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With Australian teenagers spending approximately 3 hours per day online¹, it's no surprise that their relationships now contain a digital element. Teenage relationships are volatile and intense in the offline environment, adding the Internet and mobile devices to the mix can further complicate these issues. Research from Australia suggests that 28% of women have experienced relationship violence in the previous year², either physical emotional or psychological and we are yet to understand how prevalent this is online.

Relationships can begin, blossom and go bust online. An extreme example is the UK man who in 2008 killed his wife after she changed her Facebook status to "single".³ Interestingly, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers claims that one in five divorce petitions cite Facebook as evidence.

As adults who didn't live their teenage relationships through the lens of Facebook, it can be intimidating trying to guide young people into having respectful relationships online. However, the same principles of respect, trust, communication and self-identity apply online as they do offline.

We've come up with a few tips to pass onto young people whether they're in a relationship, just got out of one, or are looking for someone special online:

Just because you can be connected all the time, doesn't mean you have to be. Constantly checking in with your partner by text, Facebook or messenger can be frustrating and even stalkerish. Incessant contact could indicate that you don't trust your partner or want to control their activities - both indicators of an unhealthy

Time2Talk

This section provides some useful conversation starters for talking with young people about their use of technology:

How important is online/mobile communication to a relationship?

How much is too much communication?

Have you seen an unhealthy relationship?

Who would you speak to if you thought your relationship was becoming unhealthy?

Don't change your relationship status to single before you've officially broken up with your partner. You wouldn't appreciate it if you found out your relationship was over via Facebook, so don't do it to others. Also, breaking up on Facebook or in a text isn't the way to go. Show respect to your ex and break up in a way that involves actual human interaction!

Online dating services are great for adults, but aren't designed for young people. There are adults out there who want to meet young people for the wrong reasons, so be very cautious when speaking with someone online that you don't know in the offline environment. Really consider the risks

relationship.

Some things aren't meant to be shared.

Your password is yours and yours alone, so don't share it with your partner or even your best friend.

Some relationships end badly, so protect yourself and maintain your integrity. If you have a nasty break-up, it's a good idea to delete your ex from Facebook. This prevents any opportunities for you or your ex to exchange hateful words and can also reduce the pain of seeing your ex moving on when you haven't. Before deleting them, send a private message letting them know that you're deleting them so you can have some space. This will help them to understand why you've deleted them.

Having a joint profile is like having a joint bank account. It can be tempting to start a joint Facebook profile with your partner but you need to consider what will happen if you break up - who gets the profile? Also, you can run the risk of losing a sense of who you are as an individual, not just X's partner.

before agreeing to meet someone in person that you've only ever known online and ALWAYS take a trusted adult with you.

Where can you go for more information?

You can check out our page on [Digital Dating Abuse](#) for more information on respectful relationships or visit the sites below:

www.whiteribbon.org.au

www.theline.gov.au

Sources:

1 Click and Connect, ACMA, 2009

2 Mazza, D., L. Dennerstein, and V. Ryan. (1996). Physical, Sexual and Emotional Violence Against Women: A General Practice-Based Prevalence Study.

3 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/oct/17/facebook-murder>