Social Networking and the Internet
Some thoughts for teenagers

How to have fun. How to stay in control.

There are a number of things to think about when using social networking sites:

Be careful what information you give out...
Be careful what information you give out on your profile. Remember that you don't know who your friend's friends are… or your friend's friends' friends! And you don't know what they'll do with your picture or your phone number if you give it out by mistake. Once your picture is out there, it's out there forever and you won't be able to get it back.

Be aware that information on your profile could potentially be viewed by anyone.
So if you wouldn't be comfortable printing it off and handing it out on the street, maybe it shouldn't be on your profile. Use a nickname or your initials instead of your name – you don't want just anyone knowing who you are. Consider changing your photo to a cool graphic or picture of your favourite band, that way strangers won't have access to a picture of you.

Think through who you want to chat to...
Think through who you want to chat to, and how many of your personal thoughts you want anyone to view. Sometimes, it can seem a good idea to share what you got up to with your boyfriend last night, or the argument you had with your best mate; but as you're writing – remember that information could be public forever! It is tempting to share loads of stuff on your profile, especially since you're often typing from the comfort of your own home. But remember, the internet is a public space. Test yourself by asking "would I want my teacher/Mum/Dad/ stranger on the train to see this?!" If the answer's no… don't post it!

Be careful who you agree to accept...
Be careful who you agree to accept into your forums / private chat areas. Unfortunately because there are so many young people using these sites, adults with bad intentions will use them to make contact with children too; so you're safer to only chat to people you know in the real world. If you know someone… who knows someone… who knows someone, it doesn't make them your friend, so think carefully about whether you should be chatting to them and what kind of things you're saying.

Know where to go for help...
If you feel anyone is being weird with you or your friends; or if someone is bullying you on one of these sites – contact the administrator of the chat area. If they don't get back to you – you might want to think twice about using the site again.
If it's really serious – like you think the person contacting you may be an adult who wants to abuse you or your mates, report the issue on the thinkuknow site using the red reporting button.

Things to think through:
Use your Privacy Settings! Adjust your account settings (sometimes called "Privacy 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 IM. This means that people you don't want to see your profile can't!
Some social networking sites are really well run and the administrators will try to help you remember to keep your personal information to yourself. Others are not so good – so be careful when choosing which areas you go to.

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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 onto the web, as you don't know who could be looking at it or what they might be doing with it.

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 your social networking site?

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 find you. The more anonymous you are, the less vulnerable you are to people with bad intentions.

Tick the "no pic forwarding" option on your Myspace settings page
This will stop people forwarding your pictures to anyone 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, why would a complete stranger need to know this information?