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## Facebook Can Cost You Your Children in Divorce

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It is reported that more than one-third of all [divorce](#) filings last year mentioned the word Facebook. In an age when social media promises to become an ever-more prominent part of our lives, from the quick news bites of Twitter to the unparalleled job networks on LinkedIn, any responsible adult, especially a parent, needs to be concerned about what their social media presence means legally. Attorneys have found Facebook and other social media sites to be a literal treasure trove of evidence to bring before a judge. No matter whether you view Facebook as an unpleasant modern social necessity or as the gateway to a new dawn of human enlightenment, one thing's for sure: if social media is emerging as a powerful force in our lives, it's best to know how to protect yourself from that force. That especially goes for anyone involved in a child [custody](#) case.

The real-life scenarios are too numerous and too tragic to recount in total here. Take for example the child custody case in which a mother assured the judge she hadn't been drinking – and the [father's](#) attorneys were able to submit photos from Facebook showing her with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Pictures that may have seemed innocent and goofy when posted for so-called "Facebook friends" to view can be quickly turned on a parent in court, where the images will be seen by the judge as evidence of irresponsible behavior and poor parental judgment. More than a few people have lost custody of their children just for this kind of gaffe. Venting emotions on Facebook is also dangerous – a Cincinnati father was charged with civil domestic violence and ordered by a judge to apologize to his children's mother after he posted a statement on Facebook claiming that she was evil and was trying to take his children away. While the man claims he was just trying to find a way to deal with the agony of divorce, the judge read his overly public sharing as a sign that he was mentally unstable and dangerous.

Is the other party claiming that you cheat? Even an innocent check-in to a restaurant on Yelp! or a comment left on an interesting person's Facebook page can be used as evidence. Hoping to get some spousal maintenance out of your divorce? Less likely if you have a very active LinkedIn account.

If you find yourself headed into a tempestuous child custody dispute or divorce litigation, there are several steps you can take to protect yourself:

1. If the situation between you and the opposing party is very high conflict, delete all that person's friends and family from your Facebook friends and other social media account contacts immediately.

2. Delete all photos or video that show you doing anything compromising, from smoking a cigarette or drinking a beer to engaging in any kind of risky or potentially illegal behavior.
3. Send a mass e-mail out to your friends informing them not to tag you in photos, write anything compromising on your walls, or send you any messages related to your legal dispute.
4. All foul language and any language that is angry, hurtful, politically incorrect or illicit should be removed from your Facebook posts and Twitter feeds. This includes links to articles, videos, and other outside sources.
5. It goes without saying: do not vent about your situation or even mention any aspect of your legal conflict on any form of social media.
6. If you are responsible for child support and are supposed to be looking for a job, use LinkedIn like crazy for your job search.
7. Close down any accounts that track your whereabouts and can be used as a method of spying: this includes Yelp! and other review platforms. Delete any past posts on these forums that could be used against you.
8. Delete any online dating accounts permanently if possible. Do not change your relationship status on Facebook to "single" or "looking for a relationship" before your divorce is final.

Oddly enough, even once a [family law](#) conflict is resolved in court; social media can continue to be a source of trouble for everyone who was involved. In one case, a mother lost custody of her infant after she posted videos of herself feeding cat food to the child on Facebook. Also, a 45 year-old-woman was furious when she discovered shortly after her divorce that her ex-husband put pictures of their children in his online dating profile. She wanted to take legal action, but at that point, it was difficult. Which leads me to another pointer: with lawyers present, negotiate how you and the opposing side will deal with social media BEFORE you've finished up your family law dispute in court. It can make things a lot easier.

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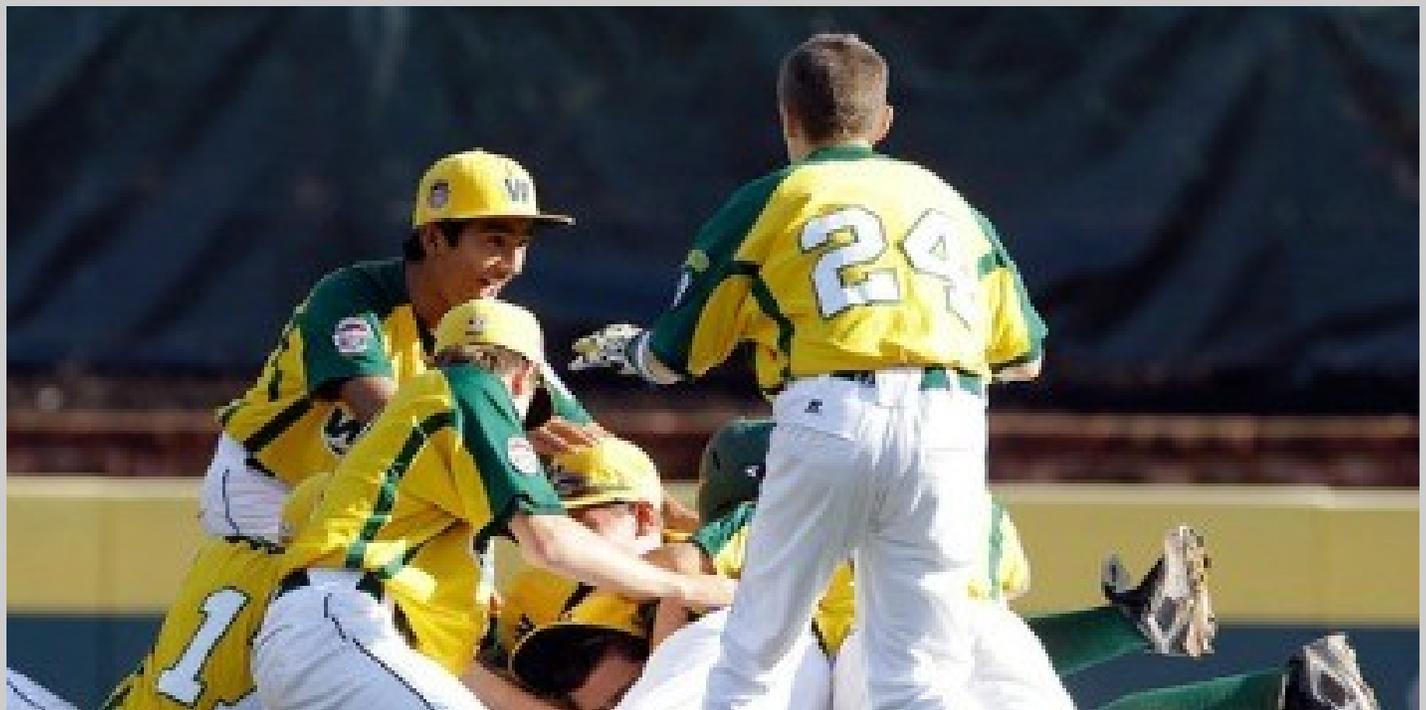
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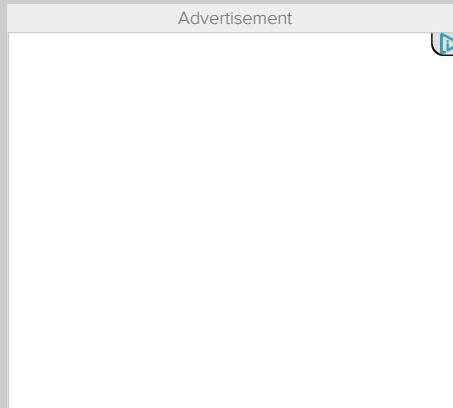
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