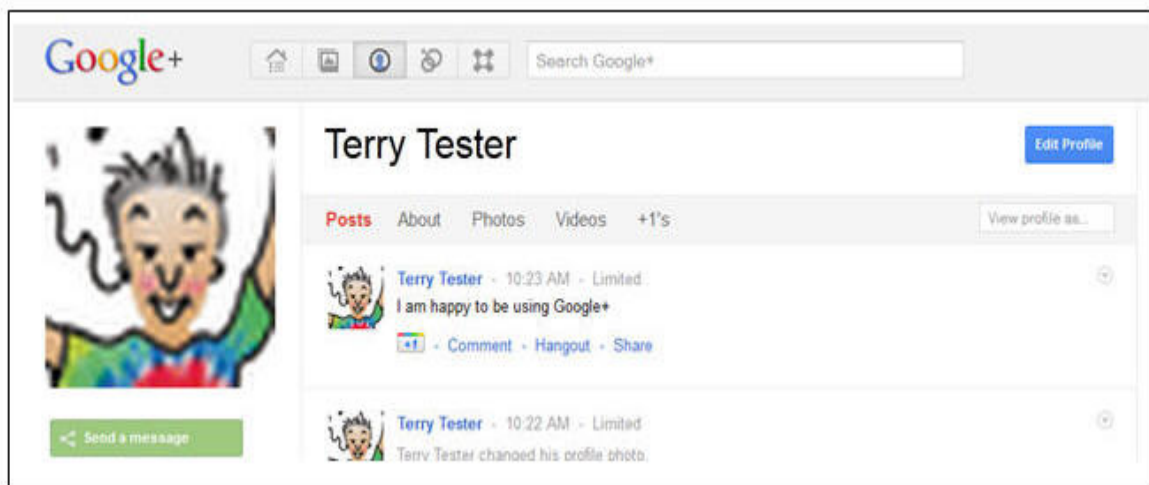
You will also be given an opportunity to add a profile picture and then you'll be whisked directly into Google+. The service may also ask you to “find people you know on Google+” by entering an email address from Yahoo or Hotmail. This is optional. Google+ won't contact the people in your contact list but will import contacts from those services and give you the option of adding your contacts from those services to your circles.

Once you have an account, the first time you visit Google+ you'll be asked several

questions including school or work name and where you live. These are designed to make it easier for friends, family and others to find you, but they are optional. Researchers have found that entering school or city name or posting a photo does not put kids at higher risk of victimization. Of course, there may be reputation issues. The photo should be suitable for sharing with the public and, if for any reason, you don't want to share your photo, school name or city, you have that option.

Your profile

Your profile is a reflection on you – a representation of you on the social Web via any device that accesses it. It's where you post and edit information about yourself. You can get to your profile by clicking on your picture (or the default icon if you haven't posted a picture).

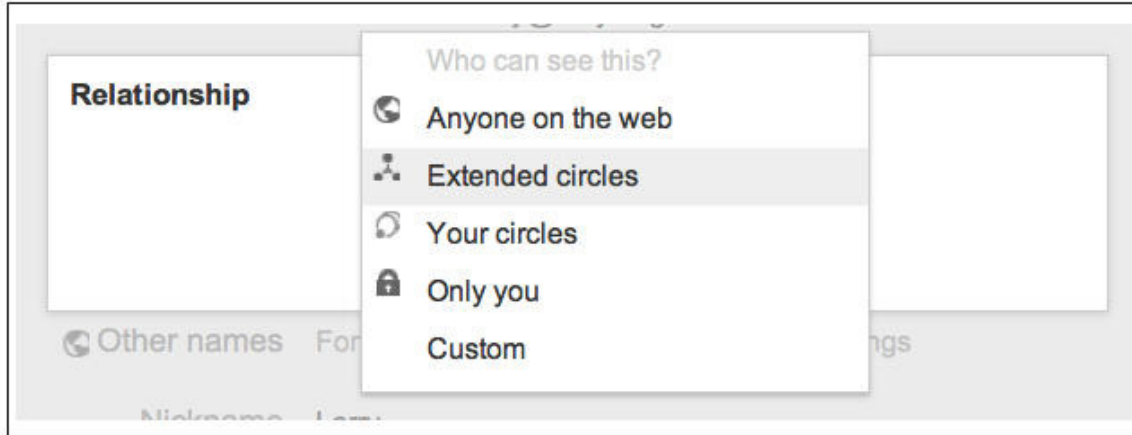


At this point, you have the option to add to or edit your profile by clicking on the blue [Edit Profile](#) link.

