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## FOCUS ON TECHNOLOGY

### Browsers put parents in control of children's networking

#### Many teens share personal information with strangers, survey says

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#### DIGITAL LIFE

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Sarah Winblad recently had "the talk" with her 12-year-old daughter.

Winblad had found her daughter visiting MySpace, a social networking site that was supposed to be off limits. So she installed [Glubble](#), a free program that creates a "closed" browsing environment for children. Parents pre-approve sites that their kids can visit, and can monitor their browsing history and Internet searches.

The software was a bit of a shock to Winblad's daughter after she came home one day to find it installed on the home computer.

"We had a long conversation about it," said Winblad, who works for a Chicago Internet company and is active on MySpace, Facebook and LinkedIn. Winblad talked about her own experiences on social networking sites and pointed out her short list of MySpace friends, showing how cautious she had been in approving friend requests.

Winblad said her daughter is smart, but as a pre-teen, she hasn't "developed the ability to sense and suss out all of the information that's out there," whether it's Web-based research for a science fair project or personal data contained on a networking site.

Her concerns are legitimate.

On Wednesday, Internet security company McAfee released a study of more than 1,000 U.S. mothers and their children between ages 13 and 17. The research showed that 52 percent of teens have disclosed personal information online to someone they don't know in real life, and 16 percent have social networking profiles or private e-mail addresses to shield their online activity from their parents.

Genevieve Thiers, a Chicago-based child-care expert who runs Sittercity.com and has partnered with Glubble, believes that children between ages 8 and 14 should be on a closed network because "it's very unsafe when they can be out there, talking to anyone. They can get obsessed with it and develop



unhealthy habits."

Both Glubble and KidZui, another child-friendly browser, have social networking features that aim to safely introduce kids to online communication.

On Glubble, for example, family members have individual pages and can share photos, update a common calendar and send messages to each other.

"We provide the tools and let parents decide [what's right] in the end," said Alexander van Elsas, Glubble's senior vice president of operations and a father of four. "These tools and social networking elements really help parents deal with these challenges."

In Winblad's case, she may consider letting her daughter sign up for MySpace in a year or two.

She knows social networking will become more popular for her daughter and her peers as they become teenagers.

But she wants her to learn good etiquette for e-mail and Web-based communication and is mindful of setting ground rules on friend requests and what can go on a profile.

Winblad also said she plans to "friend" her daughter after she signs up for MySpace and Facebook.

Ah, the parental friend request. That might have to be the subject of the next "talk."

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