

**Dr. Gwenn Is In, "Facebook Users Equal US Population: Is This a Good Thing?"  
Pediatrics Now, September 17, 2009**

CNN posted today that "[Facebook is as large as the US Population.](#)" That's a lot of computers connecting in a lot of homes and communities all over the world but at what cost?

None to Facebook. They announced today they are finally making money.

But what about to us and our kids? Are we paying a price for being so socially networked?

Certainly we all have to assess the degree we want to be connected to people we know well, don't know too well, or don't know at all. As our connectedness to people online grows, what will happen to our connectedness to people off line?

My concern is we have fostered a culture obsessed with online connections that we forget that the world of living is offline. We see this played out almost daily as people cavalierly unfriend or unfollow people on their Facebook and Twitter feeds and then puzzle over the backlash, have forgotten that real relationships when severed have emotional consequences, even if based online.

This is one situation we can learn a great deal from our kids. As many researchers have already pointed out, teens use social networking sites to enhance and deepen the relationships they already have. They don't feel the need to reach beyond those relationships online and use the social networking tools as a way to foster a richness of their offline lives. As note in [the Future of Children](#):

"...most adolescents use social networking sites to reinforce existing relationships, rather than make new friends....Instant messaging, Facebook, and MySpace...allow teens to share personal information and communicate with their friends and existing social networks."

I see this play out daily with my high school daughter who uses her Facebook network to enhance her offline time. For she and her friends, time on Facebook is a continuation of the day's socializing, not something disconnected from it. She's not trying to fill a need when she goes onto Facebook that she doesn't already have but continue conversations that were already begun.

Adults, on the other hand, use Facebook very differently and many times we have people on our lists we don't know as well. And, even the people we have on our lists are often people we are not heavily invested in socially day to day. The best description of Facebook that I've heard in a long while is from a psychiatrist I know who told me that he thinks of it like "a school reunion that never ends - it feeds our need to connect and not much else."

It's time we embrace what our teens already know - it's the offline world that matters and the online world is supposed to help us make those connections more meaningful. If you're not using Facebook that way, perhaps your not using it the right way.