To add to or change your profile, click on the section you wish to edit. For example, you can type in a brief description about yourself or click on the [About](#) link, where you can add or change information about your occupation, education, where you've lived and even "how people reach you at home" (your phone number).

There are also places where you can say if you're in a relationship, "who you are looking for" and more.

For each of these questions, you have the option to leave it blank or not, and you get to decide who gets to see that information. It can be only you, your circles, your extended circles (which includes circles of people in your circles) or anyone on the Web. You can also choose [Custom](#), which allows you to specify only certain people.



You get to decide what profile information to enter and who, if anyone, get to see it.

Parent Tip: It's very important to help our kids think carefully and often about what their profile says about them and who sees it. In particular, you and your teen should put some thought into questions like "Relationship" and "Looking for," but also think about other questions such as "Bragging Rights," "Occupation" and Education, to make sure your child isn't setting him or herself up for ridicule or bullying. We're not saying that everyone should leave these blank, but just to know that what they put in their profile is a reflection on them. Also, it might be a good idea for your teen either not to disclose a mobile phone number or to restrict it to circles that include only family and close friends.

Privacy Point: There are certain default settings that have a more private default for teens than for adults. For example, [Employment and Education](#) is Public for adults and just "Your circles" for teens. [Relationship Status](#) is "Extended circles" for adults but set to "Your circles" for teens. Default settings can be changed by the user, but they're there as a recommendation.

Your circles

Google has introduced the concept of "circles," as in social circles, to connect with people and make it easier for you to control who see what you post and help you home in on posts from people you want to hear from.

Think about the people in your life. Adults have work colleagues and people they

went to school with. Kids have classmates or teammates. Everyone has family, and just about everyone has a group of close friends and acquaintances that are not-so-close. These people are part of our lives, but we don't necessarily share the same things with all of them. A teen who is on both the cheerleading squad and the science club might want to share a set of photos with one group and details about an experiment with the other. Circles makes it easy to share different content with different people.

You can have as many circles as you want and they can overlap. A student could, for example, have a circle of everyone she knows at school but also a circle of everyone working on a project for English class, one for everyone on the basketball team and a separate circle for family. You could even have a circle for people you've never met but who share a passion, such as a particular cause or political candidate, and not have to worry about sharing personal information with folks you don't know offline.

If a teen wants to post something only to people in her English class, she would direct it just at that circle. But she could also post to people in her English class and the basketball team but no one else. You also have the option of typing in the names of individuals you want to share something with and you can label some content as "Public," which means it can be seen by anyone – even people you have no connection with.

Don't worry about how you name your circles. People are notified that they're in a circle but they don't know the name of it and they don't know how many of your circles they're in – only that you might share some content with them.

Parenting Tip: *When you put someone in a circle, you're making a decision to share information with that person. You have control over what circles you post to but – as a general rule – it's a bad idea to put anyone in a circle unless you feel you can trust that person with what you plan to post to that circle. Because adding someone to a circles may allow them to see more of your profile info.*

You can be in my circle but I don't have to be in yours

People don't have to give you permission for you to put them in one of your circles. That's because when someone is in your circles, it means you are sharing information with them, but doesn't mean that they're sharing it with you, so their privacy remains intact. They can choose to add you to one of their circles, but that's up to them.

You can also limit posts that you see to certain circles, so you can check out only what your family is saying or skip everyone except the people in a particular club or group you're a member of.

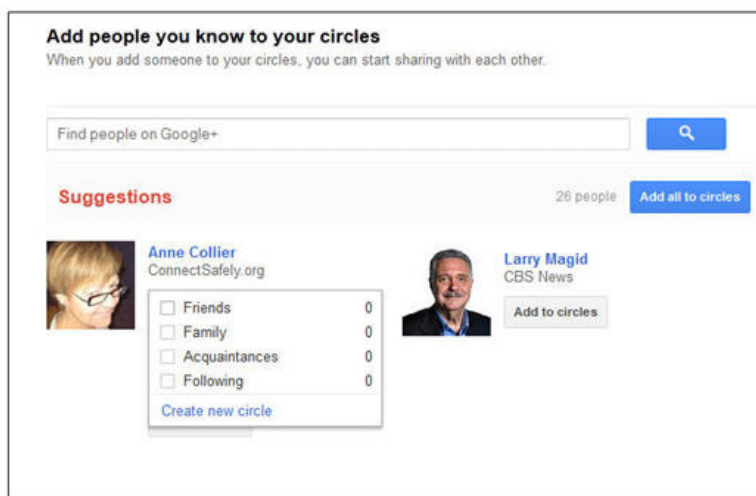
When someone is in one or more of your circles you can share with them and chat with anyone in your circles who also has you in theirs.

