

# NEW MEXICO INJURY ATTORNEY BLOG

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## Internet Monitoring Services Keep Parents In the Loop

"Cyber bullying", "cyber stalking", "online predators"; these are only a few additions to the English language that advances in computer technologies have created. Unfortunately, these are not just words, but real issues that children could face when participating in online activities.

One of the most popular online activities accessed by children today is social networking, also known as "virtual communities". Social networking services allow users to create personal profiles that can include photographs, in an attempt to share information and stay connected with others. It is estimated that approximately 72% of teens have a profile on a social networking website, and of these profiles, nearly half can be viewed by anyone.

Access to a child's personal profile can create a host of dangers, including threats by cyber bullies and online predators. However, there are remedies for reducing a child's exposure to these dangers. One such tool is an online monitoring service. This service searches through public online activity and generates reports that parents can use to detect dangers. These services are also an effective tool in creating an awareness of what types of information can be publicly viewed.

Online monitoring services pay particular attention to social networking sites and identify where a child has an account. Then they look for "red flags" or key words that the child has written to others or received from others. These could be words like "suicide" or "sex". Keyword flags could point out possible cyber bullying situations or even risky relational activity. The monitoring service can then attempt to locate individuals who are engaging in inappropriate contact, so that further action can be taken to eliminate it.

These services can also monitor the contacts or "friends" a child has accepted through their social networking site, and notify parents of anything suspicious. Depending on the service, names can be run through various databases that register sex-offenders or other criminal activity.

Threats to reputation may be one danger that both parents and children may not be aware of. Information posted on social networking sites has the potential to remain on the internet indefinitely. What might have been a childish indiscretion or prank may come back to create questions surrounding a person's character later in life. Consequently,

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this information could be harmful for future educational and employment opportunities. Once alerted to potentially damaging information, parents can teach their children about the responsibility of protecting their reputation.

Ultimately, parents need to have some awareness of their child's online activity and be able to communicate the apparent dangers. However, it is not always possible to monitor everything a child sees or does online. Online monitoring services cannot replace parental vigilance but they may offer a good option for filling in the gaps.

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