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[Michele Borba: Yoursphere – A Great Way to Keep Kids Safe Online](#)

Posted: November 23rd, 2009 by Michele Borba

It's a whole new world and with so many new issues to face when it comes to child rearing these days. Let's face it, June Clever didn't have to deal with worrisome parenting challenges such as online safety, predators, and cyberbullying. One thing is for sure, the Internet is here to stay. It has also become a core part of our children's social and information highway, but we still need to take the time to find out more where our kids are surfing online, as well as what services are available to help parents keep our children safe. That's why I'm devoting this blog to a special new Internet site called, [Yoursphere](#). The more I learn about this site, the more I'm convinced it addresses so many parent safety concerns.

[Mary Kay Hoal](#) is the founder of [Yoursphere](#), an internet site for kids and teens that puts safety first. It was designed to be a place where youth can connect in a fun and positive online environment, and parents can still be assured that their kids will enjoy their Internet experience safely.

Here are just a few unique features of this online community that are different from most other social networking sites:

- Parental consent is required and the identity of the parent providing consent is verified to ensure the adult is not a registered sex offender. Parents are also kept in the loop about what's going on in the community through their monthly parent newsletter.
- Onsite participation is limited to kids and teens through age 18. Translation: no one over 18 is allowed.
- Every membership to Yoursphere.com is free for the first 30 days. A nominal fee of \$39.95 per year (.10 per day), or \$4.95 a month (cancel at anytime) is charged in order to afford the safeguards that are.
- Technology and human oversight is used to proactively protect the kids from inappropriate content, or from digitally tattooing themselves. The site leverages the expertise of a Chief Security Advisor who worked for the Department of Justice tracking online anonymous sexual predators, as well as Yoursphere's own law enforcement team with expertise in internet crime.
- Yoursphere models "friending" after the real world. Kids under 13 can friend those in the same age range, teens can friend teens. (A 12-year-old girl typically would not be having a private conversation with a 17 or 18-year-old unless a sibling, so we don't allow online siblings, of course, but siblings can be friends.) performing arts, travel, animals & pets, art and photography, etc.

- Parents of children 12 and under can access any content their child has posted. Text, video pictures through their “parent dashboard” where they can manage their family account. (i.e. add another child, suspend membership, review content.)
- Yoursphere was developed with the help of kids and teens across the U.S., so once inside the community, it is centered around their interests. Kids are also allowed to create their own “spheres” or web communities based on their unique interests.
- Yoursphere also educates kids about online safety with daily site internet safety reminders
- Technology is used to scan even possible inappropriate photo images. (Phew!) For instance, if the image of a “can” comes up, that image is instantly flagged. Yoursphere then determines whether the image is soda or an alcoholic beverage. Human oversight is used to read even images of hand signals to determine if appropriate, or not.
- Yoursphere was created on the inside (features, functionality, etc.) with the direct involvement of kids and teens across the U.S. and abroad with even their own teen advisory board. Site content is created by kids and teens, for kids and teens. They even have a team of paid contributing young writers.

As Mary Kay points out, “Parents need to protect their children from both from the people that intend their children harm and the culture that awaits them on these social networking communities. There is not another site that deploys all the same proactive safeguards that **Yoursphere** does. Yoursphere has arguably set the industry standards for kids and teens safety online as evidenced by the fact that we’re the sole-youth only site approved by The *Privacy Vaults Online Safe Harbor of the Federal Trade Commission*.”

So parents, there you have it. This is one site you may want to check out for your family.

For more info: Visit Yoursphere.com and follow [Mary Kay Hoal on Twitter](#).

For specific information on protecting your kids online see [The Big Book of Parenting Solutions](#) on Internet Safety (page 610), Cell Phones (page 598) and Cyberbullying (page 602).

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