For adults, the default setting is that people who look at your profile can see the people in your circles as well as who has you in their circles, but you have the option to hide both the list of people in your circles and the list of people who have added you to a circle. For teens, the default setting is that people in their circles and people who have added them do not show up.

Parenting Tip: Google+ will also suggest that you “follow public posts from interesting and famous people.” While that’s a great way for kids to keep up with celebrities or people in the news, you may want to talk with your kids about who they’re following. There are no privacy issues – the person can’t see what your teen is posting (unless it’s public) – but you might not be comfortable with your child viewing the content some celebrities might post.

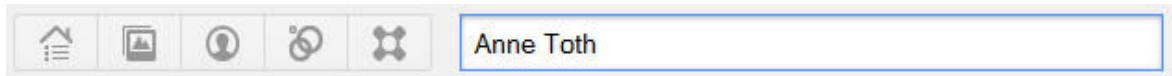
How to add people to a circle

When you sign up for Google+, one of the first things you’re asked to do is add people to your circles. If you are already a Gmail user, Google+ will probably suggest people to add from the people you communicate with, and it will create some default circles for you: *Friends*, *Family*, *Acquaintances* and *Following* (people you wish to follow that don’t fit into other circles). These are just suggestions. You can also create as many new circles as you want, such as “My English Class,” or “Kids at my school.”



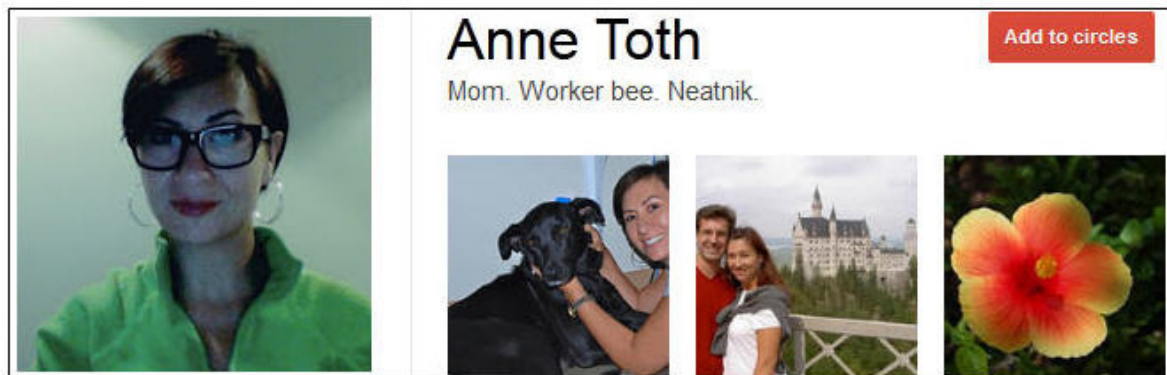
You can place someone in one or more circles, and you can create new circles.

You can add people to circles at any time. For example, if you think someone might be on Google+ you can search for them by name in the [Search Google+](#) box near the top of the screen.



That will bring up their public profile, which includes any pictures or posts that they are sharing with the public. If they share anything that's not public, you won't see it, in most cases, until they add you to one of their circles.

To the right of their profile there will be an option to [Add to circles](#) that you can click on to add that person to one or more of your circles. That person will be notified that they've been added to your circle but won't know the name of the circle(s) they're in. They will be asked if they wish to add you to a circle. If they don't, you will still see their public postings. If they do, you will also see postings that they are sharing with any circles they've put you in.

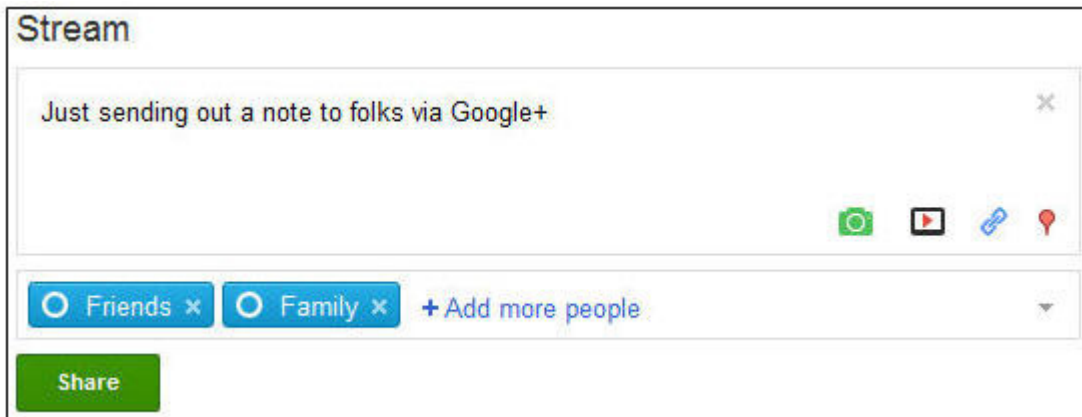


This is her public profile. Anyone can see this because she's chosen to show these pictures to the public.

