Facebook for Parents

With good judgement and privacy settings, your teen can learn to use Facebook safely. Learn how.
by Common Sense Media | Oct. 3, 2011 | Social networking and virtual worlds

Some facts

- Facebook has more than 500 million registered users (Facebook, 2010).
- 73% of 12- to 17-year olds have at least one social networking profile (Pew, 2010).
- Facebook isn't supposed to be used by kids under 13, but approximately 7.5 million kids under 13 in the United States are on Facebook (*Consumer Reports*, 2010)

Advice & Answers

Facebook is How Our Teens Connect

Facebook is a huge part of many teens' lives. They use it to keep up with their friends' activities, play games, chat, post photos -- even do homework. And while public sharing always carries some safety and privacy risks (more on that below), with good judgment and strict privacy settings, Facebook can be used safely.

What is Facebook?

Facebook is an enormous, free social networking site with hundreds of millions of users all over the world.

To use Facebook, you sign up with your email address, name, gender, date of birth, and password. That gives you a profile page, which you can then fill in by answering questions on Facebook's forms. The questions are designed to help you create connections with people you know -- called "friends" -- as well as display things you like, such as books and movies. You also have the option to upload a photo of yourself.

As you complete your profile, you can select the people who can view each piece of information. (See our advice for privacy settings below.)

Why it Matters

Teens' willingness to share information can surprise -- and even shock -- parents who aren't used to such public disclosure. And with teens turning to Facebook for much of their socializing (and maybe using their smartphones to do it), parents are often completely out of the loop.

Facebook is also a big part of teens' real-world lives -- and any indiscriminate posting (such as racy photos, cyberbullying, or relationship status) can lead to drama in high school hallways or land kids in the principal's office.

But Facebook's privacy settings have evolved since the site first started, and its users have evolved, too. Many teens are very sophisticated about who they let see certain information and who they block.

Finally, Facebook can be a time-waster and interrupt kids' when they're supposed to be doing homework.

How to Help Your Teen Use Facebook Safely

You can help your teen use Facebook safely by explaining the importance of setting strict privacy controls, using smart judgment about what they choose to post, behaving appropriately, and understanding that anything they put online can potentially be misused. Here are more tips on navigating this tricky territory:

Tips for talking to teens about Facebook

Talk to your teens about controlling their information. Encourage them to be selective about what they share by customizing the recipients of their posts. Activities on Facebook, including the applications teens use and games they play, can be viewed by others.

Use strict privacy settings. Review all of the options on your privacy settings page. Facebook's default settings tend to keep information public until a user makes it private (although Facebook is a little stricter with minors' accounts). "Friends Only" is a good choice for most items, but you can be even more selective.

Pre-approve tags. Choose the settings that allow you to see everything you've been tagged in (including photos) before the tag links to your page.

Use notification settings. You can tell Facebook that you want to be notified of any activity performed on your name, including photo tags.

Don't post your location. Facebook lets users post their location on every post. Teens shouldn't do this for safety and privacy reasons. Teens can also "tag" their friends' location but you can prevent anyone from tagging your location in the How Tags Work section.

Set rules about what's appropriate to post. No sexy photos, no drinking photos, no photos of them doing something that could hurt them in the future. Teens also need to be thoughtful about their status updates, wall posts, and comments on friends' posts. Remind them that once they post something, it's out of their hands.

If in doubt, take it out. Use the "Remove Post" button to take down risky posts.

Encourage teens to self-reflect before they self-reveal. Teens are very much in the moment and are likely to post something they didn't really mean. Work with them on curbing that impulse. Teach them to ask themselves why they're posting something, who will be able to read it, and whether it could be misunderstood or used against them later.

Watch out for ads. There are tons of ads on Facebook, and most major companies have profile pages. Marketers actively use Facebook to target advertising to your teen.

Create your own page. The best way to learn the ins and outs of Facebook is to create your own page. A great way to start talking to your teens about their Facebook experience is to ask them to help you create your own page.

"Friend" younger teens. If your kids are in middle school, it may be a sound policy to know what they're posting, since teens that age don't necessarily understand that they're creating a digital footprint. Keep in mind that kids can block you from seeing things, so check in with them, too.

Talk to your high school-aged teens about whether they're comfortable letting you "friend" them. Many will be. But if you *are* your teen's friend, don't fill her page with comments, and don't "friend" her friends. Many parents say Facebook is the only way they know what's going on in their teens' life, so tread cautiously.

