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Social Media and Teens:  
The Ultimate Guide to Keeping  
**Kids Safe**  
Online

**Social Media  
Contract  
Included!**

# Parenting with a Little Social Media Know-how Goes a Long Way!

**F**acebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and other social media platforms are a great way to keep up with friends and family, share good messages, and learn from others. Using social media in positive, useful ways, can be a great tool. However, it can turn into a weapon for distraction or worse if we are not continually taking inventory of our children's phone usage and our own time on the smartphone..

*Parents use social media differently from their children. Parents post vacation pictures and share interesting articles.*

*Kids use it to communicate with friends, flirt, receive validation, and even date.*

Whether your child is just starting to use social media or already has an account, this guide and social media contract is a phenomenal asset to setting standards of current and future social media use and can protect your family from a lot of the distraction, negativity, and destructive media on the internet. Signing a social media contract like the one included in this lesson or creating a social media account is not the end of the discussion. It's just the beginning! Revisit the rules in this lesson and your children's phone/screen usage at least three times per year.



## Technology: The Playground for Today's Digital Kids

It's no secret that technology has revolutionized the rising generation. Instead of passing notes in class, they text and tweet. Rather than waiting until prom to see each other's dresses, they post pictures while they shop. And if they have a crush and want to share with friends, they can just pull up a pic on social media.

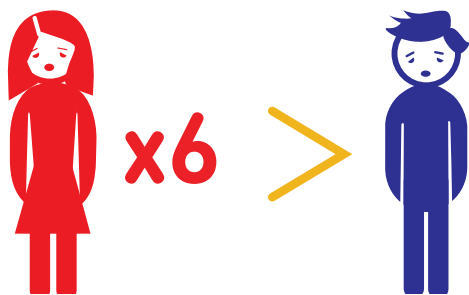
This phenomenon has created a culture that is virtually wired to technology. The digital arena is their playground. To them, tech is not good or bad. It's like the swings and slide we used to play on in the old schoolyard--it's always been there, as long as they can remember.

However, just like the recess monitor is always watching for hazards and ready to blow the whistle, we need to be watching and aware of the dangers in this new virtual playground. As parents, it is our responsibility to help protect our kids. Unfortunately, because the digital world is tricky the hazards there are more elusive. We won't see the dangers to our kids if we don't know what we're looking for.

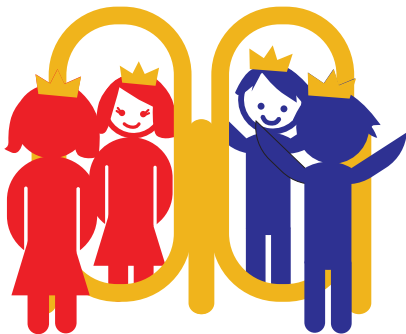
# Social Media Risks

## Screen Time & Depression

Social media has been linked to increased anxiety, feelings of inadequacy, depression, and feelings associated with poor body image (Wakefield, 2018). This is in large part because kids use social media to compare their worst to others' curated, filtered images.



The biggest increase is among girls - who are six times more likely than boys to report these or other symptoms of depression.



7 in 10 said Instagram made them feel worse about body image

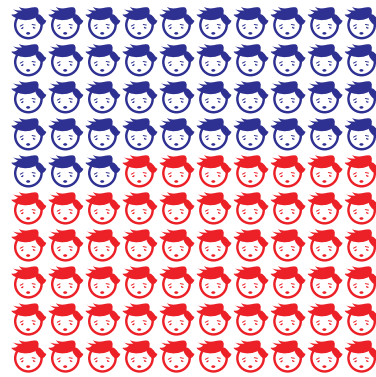
Snapchat and Instagram were the most likely to inspire feelings of inadequacy and anxiety.

