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CENTRAL FLORIDA'S PREMIER COMMUNITY MAGAZINE

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and More Babies
See Our Cutest
Baby Contest Winners

+

KIDS' ISSUE

Parenting
the Internet
Keeping
Your Kids Safe

LIFELINES

Do-Gooders

Do you belong to a club, organization, or group? Has your organization recently had an event or done something great? We want to brag about our communities in our Local Life section, so send us your good news today.



Moms of Multiples

Do you have twins, triplets or more? We would love to hear what it was like being a mom to multiple babies all at once.



Find out more about local businesses

Browse "Resource Directory" on CentralFloridaLifestyle.com for everything from doctors to restaurants.

Please email us at editor@vspublishing.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

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Smiling Babies

Our annual Cutest Baby Contest is one of my favorite issues. Not only do I get to enjoy the enormously cute offerings you send in, but also I get to see photo after photo of babies smiling. Although babies don't talk, they sure express themselves pretty well through their smiles. There's the silly smile, the I've-got-my-Binky smile, the "What is Daddy doing" smile and one of my favorites, the mischievous smile.

And every year the same thing happens. I take a look at all these little happy faces and think babies have the right idea: If you just get enough sleep and smile a whole lot – at everyone – life isn't so bad.

In my view, doctors and therapists would be out of business if we just had more chances to enjoy smiling babies. OK, maybe that's an over statement. But really, how unhappy can you be while you're looking at an innocent baby just loving life?

Like many of you, I'm a sucker for a smiling baby. So I knew shooting our winners at Creative World School – Avalon Park (page 30) was going to be a treat indeed.

The best ear-to-ear grinner was our second-place winner Jayla. She had what I call an infectious smile. When she smiled, you could not help but smile back. Even while she walked out of her shot and wanted to explore outdoors, she kept that smile big and bright.

And then there was Alex who was the most serious of the bunch. He just seemed to carry this expression of somberness throughout the shoot. But he did break out a slight smile when Mom and Dad clapped and jumped around behind the photographer.

At only three months old, our winner Cooper did more sleeping than smiling. But



BRIANNA FORSTER PHOTOGRAPHY

The editor holds the Cutest Baby Contest winner Cooper Reinert with Alex Miller (left) and Jayla Robinson (right) at Creative World School – Avalon Park's fun and fanciful Exploratorium.

eventually she did grace us with a sweet little smile in between naps.

It's funny that there's a saying in the entertainment industry: Never work with children or animals. I beg to differ. Working with children, especially smiling babies, is about the best thing on the planet. So if your world has been a little dreary lately, I suggest you find yourself a smiling baby. Sta! And if that doesn't work, take another cue from the little ones and take a nap.

Tarre Beach

Tarre Beach
Editor

CONTRIBUTORS SPOTLIGHT



Brianna Forster specializes in custom portrait and lifestyle photography for maternity, newborns, children, seniors, families, and weddings. She loves to use natural light and surroundings. You can reach her at briannaforsterphotography@yahoo.com



Freelance writer **Matt Bendell** has a bachelor of arts degree in communication arts/journalism and has worked in various media, including radio and TV. When he's not writing, he likes to play tennis, golf, travel and spend time with his family. He lives in Lake Nona. To view his latest work, or to contact him, visit www.mattbendell.com.

SAFETY NET

How much is too much when it comes to your kids, the Internet and their access to social media? Find out an expert's recommendations and what some local parents are doing to protect their kids.



By Matt Bendell

Maybe you're used to it by now, maybe you're not. But we know it all too well. The constant dinging, beeping and vibrating that tends to be the underlying soundtrack of our lives.

In this day and age, we are all connected to each other through social media. If it isn't enough that your own phone or tablet is alerting you every five seconds about your neighbor's cousin's best friend's change in relationship status, or that reoccurring friend request from a long lost "acquaintance" from kindergarten, now you've got another social media account to concern yourself with, and it belongs to your child.

Although some people won't allow their children access to social media at all, the number of kids with Internet access is growing by leaps and bounds. According to a 2010 US Census Bureau survey, 57 percent of kids age 3 to 17 have access to the Internet at home, and 37 percent have access elsewhere. With Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and MySpace (Remember that site? It's making a comeback.), there are countless ways to express yourself in the realm of social media. But, when it comes to your kids, what's socially acceptable and what's not?

Perhaps as you're reading these very words (on your mobile device or tablet), your child is updating their Facebook status. And what, prey tell, are they saying? Many people believe it is the responsibility of each parent to regulate various aspects of your children's social media presence.

Expert Advice

You might be telling yourself that a few ground rules couldn't be a bad idea, but where do you start? According to **Thomas Jelneck**, who owns On Target Web Solutions in **Orlando**, protecting your children



Web expert,
Thomas Jelneck

Fifty-seven percent of kids age three to 17 have access to the Internet at home, and 37 percent have access elsewhere.

should be your key goal in whatever rules you come up with. "I feel that as parents, we aren't there to just police their online activity but to protect them and explain the digital world to them," says Jelneck. He says the most important thing you can do is explain the safety components to your kids and have a plan for what they should do if they are approached by someone online. There are a number of commonsense ground rules that you could implement for their own safety, no matter their age.

Here's a few:

- Face-to-face meetings with someone they met online, and with someone you do not know personally, are not allowed.
- Sending pictures of themselves to people they do not personally know is forbidden.
- Do not allow them to give out identifying information such as their name, home address, school name, or telephone number to people they do not know.
- Tell them to never respond to messages or bulletin board postings that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or harassing.



Jelneck says a good way to keep your kids safe and involved is to limit their time online. According to Jelneck, the average user of Facebook spends roughly 15 hours and 33 minutes on the site per month. He doesn't believe this is a good use of his children's time. He limits his own children's daily use to ensure they are participating in other activities besides Facebook. Jelneck also limits his kids' access to the Internet by not having a computer in their rooms.

The Usefulness of Social Media

Jeff and Vicki Foley of Lake Nona have three children, and they've put a fair amount of thought into both the benefits and the drawbacks of mixing social media and kids. Oftentimes, parents see only the potential "bad" things that could result from social media, but Vicki says



there is good that can come from it too. “Our son often sets up a majority of his [in person] activities through [social media].”

But not every child uses social media the same. Some use it as a means to communicate and enhance personal relationships; others as a way to avoid face-to-face contact. You must know your child and what they are doing online to determine how your child is using social media and the Internet.

Jeff and Vicki agree that parents who stay involved in their kids’ social activities (online and in the real world) will be able to protect their children better and also help their children be more socially rounded.

In the end, Jeff says there’s a lot of trouble to be gotten into on social media, but there’s plenty to be found in the real world too. “The key is to be involved the best we can and be aware of what is

going on in the social media world by researching and asking our kids to show us what they are up to.” **L**

For tips and ideas on how to keep your kids safe online, visit CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.