Choose your battles. You'll see the good, the bad, and the truly unfathomable. If you don't want your teens to unfriend you, don't ask them about every transgression. Keep it general.

Be a model friend. Remember that your teens can see what you post, too. Model good behavior for your teens, and keep your own digital footprint clean.

Review Facebook's Safety Center. Several FAQs, from General Safety to Safety for Teens, provide detailed information on how to use Facebook safely.

Safety Information for Parents

There are a number of important steps you can take to ensure your children have a positive experience when using these sites:

- Become familiar with the sites yourself
- Encourage your children to keep their profiles private
- Be careful about what information your children are sharing on the sites. You may think you know all their friends in the real world - but you may not know all their friends online
- Encourage children to think about who they want to add as a friend. Encourage them to only add friends they know in the real world
- Make sure your children know where to go for help if they feel uncomfortable. And make sure they feel happy talking to you about the negative as well as positive experiences

You might also want to encourage them to think through these things:

- Only upload pictures that you'd be happy for your mum to see. Anything too sexy to be passed round the dinner table should NOT make it on to the web, as it could encourage sex-pests to contact you
- Don't post your phone number or email address on your homepage. Think about it? Why would anyone actually need this info when they can message you privately via MySpace or Facebook?
- Don't post pictures of you or your mates wearing school uniform. If dodgy people see your school badge, they can work out where you are and come and find you
- Adjust your account settings so only approved friends can instant message you. This won't ruin your social life. New people can still send you friend requests and message you, they just won't be able to pester you via instant messaging
- Tick the 'no pic forwarding' option on your MySpace settings page. This will stop people sending pictures from your page around the world without your consent
- Don't give too much away in a blog. Yes, tell the world you're going to a party on Saturday night, but don't post details of where it is. Real friends can phone you to get details. Strangers shouldn't be able to see this kind of information

Cyberbullying is becoming a concern with not only Facebook, but with texting and emails as well. This is where the parent needs to teach their child to let them know when this is occurring. The parent needs to take immediate action to stop any cyber bullying before it gets out of hand. It is viral and escalates very rapidly. By being a friend with their child on Facebook, a parent can often recognize the initial signs of cyberbullying and put a quick stop to it. Some kids get caught up in the bullying process without even being aware that they are contributing. Parents need to remind their kids of the old adage that if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. This applies to texts , emails, wall post and comments.

Facebook addiction is a risk to not only kids but adults as well. It is very easy to get consumed. Setting limits and boundaries and sticking to them is the best defense in this case.

What if your kid won't "friend" you?

This question is so commonly asked that it surprises me! In my house, not friending me is not an option, especially if my children want to eat. I understand that this is not the policy of every family. The advice that I give parents that have children that won't friend them is to not worry about it. The parent needs to go ahead and establish an account and become familiar with Facebook. They need to build their own network of friends and interact with them. In most cases, once the child

feels comfortable that the parent will not embarrass him in front of his Facebook friends and knows what he is doing, then the child will be comfortable in friending the parent.

Facebook IS constantly changing. That is just the nature of the beast. It will continue to change and evolve. Here are the best ways to stay "Facebook hip:

1. use it on a regular basis

2. follow @fb4parents on Twitter

3. sign up for our newsletter on facebookforparents.org

4. read the facebook blog

5. use google alerts to notify you of updates and news on Facebook

PARENTAL ADVICE ON FACEBOOK

Here are some suggested guidelines on how to support your children using Facebook safely:

 The terms and conditions for Facebook state that users need to be 13 years of age. Anyone under that age who has an account is violating the terms and conditions and you can report them at http://on.fb.me/dTSqRP.

 Don't be afraid to set boundaries for your younger children and explain that, as with other forms of media, there are age restrictions on using certain websites.

 Create a Facebook account yourself and be 'friends' with your teenage children. This will enable you to monitor what they post on their wall and who they add as 'friends'.

 Facebook explicitly states that no person should abuse, harass or bully other people through posts or comments. If you come across any information that breaches this specific rule you can report it to Facebook. Guidelines on how to do this can be found at http://on.fb.me/ePpM93.

 In order to ensure that your teenage children are aware of some of the potential risks on Facebook, make sure that they download the ClickCEOP application, so that they can install the 'Report Abuse' application on their Facebook profile. Users can access this at http://apps.facebook.com/clickceop/.