## Social Media & Cyberbullying

When we were kids, we left the bullies at school, but, that isn't the case for our kids. One of the biggest problems with cyberbullying is that the threat never sleeps. There is no safe place away from social media. Threatening images and messages stay there, haunt the child, and often snowball. For this reason, many children are crushing under the constant psychological pressure of cyberbullying, leading to depression, social issues or worse.

# More Social Media & Cyberbullying Facts

1 in 4 has been bullied online more than once

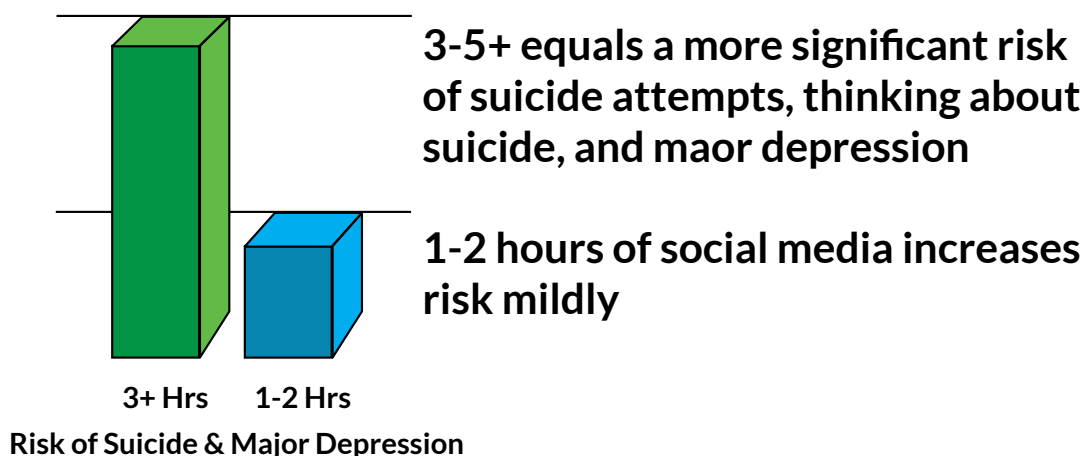


Nearly 43% of kids have been bullied online

**81%** of young people think bullying online is easier to get away with than bullying in person

## “Snapchat Suicide”

Every so often a headline will hit the news about a child who committed suicide because of an embarrassing/nude photo posted on social media (examples [here](#) and [here](#)). One study that included a survey of approximately 2000 middle school students shows that victims of cyberbullying are almost two times as likely to attempt suicide than those who are not (Hinduja, 2012). We would like to tell ourselves that this could never happen to our children. But how can we be sure?





# Why Kids Shouldn't Be on Social Media Until at Least Age 13

*Knowing these terrifying facts, you might be tempted to pull your kids off social media altogether. Instead, use the fear to propel you into action. Raising kids who will someday become responsible, capable adults, they will need to function in a tech-saturated world. We need to help them navigate this turbulent terrain, by using your home as a training ground.*

Your children should get a social media account while they are still living in your home, **but**, kids should **NOT** be allowed on social media until *at least* age 13. We generally recommend waiting until age 15, 16, or 17 to let them on social media. It is far better for them to learn how to behave, how to communicate on social media, make mistakes and see the consequences while still under your guidance.

## Responsible Online Behavior

### Teach Your Kids to Be Great Digital Citizens

“Show,” don’t “tell” your kids how to be good digital citizens by being kind and respectful in your own social media interactions.

- Show your kids how to handle a disagreement on social media.
- Show your kids healthy and unhealthy examples of social media use.
- Teach them to be thoughtful.
- Encourage as much face-to-face interaction as possible with your kids and their friends--including group dating--as a balance to their online socialization.

Remind your kids, everything shared on social media can make an impact that you would never expect. (See the Discussion Questions section below).

