

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL MEDIA

THE BASICS


According to Merriam Webster, social media is defined as "forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content."


3 MAIN FUNCTIONS

1. To post
2. To consume
3. To communicate

13+ is the age limit on most social media platforms. Those without an age limit usually have a restricted access version of the platform for younger users.

POPULAR PLATFORMS

 **Instagram:** Photo and video sharing app that allows users to post their own content, engage with the content others post, and engage with other users via likes, comments, and direct messages.

 **TikTok:** Short-form video sharing app often featuring dance, comedy, lip-syncing, and more for users to both create and watch.

 **Snapchat:** Messaging app in which users can send photos, videos, or chats to other users that disappear upon being opened.

 **X:** The microblogging platform formerly known as Twitter is experiencing numerous branding changes after being bought by Elon Musk. It is expected that there will soon be changes to its in-app functions as well. New platforms like Instagram *Threads* are being created as an alternate replacement.

PROS

- Allows users to stay in touch with people who would be hard to reach otherwise (i.e. family and friends who live far away)
- Gives marginalized users (LGBTQ+, those with disabilities, etc.) access to communities and support they may not have in real life.
- Allows users to explore niche interests that they would not otherwise have access to.
- Provides a space for users who are shy or awkward in real life to express themselves and form connections with others.
- Teaches children and teenagers how to communicate in an increasingly digital world.

CONS

- Potential for cyberbullying and online harassment.
- Encourages people to only post their best moments and not the bad ones, which can be isolating for people who are struggling.
 - Many young people do not have the critical thinking skills to understand this.
- Extensive social media use can distract from real-world responsibilities, and in extreme cases lead to internet addiction.
- May heighten insecurities about how people perceive you.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF...

CHILDREN

1. **Set up accounts together.** This gives you access to usernames and passwords, plus the opportunity to explain online safety.
2. **Online rules should mirror real-life rules.** If you would not let your child do it in the real world, do not let them do it online.
3. **Show your kids safety features.** Parents can only stop so much, so make sure your kid is educated too.
4. **Make specific rules about in-app purchases.** Kids may have difficulty understanding online buying uses real money.

TWEENS

1. **Turn on privacy settings.** Making private accounts limits who has access to your tween's profile
2. **Remind them to think before they post.** Tweens are more likely to post risky or inappropriate content without thinking about the consequences.
3. **Trust your kid.** Oversurveillance will not stop your tween from acting out (and may even cause them to break the rules more).
4. **Have access to their profiles.** This allows you to monitor and may also stop your kid from posting risky content.

TEENS

1. **Emphasize digital footprint.** As college admissions and future employment become more important, remind your teen that what they post can be seen by anyone.
2. **Once it's out there, it's out of your control.** It is easier than ever to alter or edit other people's content, especially with the rise of AI. Even if you delete it, there is a chance someone saved it before you did. Tell teens to be aware of who their audience is.

MANAGING SCREENTIME

The endless possibilities of the online world and social media can be addicting, especially for the developing brain. Many technology companies have therefore created specific software to help parents set limits on their children's screentime.

APPLE/IOS

Screentime settings allow parents to monitor and regulate screentime, for example, by limiting the amount of time on specific apps and setting "downtimes" in which the child cannot go on their device (i.e., bedtime)

How to Set Up:

Settings --> Screentime --> Downtime/App limits

ANDRIOD

Google Family Link allows parents to monitor and regulate screentime, for example, by limiting the amount of time on specific apps and setting "downtimes" when the child cannot go in their device (i.e. bedtime).

How to Set Up: Download app on parent's and kid's devices. Then, connect with Google accounts.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Instagram's Family Center allows parents to view and set limits on their teen's time on the app,

TikTok's Family Pairing connects parent's own accounts to their child's, enabling them to regulate screentime.

SOCIAL MEDIA SAFETY

LIMITING INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

It is impossible to prevent your child from all sensitive content online. However, most social media platforms have filtering options for younger users to help.

Instagram automatically activates its sensitive control center for users who are minors. This feature allows users to control how much offensive, upsetting, or sensitive content they see on their explore page, reels, and account recommendations.

TikTok's restricted mode filters out and flags inappropriate content when activated in settings. Family Pairing Mode also allows parents to filter content.

YouTube offers a version of its platform specifically for younger children called *YouTube Kids* that uses automated filters and customizable settings to curate child-friendly content.

PRIVACY SETTINGS

Yes, the internet allows us to meet new people. But being behind a screen makes it much harder to know who you are really talking to. Many social media platforms therefore have privacy settings that limit who can engage with you.

Instagram's Family Center allows parents to see who their children are following, are followed by, and have blocked. It also notifies them when the privacy settings on their child's account have been changed.

TikTok sets accounts of users under 15 to private by default. Parents can also limit who their children can message with in the app's family pairing mode.

Snapchat's Family Center pairs a parent's account with their 13-18-year old's, giving access to the child's friend list & user that they've recently messaged.