 Ensure that you educate your children about their digital footprints. More colleges, universities and employers are researching candidates for jobs by searching social networking sites. A negative post or unsuitable photograph could come back and haunt your teenage children in later years and prevent them from gaining certain employment.

 Finally, teach your children to send positive posts. Schools and the police are taking seriously negative and libellous comments about educational professionals and it could lead to exclusion or legal action against them.

For further information, visit www.yhgfl.net

Staying safe on Facebook

Introduction

Facebook is a very powerful tool for enabling people to stay connected and share information with youronline friends. It is currently the most popular Social Networking site in use across Redbridge schools.Facebook's terms and conditions state that you must be aged over 13 to use their system. This documentoutlines briefly key things you should consider to ensure the website is used safely.

Deciding your privacy settings

Sharing informationFacebook enables youto completely controlwhich information getsshared with who. Noyoung person shouldhave their profile detailsshared with 'Everyone'as this is puttingyourself at risk of absolutely anybody –the good and the bad –of knowing how to getin touch with you.Whether you share youremail address and phone numbers with your friends depends on whether you are a type 1 or type 2social networker. A type 2 social networker must actively choose to share less otherwise your phonenumber and email address can easily get into the wrong hands.Blocking and reportingFacebook enables youto block friends who areno longer friends, orreport friends who youbelieve break Facebook's rules. It is important to remember that your decisions impact your online safety. Look at yourfriendship list now. It may be very long, but are you happy that all these people are still good friends?

Once you block someone, that person can no longer be your friend on Facebook or interact with you (except within applications and games you both use).

Name: Block This User

Email: Block This User

	Everyone	Friends of Friends	Friends Only	Other
My status, photos, and posts			•	
Bio and favorite quotations			•	
Family and relationships			•	
Photos and videos I'm tagged in			•	
Religious and political views			•	
Birthday			•	
Can comment on posts			•	
Email addresses and IM				•
Phone numbers and address			•	

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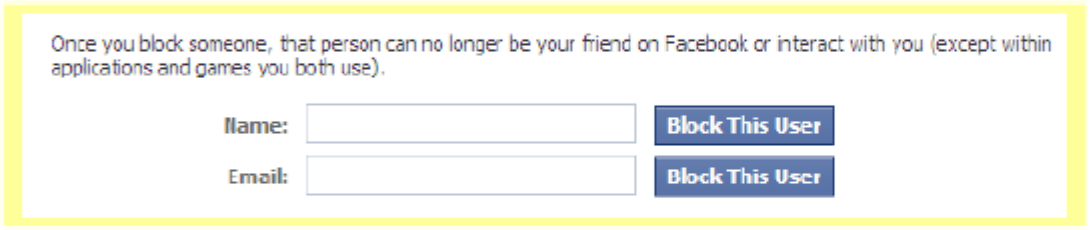

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What is my digital tattoo? (aka – the toothpaste tube problem…)

It is now becoming more common place for employers and colleges to 'google' people before interviewing potential candidates. The moreinformation you make available publicly on the web the more risk you are of creating an indelible digital tattoo. That web profile is seen before you are and therefore the comments you made about Aunt Ethel's party, the photos that were taken when you and your friends were playing daresand the words you used when you realized your team had lost their latest match could all become the first impression you make to people. Peoplehave lost jobs and been removed from colleges because of their internet activity – don't let that be you.Why is it also known as the toothpaste tube problem? Have you ever tried getting toothpaste back into the tube…?

Basic directory information This is fundamentally howyou are listed to the generalpublic. Many people chooseto become ex-directory onthe telephone network toavoid nuisance calls. It isquite possible to do this inFacebook too.It is important you reviewthese settings and make surethat you are comfortable withwho can see your directoryinformation. It is alwaysbetter to make a very smallamount of informationavailable to the generalpublic, and then change yourmind later. It is very difficultto do it the other way round!

