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Facebook - To Friend or Not to Friend

By Jean Follmer

To friend or not to friend, that is the question. Facebookers know the routine: So-and-so has sent you a "friend request." If you confirm the person as a friend, you're inviting him into your virtual world. Many Facebookers out there have hundreds of "friends." If adults have trouble knowing where to draw the line on Facebook friends, imagine trying to establish that line if you're a kid. Stanley Middle School recently reported an incident in which an unknown Facebook user sent friend requests to a number of Stanley students.

Posing as Stanley Principal David Schrag, the perpetrator successfully "friended" a number of the students. "Several students had approached me asking if I have a Facebook account," said Schrag, who notified both Facebook administrators and the Lafayette Police Department of the situation. "Facebook was really responsive and they took the page down immediately," said Schrag. Due to Facebook's timely response, the Lafayette Police Department did not need to get involved.

The situation served to raise awareness and increase the dialogue about internet safety for Stanley students.

"Anyone who you accept as a friend on Facebook has access to all of your information," said Schrag.

While some middle school parents feel their children are ready to access social networking sites like Facebook, other parents do not. Stanley parent Gint Federas said his 8th grade daughter does have a Facebook account. Federas said he and his wife "friended" their daughter so they can monitor her Facebook activities. "I just go look at her wall every now and then, maybe once or twice a week," said Federas, and he has addressed a few postings he thought were inappropriate by both his daughter and her friends. Federas said his daughter did receive a friend request from the perpetrator posing as Schrag. When she looked at the impostor's information, she saw it was filled with profanities and clicked the "ignore" button.

Another parent of an 8th grade Stanley student, Kristi Buck, said her daughter does not have a Facebook account. "She does not have one and I personally feel that they're too young. I just think there is too much information available for them to safely navigate at this age. What's hard is you can post comments so conversations can be publicly broadcast. I also think it makes relationships very public when they should be private," said Buck, adding that she recently set up a Facebook account herself so she can learn to navigate it effectively before she allows her daughter to access the site. Buck was pleased with Stanley's reaction to the situation. "I think David (Schrag) handled it well. He's really good about immediately taking action. The good thing is, now the dialogue is going," she said.

Reach the reporter at: jean@lamorindaweekly.com

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