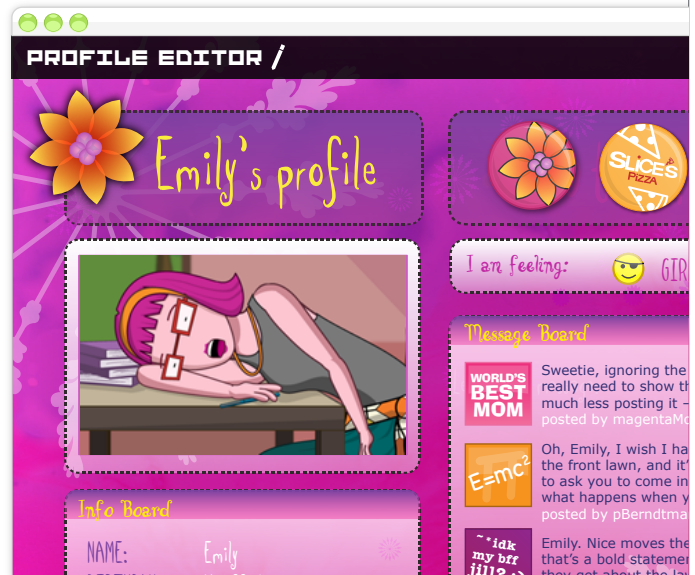


**D**o you play games online? Maybe you have a page on a social networking site, do some shopping, or write a blog. Whatever you do online, you may be asked to share your personal information. When that happens, ask the same questions online as you would in a store or on the phone: Why do you need it? What will you do with it? Will you share it with anyone? How do you keep it safe or secure?

The answers should be in a site's privacy policy. Websites have to post a privacy policy if they collect personal information. A privacy policy tells what kinds of information the website collects about visitors, how they use it, if they share it with anyone else, and if and how they protect it. Don't let the name fool you, though. A "privacy policy" could be called a "sharing policy" because it's an explanation of what the site does. It doesn't mean that the site keeps your information private. If a company's business practices don't follow its policy statement, the company risks facing legal action.

The rules are different for kids under 13 who are online, thanks to a law called the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). It's for websites run by businesses that collect personal information from kids under 13. It says these sites have to get parents to agree before the site can collect, keep, or use their kid's information. COPPA also lets parents look at their child's online profiles and blog pages.

The idea is to keep kids' personal information private – that means their name, birth date, address, telephone number, email address, Social Security number, and bank account or credit card numbers (if they have them). And, if parents agree that kids can share information with the website, the site has to keep the information private and secure.



### When you do want to post...

If you blog, microblog, or have a page on a social networking site, you may want to share information with your friends. But even if your idea is to share just with people you know, be aware that other people might be able to see your information, too. So before you post your email address or that goofy picture:

- Make sure you're comfortable with anybody seeing what you post. Your teachers, coaches, even college admissions officers may see what you've posted.
- Remember that once you post something online, you can't take it back, even if you delete it.
- Remember that the words you type and the images you post can have consequences.
- Trust your gut. If someone says something to you online that makes you feel uncomfortable, talk to an adult you trust.

**Things to Talk About and Do**

- Keep a journal of all the places online that ask for your personal information. What do they want to know? Why?
- Read the Privacy Policy for several sites you visit often. Does it make sense? Do they say they'll keep your information private, or share it? Who with?
- If you use a social networking site, review the privacy settings you have in place. Who can see what you post?

**Want to Find Out More?**

Federal Trade Commission  
www.ftc.gov

On Guard Online  
www.onguardonline.gov

**They Shoulda Known...**

The FTC's lawyers and investigators enforce COPPA to make sure websites are complying with the law. If a site does something wrong and doesn't fix it, the FTC might sue on behalf of consumers. In one case, the FTC said a social networking site collected, used, and shared personal information from kids under 13 – but didn't get permission from the kids' parents, or even tell the parents that their kids were sharing information. The site said that no one under 13 could join, but then let people join even when their birthdates showed they were under 13. Over five years, the site created 1.7 million accounts for users they should have known were under 13. The website company promised not to do this again and paid a \$1 million penalty.