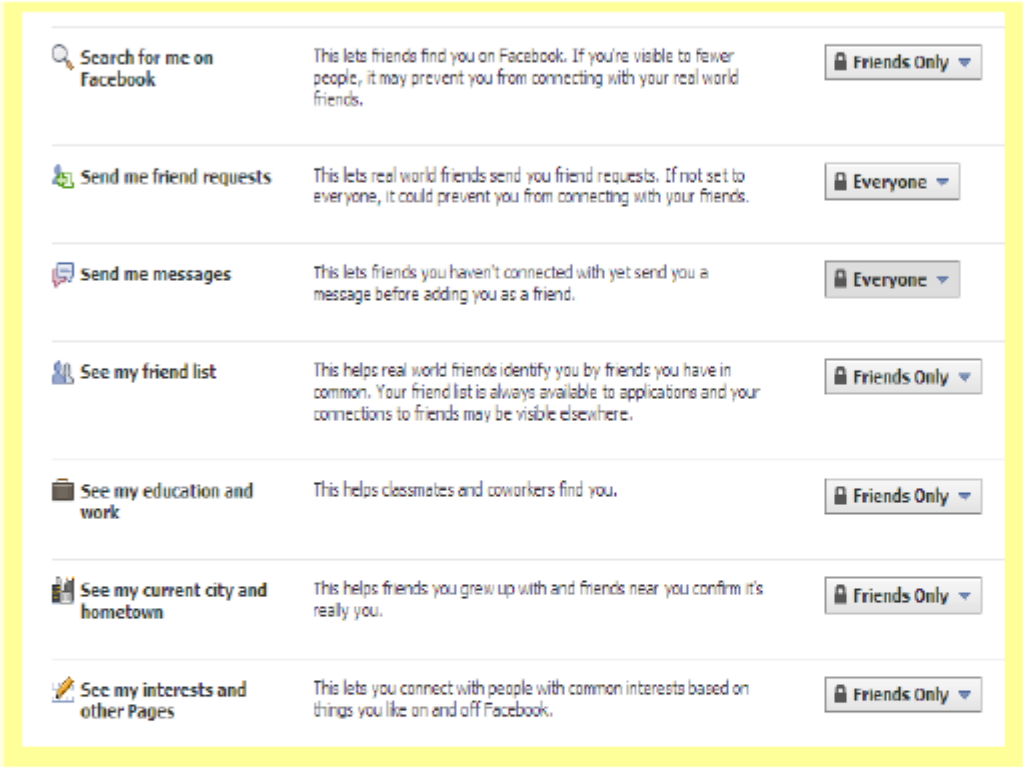
How can I make Facebook safer for my friends?

CEOP is the UK Police agency concerned witheSafety. They have a Facebook App that ensuresyou are safer online. It costs nothing to add andyou can share the 'Report a problem' badge onyour status update. By sharing it you have becomepart of the solution, not part of the problem.In an ideal world every person onFacebook should add the CEOP appto their own profile. When youreport a problem via the CEOPbadge it is dealt with immediatelyby a team of expert Policeinvestigators. It's like having yourown hotline to headquarters!

Further information:

http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk http://www.facebook.com/ClickCEOP
http://www.facebook.com/help/?safety=teens