# How do I know my child is ready to be on social media?

*Your child is ready to be on social media when they can be deliberate in most of their social media interactions. Consider the following questions:*

- *Does your teen get online or log on to social media with a purpose?*
- *Do they post a photo with a caption or micro-blog and then get off in a timely manner?*
- *Do they spend too much time scrolling through their feed?*
- *Is your teen kind and respectful to others online and off?*
- *Are they able to stand up for themselves and others in a mature fashion?*
- *Do they understand that every text, email, post, or comment creates ripples, or small waves of change, around them? (Ripples that can help others or hurt others.)*

*Encourage as much face-to-face interaction as possible with your kids and their friends--including group dating.*

# With Social Media, Your Role as Parent is to:



## Teach Authenticity

Help kids learn to question their posts.

- Are they real?
- Do they paint an accurate picture of what is actually going on?

People often post exaggerations or even lies about their lives on social media, showing a perfectly filtered life, pretending that everything is always fun and beautiful in their lives, or proclaiming beliefs that they only mildly subscribe to. Teach your child that this is the time and the place to show who you really are, instead of showing a fake version of yourself.

## Teach Responsibility

A person with a heartbeat sits somewhere reading and reacting to what is being posted. That is why it is so important to teach our children to take personal responsibility for their own social media relationships. Remind your kids that words have power, especially written words! Social media accounts are not like a journal. They are not there to rant, mock, or complain. Or at least they shouldn't be. Every interaction on social media is real.





## Teach Safety

A grown man can just as easily create a profile to make himself appear to be a young girl. Teach them that they should NEVER share personal information with strangers, including their birthday, address, and location. Be sure that they know never to arrange to meet a stranger in person that they have only met online. Tell your kids that while it's good to be real, it's important not to over-share. Emphasize the fact that you never really know who is on the other side of the computer screen.



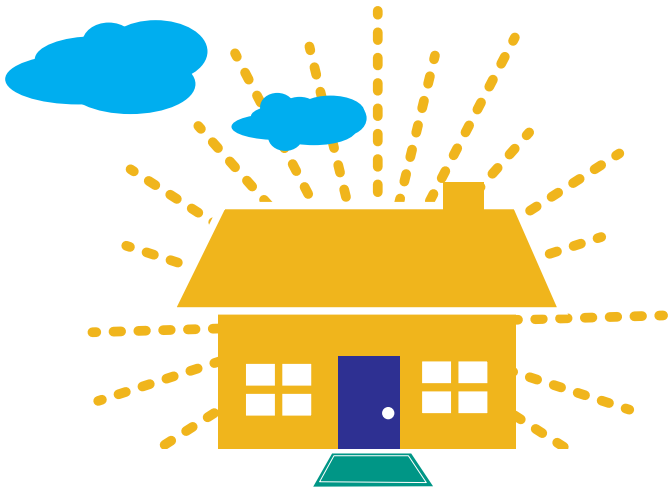
## Encourage Creativity

Whether it's online or offline, encourage your child to read, draw, paint, write, create, build, etc. This encourages your child to be true to himself, to find worth in his own be-



liefs, and to explore his own thoughts and desires--not just what the current culture dictates. This goes right along with your children's lives online. If you help them find genuine interests and encourage those interests, it will be easier to be more authentic online because they will be more authentic offline too.

# Online Rules Parents Can Set in the Home



## Have Screen-Free Time Every Day

Parents should be conscious of setting down cell phones, turning off the TV, and shutting laptops at night. Set consistent boundaries for media usage in your home. For instance, have a block of screen-free time each day or make cell phones off limits at the dinner table or in bedrooms.

## Set Limits For Your Child

Take time to sit with your child and develop a set of rules that will work for your family. These rules should include which websites, apps, media, and social media platforms are acceptable inside your home and out. Set specific rules and consequences with your child about how much screen time and how much time can be spent on social media each day. There are helpful apps and filters a parent can install to help keep these limits in check.



