



DARE TO BAN YOUR KIDS FROM FACEBOOK



Kate Fratti

215-949-4179

Email: kfratti@phillyburbs.com

Blog: phillyburbs.com/blogs/news_columnists/kate_fratti/

Twitter: @frattik

Recently, a weary father to a middle schooler wrote to me to express his consternation with some of what he's finding on his kids' Facebook page.

Very innocent looking "friends" posting some not-so-innocent content. He wondered how other parents are coping. Did I think he should let other parents in on what he sees? "You raised children. What do

you think?" he asked.

I wasn't sure. It's tricky stuff. So I reached out to friend, licensed psychotherapist and parenting coach Robin Kevles Necowitz. I've trusted her with some of my own parenting questions, and she's always steered me right. Though sometimes what she said wasn't so easy to hear.

She doesn't think parenting around Facebook is tricky. Difficult, yes. Just not complicated.

Here's her thinking:

"In my private practice, I specialize in parenting issues. Many parents present all kinds of issues that arise from Facebook. When I make the suggestion that maybe Facebook shouldn't be permitted, they look at me like I just asked them to sacrifice their first born. It really is OK to say no to your child even if 'everyone else is doing it.'

"I have made it clear to my children that they will never have a Facebook account as long as they live in my house. My kids seem relieved. Sure, they balked initially.

"Facebook is a breeding ground for inappropriate language, behavior and bullying. Parents are just asking for trouble by allowing kids under 18 on the site.

"Social relationships are a beautiful, yet a stressful and challenging training ground for life. It's tough to look someone in the eyes and speak cruelly about them. I was watching Chris Christie interviewed by Oprah, and he had a great quote. He said, 'It's hard to hate up close.'

"He was making a political point; I am making a social media one.

"Kids are struggling to learn how to navigate personal relationships. Relationships, even the healthiest ones (especially the healthiest ones), are very hard work.

"Facebook makes friendships look easy. It's not a good message to send. I'm sorry, but you don't have 487 'friends.' We are blessed if we have three.

"Childhood is a vulnerable time. And we have so little time to teach our kids how to manage budding relationships and all that is involved in being a good friend. To be a good friend requires conflict resolution and listening skills, providing loving support and encouragement, and knowing how to approach difficult/sensitive subjects that often lead to difficult conversations with people you love. It is an art form. A skill that will be lifelong. Facebook is a distraction from all that.

"At minimum, if you aren't able to say no, you need to monitor it very closely. I strongly encourage parents to have the computer in plain sight so they can easily see what their kids are doing and saying, and what they are being exposed to. Make sure you get their passwords so you can periodically check their activity. Just knowing that your parents can check on you helps to keep things more appropriate.

"I subscribe to the 'it takes a village' philosophy. We are all raising each other's children. If I saw something that could be potentially dangerous posted by another child, I would contact that parent immediately. Not because I necessarily think the parent would appreciate it (some would, some won't), but because I need to know that I am part of the solution and not part of the problem. Passivity can be a form of neglect.

"Will you get criticized by other parents who won't agree? Absolutely. I do.

"And expect fits from your own children. That's OK, too. It's your job to hold the line and their job to push against it.

"Manage your anxiety and you empower yourself to make reasonable, responsible, sound (albeit unpopular) parenting decisions."

If you have questions for Robin, she can be reached at www.parentassist.net.

Kate Fratti's column appears weekly.

