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## Data Privacy Day a good time to talk online privacy with teenagers

*International holiday draws attention to the need for safe choices online*

MILWAUKEE — Have you thought about how your personal information is collected, shared and stored online? It's a question that people of all ages should be considering, especially teenagers and young adults.

January 28 is now a designated international holiday, Data Privacy Day, which is celebrated in nearly 30 countries. Data Privacy Day is focused on bringing awareness to safe practices online.

"Technology has enabled people to connect with the global community, but to do so safely also means that users must take the necessary steps to protect themselves from harm," says Thad Nation, executive director of Wired Wisconsin. "It's particularly important for adults to educate teenagers on how to use this access safely."

There are a number of steps that parents can take to ensure that their family's information is kept private, starting with maintaining age-appropriate online activity. Social networking sites maintain minimum age requirements; popular services like Facebook, MySpace and Google+ require users to be 13 or older.

Teenagers should not reveal personal information online, including phone numbers, home addresses, birth dates or even their whereabouts on these social media networks. Posting class schedules, party plans or vacation plans to social media networks are all things parents should discourage.

"Parents should also review privacy settings on social media sites and smart phones, which are used to control the amount of information released to the user's online audience," says Nation. "Disabling location-based services, which can identify the user's whereabouts, also stops users from being tracked without their knowledge."

Most smartphones come with a geotagging feature, which automatically identifies the geographic location of the user. Instructions on how to disable this feature on most phones are available at [icanstalku.com](http://icanstalku.com).

Smartphones store and transmit a wide range of personal data, which third parties can obtain access to, often without the user's knowledge or permission, including contact lists, pictures, browsing history, certain identifying information and stored location data. Reviewing the security settings on the phone can stop much of this information from being released.

"Parents should also caution their teenagers to research apps before they download them," says Nation. "Apps on smartphones are capable of transmitting a significant amount of personal information."

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Information that can be transferred from apps includes unique user IDs, phone numbers, demographic information and geographic location. This data is often gathered for marketing purposes, but consumers are often unaware that personal data may be collected in exchange for downloading the app, particularly free apps.

“When used properly and thoughtfully, technology can be a very useful tool for people of all ages,” says Nation. “It’s important to be a responsible user, which includes taking the steps to protect your personal information online. This is something parents should do for their teenagers, who may not understand how important it is to be proactive about online security.”

Additionally, parents should take a moment to encourage their teenagers to always feel comfortable in coming to them if anything seems out of the ordinary, threatening or strange.

In the United States and Canada, Data Privacy Day is coordinated by the National Cyber Security Alliance, which also offers the following tips for teenagers to stay safe online:

- Make sure you actually know the people you interact with online.
- Be cautious with online quizzes, games and questionnaires, and don’t fill out questionnaires that ask for personal information, even if they are forwarded by friends.
- Post photos – of yourself and others – with care and respect.
- Never post photos that include nudity; sexting can have significant legal consequences.
- Never share your password with anyone but your parents.

Teenagers can also protect themselves by taking these additional steps when using a smartphone:

- Think before you text, and remember that texts can be forwarded.
- Only give your mobile number out to people you know and trust, and never give anyone else’s number out without his or her permission.
- When in doubt, don’t respond to phone calls, messages or texts.
- Make sure you have someone’s permission before taking pictures or videos of him or her.

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Wired Wisconsin is the Wisconsin-based project of Midwest Consumers for Choice and Competition (MCCC), a non-profit organization of individual consumers interested in technology, broadband, and telecommunication issues with state projects throughout the Midwest region. The project will work to support an environment for innovative technology, high-tech job creation, and economic growth. Wired Wisconsin will seek to educate consumers, policy makers, and businesses about technology-related legislative and regulatory issues that impact our lives and advocate for common-sense approaches to spur innovation and grow the economy. For more information, visit [www.wiredwisconsin.org](http://www.wiredwisconsin.org).