
Social Media Safety

Information for Parents & Caregivers



What does my child need to know about social media?

Social media is a communication tool used to interact with others online or via a mobile app. Popular social media tools include [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Snapchat](#). Each site offers a different way to share information, connect with friends, or collaborate with others. Social media enables users to instantly reach a wide audience, allowing kids to potentially publicize their lives and share information that may be better kept private. The good news is that people can protect themselves and their personal information.

What are some key tips about social media use that I should discuss with my child?

- **Talk with your child about their online activities.** What sites or blogs do they most enjoy? With whom do they interact? Making the online world part of everyday conversation makes it more likely that they will talk to you if issues come up online for which they need your help. You'll also have a chance to probe and learn if there are reasons to be concerned.
- **Be a good digital citizen.** A good rule of thumb: If they would not do or say something in real life in front of others, do not do it online.
- **Avoid strangers.** People are not always who they say they are online. Explain that if someone they do not know talks to them, not to respond and let you know immediately.
- **Keep some stuff private.** Name, address, phone number, and school/hometown name, and identifying information should stay private.
- **Follow the rules.** Many social sites have an age minimum of 13 to use the site for both legal and safety/privacy reasons. Encourage your child and reinforce sticking with age-appropriate sites.
- **Think before they post.** Everything could be seen by a vast, invisible audience (otherwise known as friends-of-friends-of-friends). Consider having access to what your child is doing online to monitor what is being posted. Parents can help keep their child from doing something they could regret later. Remind your child that even if he or she deletes something from a social media site, there is still a possibility that it could have been copied, saved, etc. prior to being deleted. Also, inform your child that colleges and future employers may visit their social media pages to get to know them.
- **Kindness counts.** Many sites have anonymous applications such as "bathroom walls" or "honesty boxes" that allow users to tell their friends what they think of them. Talk about the kind of information, language, and images they might post that could be embarrassing or hurtful to themselves or to others. Rule of thumb: If your kids would not say it to someone's face, then do not post it.

How can I help my child use social media safely?

Social media sites can have many benefits, such as allowing children to explore new interests. Help your child use them more safely by doing the following:

- Visit the site's safety section together. Sometimes you can find these sections under "About Us" or "Privacy Policy." Review the rules and find out how your child can report mean behavior or unkind content on their favorite sites.
- Help kids set their privacy settings. Privacy settings aren't foolproof, but they can be helpful. Take the time to learn about default settings, how to change privacy settings on your child's favorite sites, and teach your child how to control their privacy. Check these privacy settings occasionally because they can change: [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Snapchat](#).
- Have regular discussions about their social media activities.
- Check your child's friend lists to see who has access their profile. Make sure your child knows all friends in person, and there are no just "online friends."
- Have your child remove any inappropriate content and photos and delete any personal information.
- Check the profiles of your child's friends to see if there is revealing information or photos about your child.
- Report inappropriate or criminal behavior to the appropriate authority. Most sites have a reporting mechanism for non-criminal behavior. Criminal behavior should be reported through law-enforcement agencies.



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