SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUR TEEN

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Our children and teens are growing up in the digital era and are exposed to a rapidly expanding number of social media outlets. This offers a variety of benefits, but it is very important for parents and teens to be aware of the potential risks.

Social media has multiple benefits such as enhancing communication with friends, networking with peers who possess similar interests and sharing content of self-expression which is important in developing the teen’s identity.

Given the limited capacity with self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure in adolescence, there are potential risks such as: cyberbullying, identity theft, exposure to advertisement that may be inappropriate, vulnerability to predators, reduced time for exercise or sleep.

Social media can also affect a teen’s perception of their body image. They might compare themselves to digitally altered images and perfectly sculpted bodies potentially leading to dangerous eating patterns or use of questionable supplements and steroids.

According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, 71% of 13 to 17 year old used Facebook, about half use Instagram and 41% use Snapchat regularly.

Eighty eight percent of these teens had smartphones and approximately ¼ of them go online “almost constantly”.

In a research study conducted in 2009, 52% of teens had given personal information to someone they didn’t know off line and 28% of teens said they wouldn’t know what to do if they were harassed or bullied online

Here are a few tips for parents and teens:

* **Have your teen use your app store account** linked to your email, so you'll be notified when a new app is downloaded. Consider making the rule that your child is unable to download an app or sign up for an online account without asking you first, at least until he/she is older.
* **Ask about apps and sites** that are popular with your teen's friends.
* **Share what you're using**. Show them your Facebook page, favorite videos, or a game you enjoy playing. This may inspire them to reciprocate and share more about their online behavior.
* **Remind them to think about their online reputation.**Remind teens that anyone, including potential employers and college admission staff, can see what they post online.
* **Anything they create or communicate can be cut, altered and sent around.**[Once it is online, the use of information is out of their control](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/privacy-and-internet-safety/how-do-i-protect-my-kids-privacy-online), can be taken out of context and used to be hurtful to themselves or someone else.
* **Avoid posting location.**Although it might be tempting to use these features to connect with friends or brag about where they've been, it's just not safe for teens.
* **Limit the time spent on social media.** This can abuse valuable time for getting homework done, physical activity, personal interactions and sleep.

It is vital for parents to become more educated about their teens interests especially when it comes to the technology they are using.

It is also a good idea to have a “family online use plan” that involves regular family meetings to discuss privacy settings and what constitutes appropriate online behavior.

The bottom line is that if you want your child to be safe while using social media in a productive and fun way, you need to communicate openly. Education and awareness of dangers at an early age are key to your children’s safety associated with social media.

Resources:

<https://staysafeonline.org>

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/social-media>

<http://www.ncpc.org/topics/internet-safety/social-networking-websites>