## Limit your own Time on Social Media

Unfortunately, very few people keep strong limits on their personal social media time. Keep track of your own time on social media the next few days, ask your kids to do the same, and set goals together to cut back and replace some of that time with your family, friends and hobbies.

## Delete Time-Sucking Apps off Your Phone

People spend far more time on social media than they realize. Make it harder for yourself and your kids by removing apps that are just one mindless click away. This practice will benefit you and your family more than you realize. Even if you just delete your social media apps for a week or two, it helps you break the habit of overuse.



## Make Social Media Time Count

Teach kids to be purposeful when they are online. Show them how to follow positive, uplifting organizations, read newsworthy articles, or search for videos that cause them to think and learn. Teach them to use social media to be helpful, thoughtful, and kind by seeking out service opportunities, raising awareness and getting involved. Many people are mindlessly scrolling and pinning, instead of seeking out the positive.


## Revisit Your Routine


Pay attention to when you pull out your phone and when your kids pull out their phones. Social media usage becomes a habit, an addiction. There is nothing wrong with setting time aside for social media, but pay attention to **WHEN** you and your family are on social media. Try to figure out the best time in your day to have time and for how long. Setting rules and boundaries around social media usage can help increase our productivity and time usage.





# Practice Activity:


## Social Media Q & A with Your Child


 When do you think is a healthy age for someone to start using social media?


 What might be a consequence of someone using social media when they are too young?

 Should a teen be allowed to have multiple accounts on different social media platforms (one or two accounts on Instagram, another account on Snapchat, etc.)?

 Should a teen be allowed to have multiple accounts on one social media platform (two or more accounts on Instagram such as an account for any friends at school and another account for close friends)?

 What is appropriate use and behavior on social media? What behavior is not okay?

 What are some ways we can help and uplift others, and create positive ripples with social media?

 Are you the same person online/on social media that you are in real life?

- 👍 If someone posted an embarrassing photo of you on social media, what would you do? What can you do if a friend is being treated poorly on social media?
- 👍 What is the difference between rude behavior on social media and bullying? What should you do if someone is being bullied?
- 👍 Social media has made it easier to reach out to senators, mayors, favorite authors, experts, and other influential people through email or social media. Who would you like to connect with and why?
- 👍 How much texting or posting on social media in one day is too much?
- 👍 Sometimes people spend time on social media or other apps when they are bored, lonely, stressed, or sad. Is this a helpful way of coping for you? What are other things you can do when you feel this way?
- 👍 Predators will always “go” where kids are, and kids are on social media now. How can we protect ourselves and our personal information from predators online? How else do we stay safe online?



*Your Kids  
will follow  
your  
example far  
more than  
any rules  
you set or  
words you  
speak.*

## Activities You Can Do Today to Teach Your Children Social Media Etiquette

Teach your kids that our words, especially written/typed words, have power. Write your child a heartfelt note. Ask them to read it, and think about the words inside.

- Does it make them feel good?
- Does it make them feel loved?

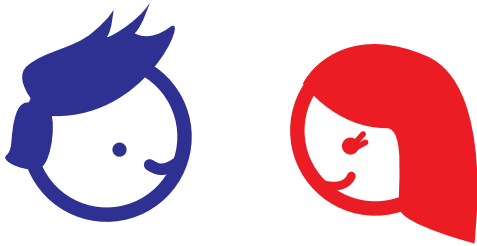
Remind them that it is the same with social media. The words that we post make people feel, and we want to make people feel good.

Challenge your family to make their media interactions more positive. Set a goal to post only positive things for one week. Encourage family members to share uplifting, informative or humorous examples.

Follow Up after one week and discuss the positive impact your kids were able to make among friends and loved ones.



# Remedies to Social Media Depression & Bullying



- Increase face-to-face activities - sports, parties, even just going to the mall with friends - are protective factors of a teen's self-worth.

- Keep social media use under 2 hours a day.









