

**Minors and Internet Interactivity:
An Interpretation of the *Library Bill of Rights***

The digital environment offers opportunities both for accessing information created by others and for creating and sharing new information. The rights of minors to retrieve, interact with, and create information posted on the Internet in schools and libraries are extensions of their First Amendment rights. (See also other interpretations of the *Library Bill of Rights*, including “Access to Digital Information, Services, and Networks,” “Free Access to Libraries for Minors,” and “Access for Children and Young Adults to Nonprint Materials.”)

With these interactive opportunities come challenges to intellectual freedom and privacy for children and young adults. Filters, for example, are sometimes used to restrict access by youth to interactive social networking tools on the Internet.

Academic pursuits of minors can be strengthened with the use of interactive Web technology, allowing young people to create documents and share them online; upload pictures, videos, and graphic material; revise public documents; and add tags to online content to classify and organize information. The educational benefits of shared learning are well documented. Concern that these sites may be used inappropriately has led to censorship of such academic tools. Schools and libraries should ensure that institutional environments offer opportunities for students to use interactive Web tools constructively in their academic pursuits.

Personal interactions of young people can be enhanced by social tools available through the Internet. Social networking Web sites allow the creation of online communities that feature an open exchange of information in various forms, such as images, videos, journal entries, and discussions about common interests. Digital social tools help children and young adults learn about and organize social, civic, and extra-curricular activities. Many interactive sites invite users to establish online identities, share personal information, create Web content, and join social networks. Parents and guardians play a critical role in preparing their children for participation in online activity by communicating their personal family values and by monitoring their children’s use of the Internet in non-school settings.

The use of digital social tools poses two competing intellectual freedom issues—the protection of minors’ privacy and the right of free speech. Concerns have been expressed regarding what they believe is an increased vulnerability of young people in the online environment when they use interactive sites to post personally identifiable information. In an effort to protect minors’ privacy, adults sometimes restrict access to interactive Web environments. Prohibiting children and young adults from using social networking sites does not teach safe behavior and leaves youth without the necessary knowledge and skills to protect their privacy or engage in responsible speech. Instead of restricting or denying access to the Internet, librarians and teachers should educate minors to participate responsibly, ethically, and safely.

The First Amendment applies to speech created by minors on interactive sites. Restricting expression and access to interactive Web sites because the sites provide tools for sharing information with others violates the tenets of the *Library Bill of Rights*. To hinder the usage of these social networking sites in a school or library prevents minors from accessing and creating resources that fulfill their interests and need for information, social connection with peers, and participation in a community of learners. It is the responsibility of librarians and educators to monitor threats to the intellectual freedom of minors and to advocate for extending access to interactive applications on the Internet.

As defenders of intellectual freedom and the First Amendment, libraries and librarians have a responsibility to offer unrestricted access to Internet interactivity in accordance with local, state, and federal laws. School and library professionals should work closely with young people to help them learn skills and attitudes that will prepare them to be responsible, effective, and productive communicators in a free society.