

Parenting Tips for Monitoring Youth's Social Media Usage

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We have all collectively experienced the rise of social media. Beginning in 2006 with the introduction of social media websites such as Facebook, Myspace and Twitter, the ease at which we began to realize connection was a click away took over most of our everyday lives. Throughout the evolution of social media, the development of new applications and websites has been fueled by this impulse and need to communicate with one another. Currently, with social media at our fingertips, these applications have gained the attention of over 5 billion mobile device users worldwide and continues to increase by 13% every year. Social media usage can include entertainment, communication, news coverage and even business all among the various media-sharing platforms available today. As a result, the average American adult will spend around 65 minutes per day utilizing social media.

Teens right now are developing in a truly unique generation, one in which access to digital content and devices has become the new norm. A recent survey indicated that over 90% of teens, ages 13-17, are regular social media users. Given the widespread use among teenagers, it is important to better understand how and why teens feel this strong sense of connection to social media. Some of the most popular social media sites include Instagram, Snapchat, Tik-Tok and other instant messaging applications. Among these various sites, teenagers are able to view different content, such as images, videos and music that others within their community share. Additionally, teens are better able to communicate with their peers through various messaging services embedded within these applications.

While there may be several consequences associated with social media use, when used appropriately, social media can have a number of benefits for youth. Firstly, teens are able to stay connected to friends and develop new and meaningful friendships with those who share similar interests. In addition, they can find communities and support for specific activities and ultimately explore and express themselves in an authentic manner. In doing so, some research has suggested appropriate and safe social media use has the ability to improve self-esteem and development of identity as well as provide social support from peers.

On the other hand, there are potential risks when there is not proper education and guidance on social media use. Without guidance, youth may experience negative emotions such as depression or anxiety, cyber-bullying and the use of social media as an unhealthy distraction. As a result, below are tips on how to monitor and talk to your teenagers about social media use in order to help foster the positive effects research has found to be associated with social media usage.



Tips for parents to monitor social media and have peace of mind

- Consider the age and maturity of your teenager when talking to them about their social media use.
 - Limit social media screen time. Research has shown decreasing social media time to 30 minutes can lead to a decrease in anxiety.
 - Set rules such as, “No screen time at the dinner table” or “No screen time before homework is done.”
- Ensure privacy settings are turned on for each application to limit access to personal information.
- Have a conversation with your teen about the importance of cyber safety.
 - Talk about why they should not share their full names, addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers, passwords and bank information with anyone.
 - Ensure their location services are turned “off” for each application.
- Be aware of the potential for cyber-bullying by looking at this website for extra resources : <https://cyberbullying.org/resources>
- Encourage your teen to use social media actively (e.g., post their own memories, stories and comments to those they care about) vs. passively (e.g., endless scrolling through posts). Research shows that this allows youth an opportunity for greater engagement with others.
- Encourage face to face interactions between your teen and their peers.
- Model healthy media use!



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