



Ethics and Social Media Use

Is everyone in the world on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Myspace? Do you feel like internet slang and texting abbreviations are taking the place of actual grammatical sentences? Have you ever wondered if LOL meant *lots of love* or *laughing out loud*? Have you ever fired off an email and immediately thought *OMG* - wishing you could stop it dead in cyberspace?

Social media is a great way to keep up with friends and family, news, trends, etc. and many of us really enjoy it. However, have you noticed the following things?

Some people seem more interested in keeping up online than in person.

People sometimes post comments without thinking them through, and can sound mean, silly, rude, or worse.

Some people just share TMI!

We have a tendency to judge a person's reputation by what they post (especially pictures) on social media sites.

Keeping up with all this social media can be a full-time job.

Although it might not seem like it, ethical use of social media and electronic communication is covered by the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, but in a more abstract way, so we think it's important to be more specific and practical here.

Let's take the case of **email**. When you send an email, you have no way of controlling where it goes once you hit the Send button. People share and forward emails all the time. Did the recipient of your email intentionally or unintentionally forward it to another person? Be very cautious about the content of your emails, particularly if they're about professional matters. Make sure your language is professional, that the content is accurate, and that no confidential material is included. If your email were to appear on the front page of the Cortez Journal tomorrow, would it harm a family, child, you, a co-worker, or your agency? Would it embarrass anyone, including yourself? If the answer is *yes*, revise it or find another way to communicate the message. The advantage to writing a letter by hand is that doing so gives the writer time to reflect and process - give yourself this time when using electronic communication, by drafting and letting your message sit for awhile in the Drafts folder. Think of harmful emails as taking a feather pillow to the highest hill in town on a windy day and popping it - the feathers scatter farther than you imagine and you can never gather them back to remake the pillow.

Using **social media** without violating ethics can be like navigating a minefield blindfolded. It requires good judgment, impulse-control, reflection, and the ability to set privacy controls for each platform you use. Just as with electronic communication, comments, status updates, videos, and photos posted on social media sites can easily cross the line and violate the NAEYC Code of Conduct. Even if they don't, information and material about your personal life is not for everyone to know. For example, maybe you attended a party and had a drink and did some dancing - all perfectly innocent fun. Maybe nothing inappropriate happened, but the pictures and comments posted could be misinterpreted or misunderstood by "a friend of a friend of a friend" who just happens to be the parent of one of the kids in your care. That's the problem with social media - you don't know who sees what unless you've carefully set your privacy controls so that only "friends" can see what you've posted. You can even make privacy settings very restrictive and individualized for each post.

The expression, "Going viral" cautions us to remember just how fast things get around - all the way around the world in seconds thanks to cyber-speed. Refrain from posting comments about co-workers, families, children, your facility as well as other facilities, and any professionals in the field. Even when you change names, in a small town where everyone has *friended* everyone else on Facebook, others will be able to identify the subjects of your comments simply by the details you might give of the circumstances of the situation. Posting inappropriate, unkind comments on social media sites is cyber-gossip and violates several of the values, ideals, and principles of our profession, to say nothing of breaching confidentiality.

If you observe inappropriate and unethical use of social media among co-workers and members of the early childhood profession, consider respectfully and kindly having a private conversation with them about this. Ethical use of social media and email is a great topic for a staff meeting as well. Talking these things over with other educators is always helpful, and can increase professionalism in all of us.