Document produce by Alex Rees for the London Borough of Redbridge, July 2010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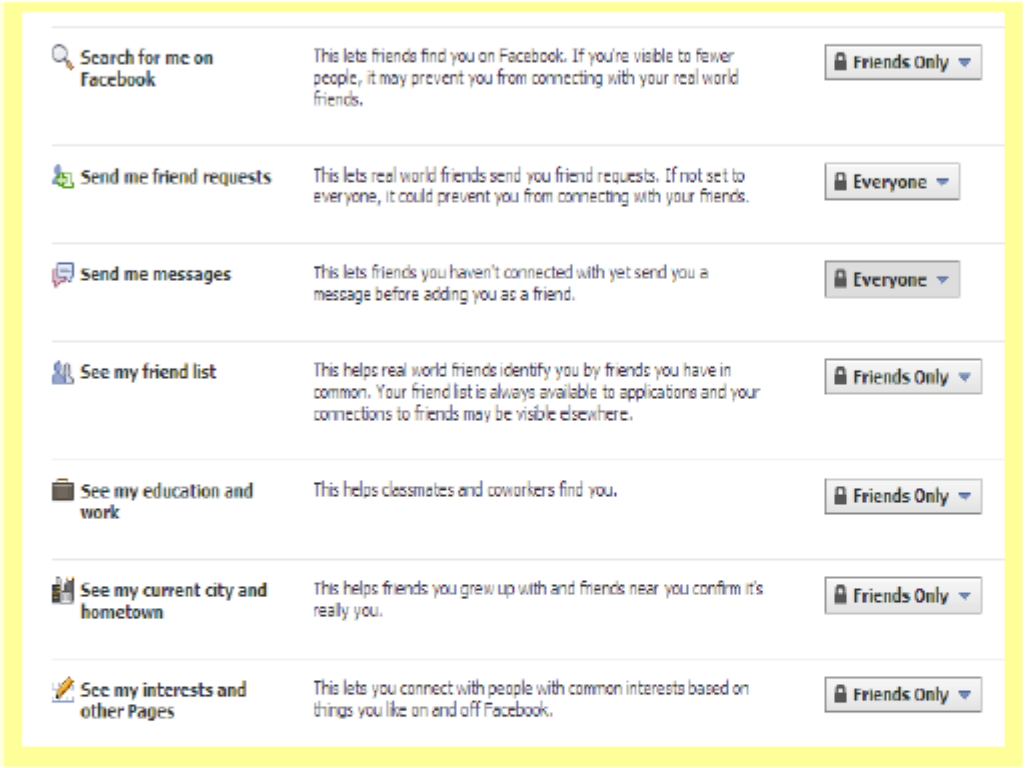
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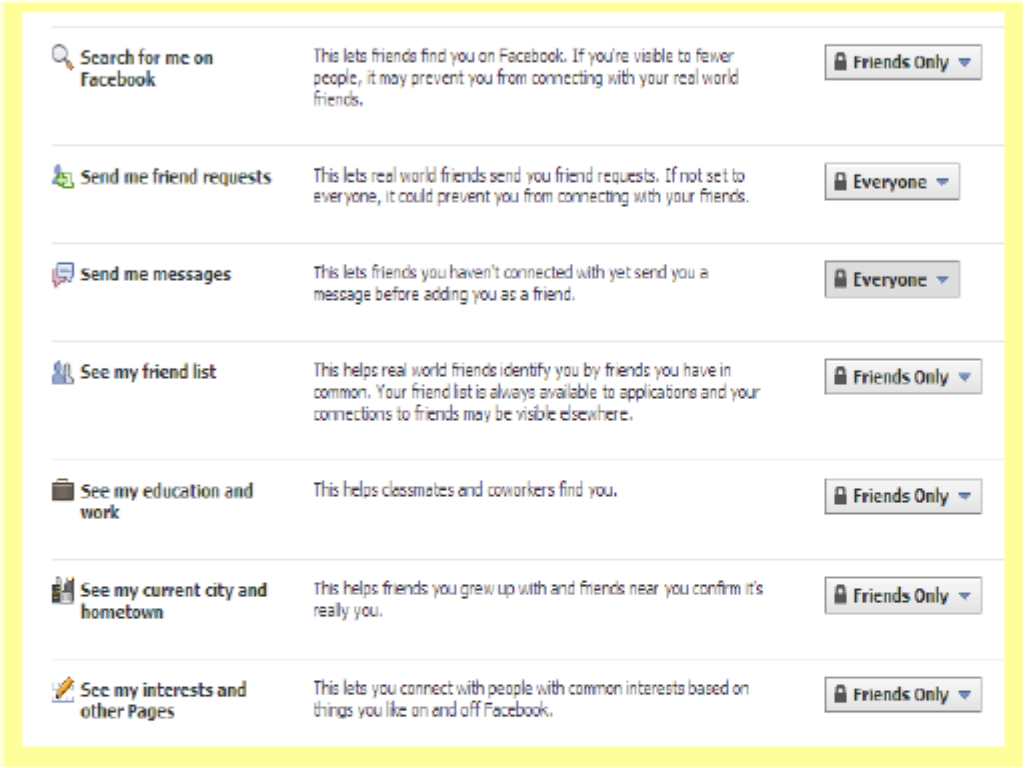