What you can do on Google+

Sharing text, photos, video and links

The heart of Google+ is the *stream*, where you get to "share what's new." It allows you to type text and add photos, videos or web links to share with people. You can also share your location. Exactly who you share each post with is up to you. You can share with one or more circles, one or more specific people or with "Public," which means anyone can see it. Obviously you need to give some thought to sharing before you click the [Share](#) button.



Make sure you're comfortable with the circles or people you're sharing with before clicking "Share."

Important Privacy Point: *Each time you share, you get to decide who can see it, but whatever choice you make will remain in effect until you change it. So, if you generally restrict posts to circles and – on only one occasion – decide to post to the public, be very careful the next time you post – because Google+ will remember your last selection and if you don't change it, your next post will be public too.*

Parenting Tip: *When teens choose "Public" or "Extended circles" for a post, they'll get a brief reminder – a special one for teens – saying that they're about to share with a pretty big audience. This is Google's way of reinforcing the message that they need to be mindful about who they're sharing with.*

Editing, deleting and locking posts

If you make a mistake or have any regrets about what you've posted, you can always go back and delete or edit a post. You can also lock a post so that it can't be shared by others and you can prevent others from commenting on that post.



Clicking on the down arrow to the right of any post brings up a menu where you can edit, delete, link, disable comments or lock that post.

Privacy Point: *You can certainly delete your own content from Google+ any time, but there is always the risk that someone may have seen what you posted before you deleted it – and copied or forwarded it on to someone else. That’s why some people say “on the Internet, there no such thing as a delete key.”*

Parenting Tip: *As we said earlier, parents should be judicious about micromanaging their kids’ use of Google+. You may occasionally come across a post that you think they should delete or modify. Think carefully about bringing this up (it reminds them that you’re watching, and you don’t want to prompt them to stop sharing with you), but do remind them that they have the ability to make changes.*

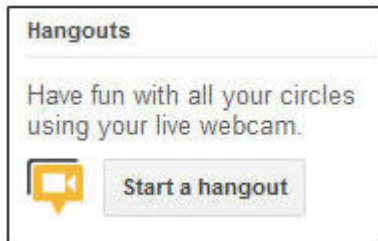
It’s usually best to be upfront with our kids – let them know you need to check in every now and then, if you do, so that, if you do see something you want to talk with them about, the conversation is about that and doesn’t get derailed or turn into an argument about privacy.

Hangouts

Just as you have face-to-face hangouts with your friends at parks, malls, people’s houses or other physical spaces, you can hang out with people on Google+ in what are basically video chat rooms where you see and hear everyone in the room. Anyone on Google+ can create a hangout and anyone with a link to that hangout can join. Also anyone who joins a hangout can invite others to join, though – for teens only – Google will temporarily pull them out of a hangout if someone outside any of

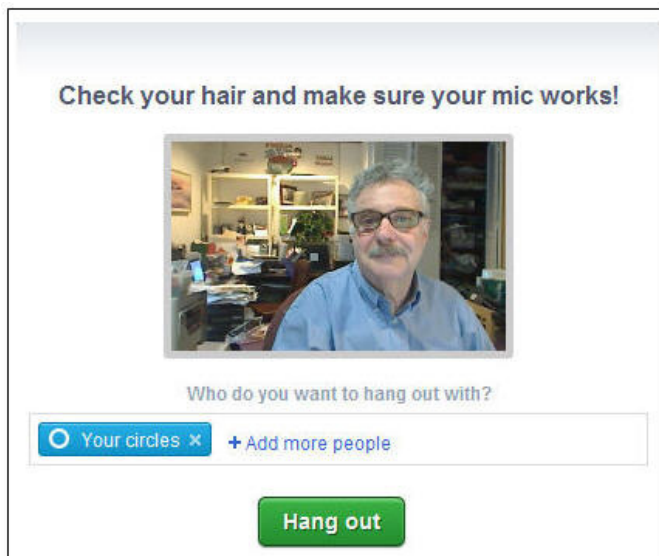
their circles joins in to make sure it's OK.

