

## **More than just a mother, now she's your 'friend'**

MARTHA MENDOZA, AP National Writer



Josh Knoller, a young professional in New York City, spent years refusing his mother's "Friend Request" on Facebook before, eventually, "caving in." Today they have an agreement: she'll try not to make embarrassing comments, and he can delete them if she does.

"We actually got into some pretty big fights over this," says Knoller, 29. "I love my Mom to death but she's a crazy, sweet Jewish mother and I was a little worried about what she might post in front of my closest friends."

As Mother's Day approaches, 1 in 3 mothers are connected with their teens over Facebook, according to the social networking giant's review of how users self-identify.

With more than 1 billion Facebook users, that's a lot of mothers and kids keeping in touch through social media, says Fordham University communications professor Paul Levinson, author of "New New Media." "Facebook has been a boon to family relationships," said Levinson.

Kelly McBride, an assistant professor of communications at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, says her students who "friend" their mothers keep their Facebook pages benign, using other social media like Instagram or Twitter for the racy stuff.

"They may be willing to `friend' their mother, but when they do, they take down the drinking or partying or suggestive photographs," she says.

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McBride says she'd like to get her own mother, who is 77, onto Facebook. "I've offered repeatedly to make her a Facebook page so I could friend her, but she just won't do it," she says.

Parenting expert Susan Newman recommends that mothers wait until their children are independent adults before friending them.

"Being a friend with your son or daughter on Facebook, to me is synonymous with reading your teenager's diary," she says. "Adolescents are trying to develop an identity and they have so much hovering and helicopter parenting going on, Facebook adds another layer that seems to be very intrusive."

But Stephen Balkam, CEO of the Washington D.C.-based Family Online Safety Institute, says he was his daughter's first "friend," a requirement for her to even have a Facebook account when she turned 13, the minimum age allowed by the company.

"I promised not to stalk her, but I do need to keep an eye on it," he says.

While 13-year-olds are the most likely group to initiate a friendship with a parent, with more than 65 percent of those friendships being initiated by the child, people in their 20s are the least likely, initiating just 40 percent of the friendships with their parents, Facebook says.

Rochelle Knoller of Fair Lawn, N.J., whose adult son Josh only reluctantly accepted her "Friend Request," says the early days of their online relationship were dicey.

"I'd write a comment, and literally no sooner would I type when the phone would ring and it would be Josh - I guess he's on Facebook a lot - and he'd be telling me, 'Mom, you can't make comments like this. My friends can't even believe we're friends,'" she says.

She says she checks his page about three times a week, and that some of his friends have even asked to be her friend. She accepted, only after checking with her son.

"Today we're pretty much down to where I'm allowed to 'like' something, and I'm allowed to go on his Facebook page and see what's going on with him," she says. "But that is it."

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