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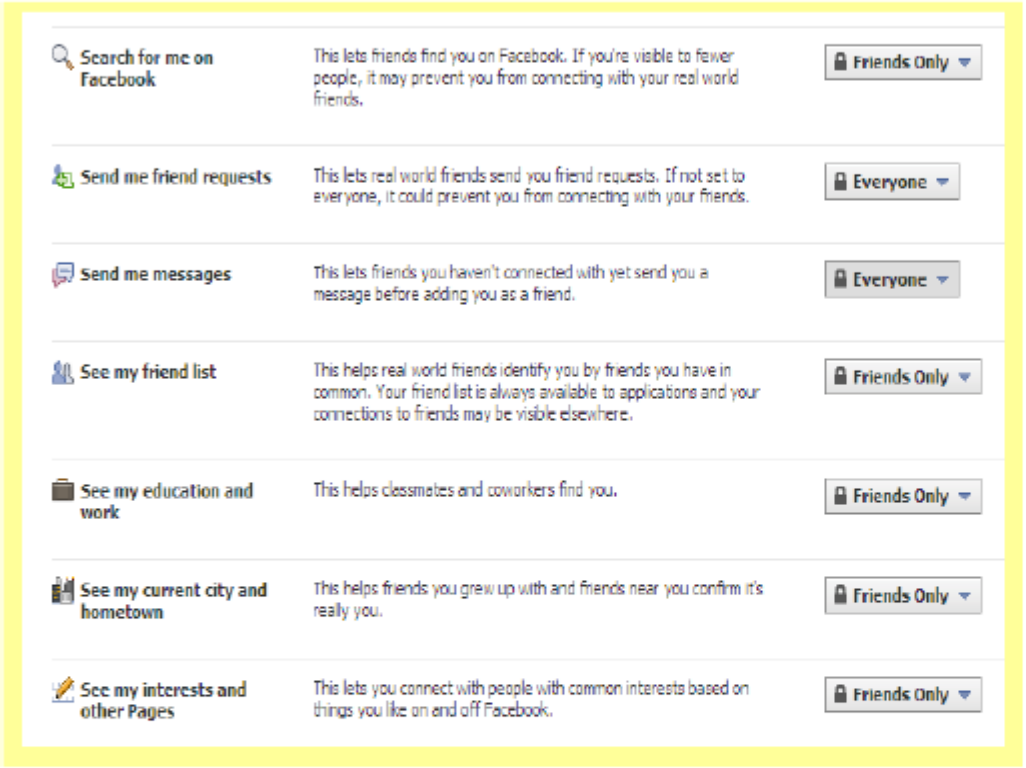
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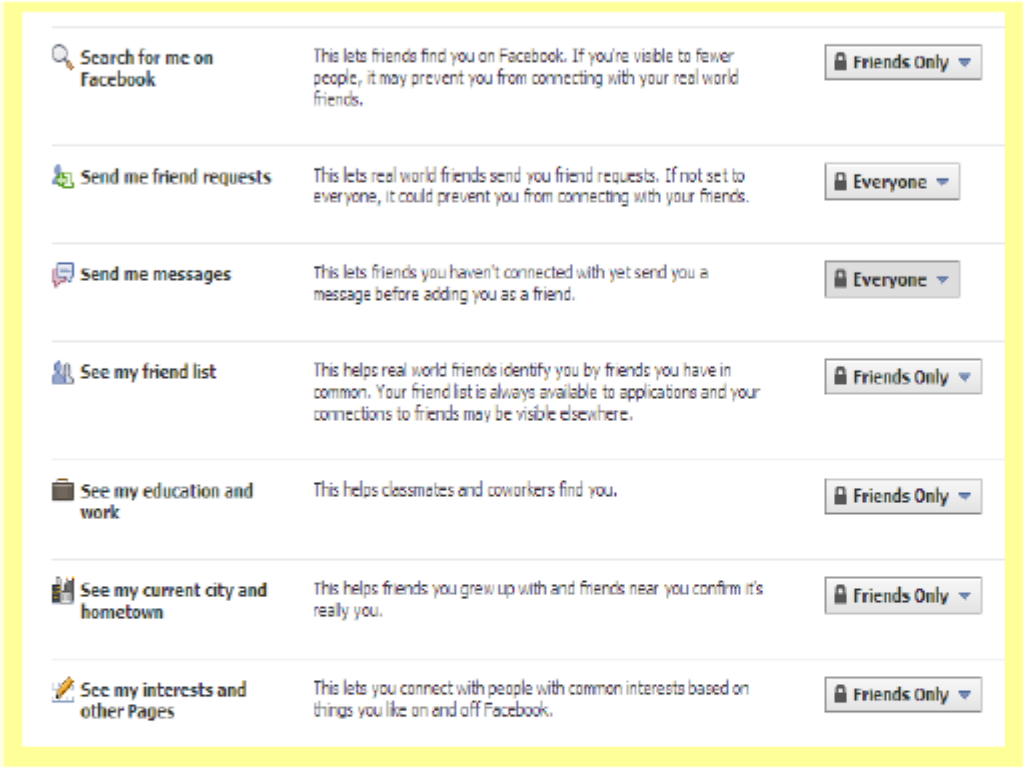
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