Hangouts can be a place for social conversations or where you work together on projects. Kids could use them as a place to review homework, discuss political issues or strategize how they're going to win their soccer game. Just about anything you can do in a face-to-face meeting can be done in a hangout.



You can start your own hangout by clicking on the video camera.

Regular hangouts are limited to 10 people, but sometimes people or organizations can hold special events or celebrity hangouts called "Hangouts On-Air" that can be attended by as many people as want to participate. Only a small number of invited participants can share video and audio with the audience. Everyone else can view and hear what's being said.



Privacy Point: Be careful who you invite to a hangout, and realize that anyone who is invited can invite additional people you may not know.

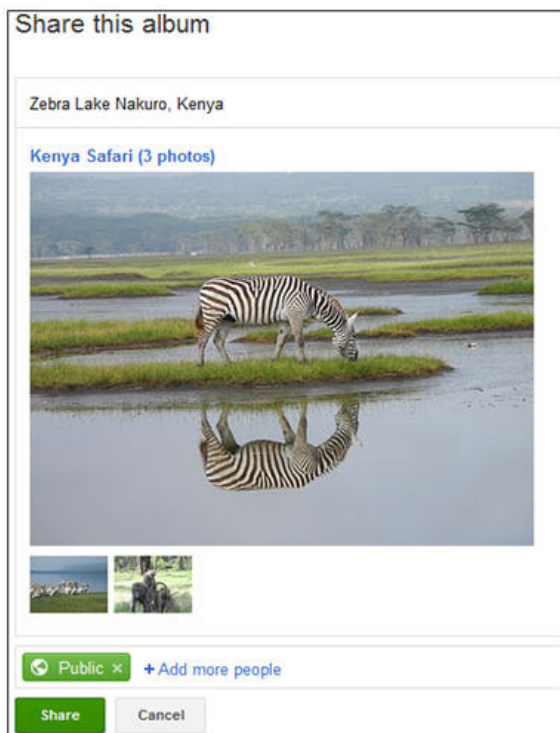
Please note: When someone outside a teen's circles joins a hangout, Google+ will pull the teen out to let them know and ask if they want to continue.

Parenting Tip: Because hangouts allow teens to use their Webcams, anyone in the hangout can see and hear everything within range. So make sure your teen knows to dress appropriately and think about people, things or conversations in the background that they (or you) don't want shared with people outside you home.

Photos

As we said earlier, part of the “+” on Google+ is its integration with other Google products, including its Picasa photo-sharing service. That’s a good thing because it makes it easier to share what you already posted to Picasa or what you uploaded from your phone to the photo service. If you have photos in Picasa, the people you’ve shared them with can also see them on Google+

Now that Google+ and Picasa are integrated, albums you've shared can be tagged and shared by others and anyone an album is shared with can see who else it's shared with. If you go into Picasa and select an album, you can decide who, if anyone, you want to share it with.



Google's Picasa web photo album service lets you decide who on Google+ you're going to share with.

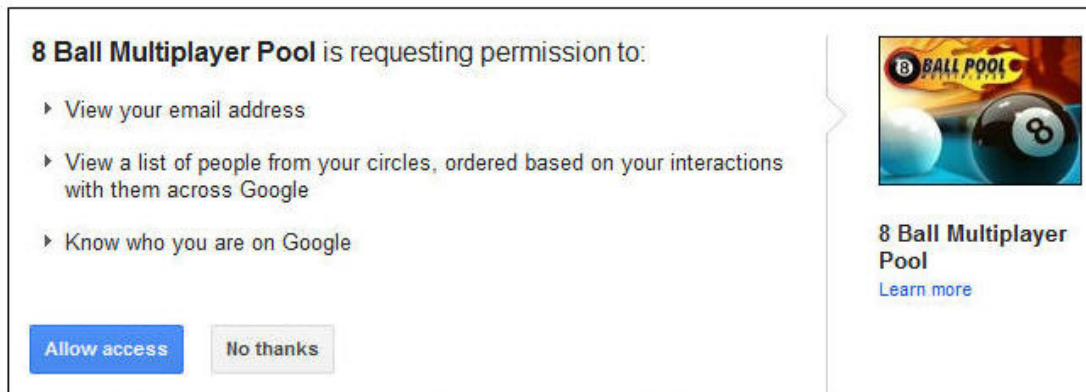
Games

Google+ is host to a growing number of games, including some that allow you to play with others. Most games are from companies other than Google. When you start playing a game for the first time, you may see a permission request that could include such things as providing the game operator with information like your email address or a list of people in your circles.



