

Social networking: A threat to teenage self-image, friendships?

Teen author helps young girls navigate issues of adolescents

ASHBURN, Va. – As Facebook and MySpace continue to be all the rage among teens, especially among girls, parents are faced with the choice of whether to allow their kids to join more than half of their peers already engaging in social networking. Do these sites encourage healthy relationships, do they build self-image?

Certified life coach, Sandee Sgarlata says that, while we may not be able to entirely prevent kids from logging on to social networks, parents can help build a healthy self-esteem in their kids and give them the tools to effectively and appropriately navigate their inevitable online world. She suggests using these techniques:

- **Communicate.** Discuss what makes social networking cool for them. Knowing why they are interested will help them be open to concerns you may have. Talk to them about the permanence of dialog online and how this can affect their future.
- **Become the student.** Let them teach you. Face it, the online world changes quickly and your teen is probably savvier to those changes. Not only will they get a kick out of teaching you, this is a chance to nurture your kid's self-confidence.
- **Agree on rules.** You are still the parent. Together with your teen, come up with boundaries for online use including: time limits, privacy boundaries and appropriate conversations. Have all parties sign the agreement.
- **Check up.** Trust, but verify. Have them give you their usernames and passwords, and let them know that you will be checking in periodically. Explain that you trust them, but you are also looking out for their safety.

As a figure skating coach, Sgarlata saw first-hand the challenges facing teen and tween girls. While technology intensifies teen issues, she has introduced her debut novel, *The Day After Tomorrow* (February 2009, AC Publishing Group, ISBN 978-0-9800824-2-5, \$9.95), the first installment of the *Julia Monroe* series, to further encourage teens to safely explore friendships, body-image issues and the healing power of forgiveness. This series provides a tool for parents, educators and counselors to encourage girls to have a secure self-image and to be forgiving of one another and themselves.

"Girls can be catty, and they beat up on themselves and one another," says Sgarlata, co-founder of 4give4peace, an organization dedicated to inspiring others to forgive. "Now with technology, we have a generation of girls who can bully each other 24/7, not only at school, but online, by text message and anything in between."

A recovering substance addict herself, Sgarlata now seeks to help people of all ages deal with unhealthy habits, an issue that *Julia Monroe* addresses head-on. *The Day After Tomorrow* is meant to inspire girls, their friends and parents to engage in a constructive dialogue, discussing harmful habits, the dangers of a self-deprecating body image and positive relationships.

In *The Day After Tomorrow*, Julia faces her first break-up, constant fights with her mother and body angst, all leading down a destructive path. When a serious bike accident hospitalizes her, however, Julia learns the importance of forgiveness, as she seeks to make peace with her former boyfriend, mother, friends and herself.

Sandee Sgarlata is a former national-level figure skating coach and certified life coach, who helps recovering addicts. Sgarlata has mentored teen girls and is actively pursuing the creation of a non-profit organization, Alliance for Peace Foundation, which will help teens strengthen their life skills. She currently resides in Ashburn, Va., with her husband, Mark, of 17 years, and eight-year-old son. For more information, please visit www.juliamonroe.net.

###

To request a review copy or to set up an interview with Sandee Sgarlata, please contact Shelby Sledge at (512) 478-2028 ext. 227 or ssledge@phenixpublicity.com.