

ScuttlePad is the new "Facebook" for kids

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ScuttlePad is a safe way to give your kids a taste of social networking.

Photo: Photo by Kimberly Gray

Do you have a child under 13 or younger who begs to get on Facebook or MySpace, but you as a parent are weary of allowing your child to venture into the world of social networking just yet?

Well now there is an alternative that provides a place for kids to get a taste of social networking and learn to be safe with it in a safe environment. That alternative is ScuttlePad.com.

Mitchell County teacher and mother of children ages 10, 11 and 14, Christy Harris, allows her kids to set up Facebook pages, but she monitors their use closely. She limits their time online to 30 minutes per day and requires them to be in her or her husband's sight at all times when online.

She also requires each of her children to "friend" her on Facebook so they know she can see what they post and so that she can monitor what they're saying and who they're saying it to.

"Children are naive, and if you do not set boundaries (which all children want and need), they they get out of control, and that is how you have so many teen pregnancies and children running away to meet people they 'found' on Facebook," Harris said.

Children can be prey for child predators on social networking sites. Adults may even disguise themselves as children in order to get a child to trust him or her with personal information. These sorts of dangers are almost impossible on ScuttlePad.

That's because the child has to choose from pre-approved words or phrases to communicate with "friends" online. The only way any comments can be made is through this sentence tool. There is no freedom for a child to give personal information, and there is not freedom for an adult to ask a personal question, like if the child is home alone.

"We don't give anyone an opportunity to ask inappropriate questions," ScuttlePad creator Chad Perry pointed out.

Perry came up with the idea to launch a social networking site for kids ages 6-11 to give younger kids and their families a safe option.

There are other safety features included:

- Manual checking of each photo to be uploaded to the site to ensure inappropriate content is not on the site.
- Only having first name listed on personal profile.
- Having the option to just list home country or home state and country on the profile.

I allowed my eight-year-old boy to try out ScuttlePad, and he was so excited because he had never done anything like that before.

The only drawback for him, which is a positive for me as his mother, is not being able to say whatever he wants. That frustrated him a little. It's also tough right now to meet up with people he knows because it's so new, but that's something that can change because there is an invite tool to send emails to your child's friends or friends' parents to suggest joining ScuttlePad as well.

Your child may also like the opportunity to have today's version of a pen pal. They can meet kids from different countries since children from Korea, Mexico and Spain have registered, according to Perry.

Perry says they are not trying to compete with Facebook but want to give kids a safer option. He described his site as a "building block of social networking," as well as educational and fun. It can also serve as a tool for adults to learn about social networking as well because it is very simple without games and applications to complicate things or distract the user.

The site is free. All that is required is an adult's email address. You can also log on to www.scuttlepad.com to preview the site before registering.

URL: <http://www.examiner.com/stay-at-home-moms-in-abilene/a-facebook-for-kids>