A few of the many games on Google+

Young people need to be aware of who they are playing with and what information they or the game developer is sharing with other users. And, like all aspects of social networking, it's important to be aware of how you're using your time, especially in a game where it's so easy to get wrapped up in all the action and forget the passing of time.



You can control what permissions to grant to each game. Read the permission screens carefully to be sure you're comfortable with what's being shared before you allow access.

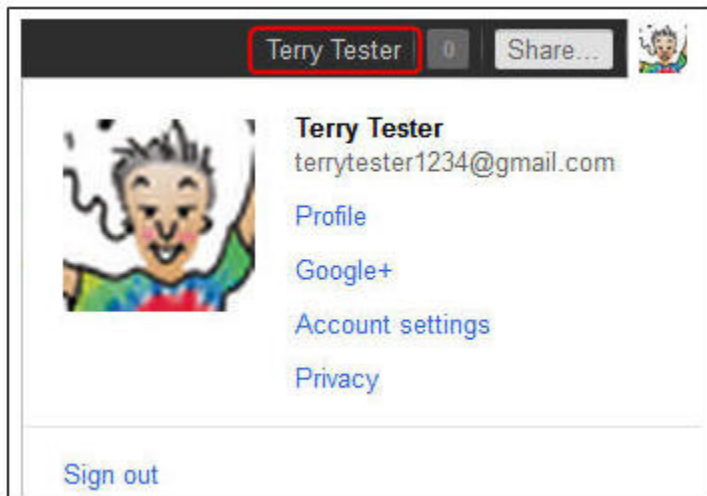
Music

Google has launched a music service that allows people to “share a listen” to music purchased from the Android Market. As Google says on its [About Google Music page](#), “caring is sharing,” but it's also important to realize that sometimes it's not such a good idea to share. There's nothing wrong with listening to music that may

not be popular with your peer group (it's actually kind of cool), but sharing that information could possibly subject you to sarcastic remarks or even bullying.

Privacy settings

There are privacy settings that you can get to by clicking on your name in the upper right of your screen and then [Privacy](#). This includes links to managing circles, network visibility (who is in your circles and who can see who has added you to their circles) and other settings. There is also a link to the Google+ [privacy help section](#).



Click on your name in upper right corner and select [Privacy](#) to change settings.

Parenting Tip: Talk with your kids about network visibility. Do they really want to share the names of all of their friends? If not, they can hide or restrict visibility of the people in their circles.

Special safety and privacy features for teens

Google+ has special default settings for teens. They can override these, but you might want to talk with them about why it's a good idea to keep the default settings.

Here's a summary of Google's special safeguards for teens:

- If teens post something to extended circles or the public, they'll get a warning reminding them that "when you share to your extended circles, people you

- haven't added to your circles will be able to view your post and may be able to comment.”
- All Google+ users can control “who can notify me.” For adults, the default is “anyone,” but for teens the default is people in their circles.
 - By default, anyone can comment on an adult's public posts, but for teens only people in their circles can.
 - In an adult's profile, Employment and Education can be seen by anyone, but for teens, the default is “Just your circles.”
 - For teens, profile information such as home address, phone number and birth date are set to “Only you.”
 - By default, teens' physical location is never attached to their posts.
 - Adults' “Relationship Status” can be seen by people in their extended circles, but for teens, only “Your circles.”
 - If a teen is in a hangout and someone outside their circles joins, the teen is temporarily pulled out of the hangout and asked if they want to continue. It's a way of pausing the action for a second and encouraging the teen to think about whether he or she wants to remain in the hangout.

Google+ also doesn't display the names of people under 18 alongside ads and doesn't allow people under 18 to co-watch age-restricted videos in hangouts.

The service also prevents teens from clicking directly to pages on Google+ that are designated for 18 and older. Teens also can't add those pages to their circles but it may be possible for a teen to see the page in search results or in a comment on someone else's post.

Reporting abuse

Google has community standards for “maintaining a positive experience for our users.” They provide the rules of the road when it comes to what people can post. Most are pretty obvious, such as avoiding illegal activities, hate speech, nudity and sexually explicit material or copyright infringement. Bullying, impersonation and gratuitous violence are also not allowed.

Google works hard to enforce these rules, but with millions of users and zillions of posts they can't do it all by themselves. That's where the community comes in. It's up to all of us to make sure Google+ remains a safe and comfortable place. That doesn't mean that people can't disagree or be provocative or edgy – that's part of the fabric of a dynamic community. It does, however, mean that people need to follow some basic rules of civil behavior that are outlined in the policy.

If you see content that appears in violation of these standards, click the down-arrow to the right of the post or content and select [Report abuse](#). You're then asked to specify why it's abusive by checking the appropriate box.

There is also an option to “Report this profile” in the left column of each person’s profile if the profile itself contains content that is likely to violate Google’s community standards.

Parenting Tip: *Teens should be encouraged to use reporting tools if they truly find something that they feel is a violation of Google’s community standards. But they (all users, really) also need to be aware that making false accusations against people is an abuse in its own right.*

Not everything that makes people uncomfortable is necessarily abusive. Even some “mean” comments may not rise to a violation of Google’s Community Standards, so don’t expect Google to police what amounts to relationship issues between users. For example, if someone posts a picture of you that you don’t like, it may not be considered abuse. Often your best bet is simply to ask the person who posted something to change it or take it down. It may not work 100% of the time, but it often does.

Report this post

Thank you for helping Google by reporting content which may be in violation of our [Community Standards](#).

Why are you reporting this post?

- Spam
- Nudity
- Hate speech or violence
- Copyright

Blocking someone

If someone posts something that makes you feel uncomfortable, regardless of whether it violates Google’s Community Standards, you always have the right to block that person. Just navigate to his or her profile and click “Block” (followed by the person’s first name) in the lower left column. Google doesn’t notify them that they’ve been blocked, but they might be able to figure it out because they will no longer see your content.

Block Anne
Report this profile

You can block a person or report the entire profile from the left column of any profile.

You can remove comments from your own posts without having to report or block the person by clicking on the gray “X” that appears to the right when you hover over the comment.

Google+ and search

Google recently announced a new feature called “Search, plus YourWorld” that adds your social-media activities to your Google search results. This new dimension of search makes it much easier to find photos, posts and other media shared with your friends.

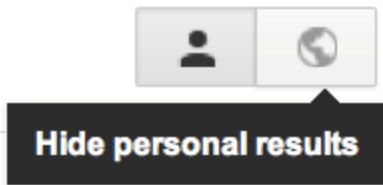
In terms of reputation and privacy, what this means is that anything you post to the public could be found later – even much later – by anyone using Google search. But if you limit the audience to one or more of your circles or specific individuals, only they can find it via search. With this feature enabled, someone could be looking for a great restaurant and find posts from friends about their top restaurant picks. Also, when you search for someone, you can find that person’s Google profile page (if there is one) along with any relevant web links about that person.

Parenting Tip: *Remind your child that posts can be found any time in the future, so what they say now can affect them later on. The default for teens is that they can only post to their circle, but they can choose to be more public. So you may still want to remind your kids to limit their audiences anyway, and delete any old posts they feel are no longer appropriate.*

Turning off social search results

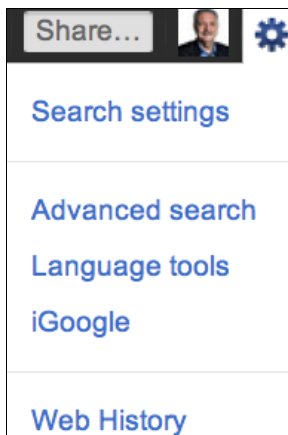
Users of Google search have the option to temporarily or “permanently” (it can always be reversed) turn off personalized search results.

To temporarily turn off the results for a specific search, type what you’re searching for in the search box, then click on the globe icon in the right corner of the results page. You can click on the little person icon to go back to social search results.

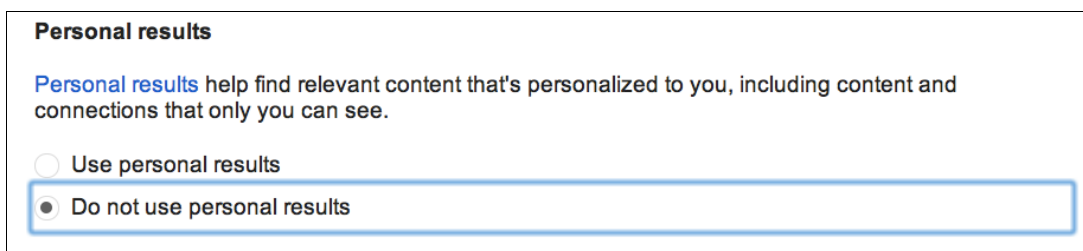


To turn off personal results for all of your searches:

1. Click on the gear icon in the upper right corner and then click "[Search settings.](#)" You need to be signed in to your Google account to make any changes.



2. Scroll down to the section marked "Personal results" and click on "Do not use personal results."



This setting will remain in effect as long as you're signed in. You can reverse it at any time to turn personalized results back on.

Parenting Tip: Do a bit of searching with your teen, looking up a variety of topics with personal results exposed and hidden. You should notice some differences. This is good fuel for a little media literacy training. Talk with your child about how personal search is influenced by your child's circles of friends and contacts and why that can be both good and not-so-good.

Google+ on smart phones

Most of the things you can do on Google+ on the Web can also be done via the Google+ Smart phone app for Android and iPhone, and there is a Web app that works with other Internet-connected phones.

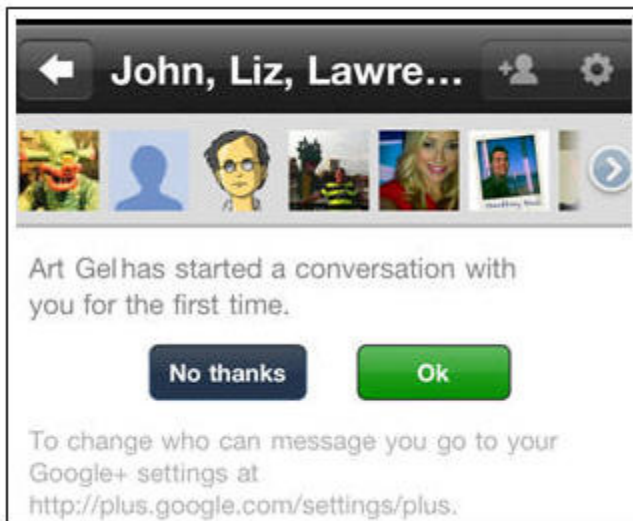
And, because of the features built-into smart phones, there are some things that you can do with a phone that you can't do on the Web.

For example, your phone has a camera which can easily be used to snap a picture and post it immediately to Google+. Also, phones use GPS, nearby WiFi networks and other technology to be location-aware, so it's easy to attach your location to any post or photo.

Parenting Tip: *Teens have their phones with them wherever they are – often when you're not around, so it's important for all of us to be mindful about sharing our physical location and who may be able to see that information. Talk with your kids about whether they let people know where they are and, if so, in what situations. Get them thinking about what's appropriate and safe for them.*

Google Messenger is a feature for smart phones (but not the desktop version of Google+) that allows groups of people to have a conversation. It can be used, for example, for friends to discuss where to go to lunch or what movie to see together. When you're in the midst of a Google Messenger conversation, everyone can see what everyone else is posting.

Parenting Tip: *Google Messenger does have controls that allow you to specify who can start a conversation with you, so talk with your kids about taking advantage of those controls and limiting who can contact them to their friends.*



When someone starts a conversation for the first time, you're given the option to accept or not accept.

Parenting Tip: For adults, Google will recommend that they include location the first time they post from their mobile and ask for permission. For teens on Google+, there is no such recommendation, although teens have the option to add their location to posts.

Conclusion

By now it should be clear that Google+ is a social networking service that provides all kinds of options for communicating, creating, sharing, and hanging out. It is also a reflection of and platform for people's thoughts, actions, relating, and learning all over the world. How people use the site is very individual, and keeping their experiences on the site positive depends a great deal on how they use it and interact with others on it. This is just as true for young Google+ users as it is for grownup ones.

Because Google+ use is based on real names and identities, it's directly tied to "real life" – in the case of young people, mostly school life and relationships. So, just as in offline life, children need their parents' help as they navigate both adolescence and the social Web. You can help them understand...

- How important it is for their own online well-being to be thoughtful about what they say, share, and upload on computers as well as phones and other devices.
- How smart it is to present themselves in a positive light online

- How much better their online experiences will be if they stay on good terms with others in their online as well as offline communities.

We hope this guide helps you, fellow parents, to support your children's positive use of this very popular part of their lives.

"A Parents' Guide to Google+" is online at www.plusparents.org, and our policy for reprinting or reposting content is at www.connectsafely.org/reuse.

About the Authors: Anne Collier and Larry Magid are co-directors of ConnectSafely.org and co-authors of MySpace Unraveled: A Parents Guide to Teen Social Networking and A Parents' Guide to Facebook. Both served on the Obama Administration's Online Safety & Technology Working Group, for which Anne served as co-chair and Larry as chair of the education subcommittee. Larry is also founder of SafeKids.com, technology analyst for CBS News and has contributed to the BBC World Service, National Public Radio, the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, CNET and Huffington Post. Anne is also founder and executive director of the nonprofit organization Net Family News, Inc., and editor of NetFamilyNews.org. Until 1997 she worked on the print, radio, TV, and Web editions of the Christian Science Monitor.