< 2 hrs



- Actively show your kids how to use social media to uplift, teach, and help others.
- Discuss with your kids ways they can stand up for themselves AND others.
- Have daily, meaningful connection and conversation with each of your kids.

# How Your Teen Can Use Social Media for Good

-  Help your kids see potential in all technology. Start looking for ways to use phones, tablets, etc., as tools and instruments, not just as a way to pacify or entertain us.
-  Don't be afraid to let your kids try something new like starting a website, photo blog, or creating a Youtube channel. These can be amazing platforms for your children to express themselves creatively. Many teens have started online petitions, art tutorial channels, photography pages, fashion and make-up classes, and self-help blogs . These are great opportunities for our kids to find and use their voice in a way they love! They will build online skills, be an active digital citizen, and build their online community. Just as your parents may have opened a bank account and taught you how to build financial credit, you can take a proactive role and,side-by-side, help your child build online credit and integrity.
-  Help your children see themselves as agents for change. Show them how kids around the world have started online social movements, created non-profits, and spread awareness to important issues. Remind them that they can change the world for the better!
-  Look for opportunities to use technology to help others. Using apps and websites, find ways to serve in your community or start a service project of your own.
-  Openly discuss rules and guidelines for cell phone usage for kids and parents in your home. Make rules together.
-  Take the next step in changing the world around you. Look for opportunities to co-create new technology, new positive online trends, new platforms, new devices, and anything else you can imagine together with your kids.



# Additional Keeping Kids Safe on Social Media Resources



[Lesson for Families: Using Technology For Good](#)  
[The Most Dangerous Apps of 2018](#)  
[Why Kids Are Leading Double Lives](#)

[30 Days to a Stronger Child](#): Great discussions and activities on topics like boundaries, community, empathy, honesty, friendship and more!

[Noah's New Phone: A Story About Using Technology for Good](#) (a great resource for kids ages 6-12)

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# Social Media Contract for Families

**For Parents:** Take time to discuss each point with your child. Make sure they understand what they are agreeing to.

**For Kids:** I understand that my parents are setting these rules and standards because they love me, want to keep me safe, and want me to use technology and social media deliberately.

## **Safety:**

- I will only create a social media account with my parents' permission.
- I will give my parents my passwords to my social media accounts and smartphone--and nobody else.
- I agree to keep my settings "private" at all times.
- I agree not to reveal the specific place I am when I am there.
- I will not meet anyone in person who I have met through social media.
- I agree to immediately tell a trusted adult if I ever receive threatening or sexual messages or images.
- I agree that my parents can check my social media postings, messages, and content at any time.

## **Behavior:**

- I agree to be done with all tech including phone by \_\_\_\_ p.m.
- I agree that occasionally I will have tech breaks. This means that when I am showing signs of needing a tech break—such as poor school performance, lack of reading or creative activities, irritability, constantly pulling out my phone, unable to concentrate and not wanting to participate in family activities—my parents may ask that I stay off the Internet and my phone for a day or two.
- I understand that social media is a privilege and not a right. If my parents think it is necessary, they may take my phone away or ask me to delete apps off my phone or delete my social media account.
- I understand that everything I post is available forever--even if I have deleted it or if an app promises that images or posts have vanished. I understand that even private messages can be copied and pasted somewhere else.
- I understand that when I am grown and an adult, someone can look my name up and find every single thing I've ever put online. This includes bosses, future family and friends, and neighbors.
- I agree to be respectful of myself and others in the words and images I use. This includes agreeing not to use social media to embarrass, tease, mock, gossip or reveal secrets.
- I will not participate in online fights, threaten others, or encourage others to behave badly.
- I agree not to post sexualized images of myself or others.
- I will only use appropriate language.
- I agree not to view pornography. I understand that my curiosity is normal and that sex is amazing and wonderful, but that pornography uses a warped, counterfeit version of sex that is unhealthy and hateful towards women. If I see it, I will tell a parent immediately.

## **Consequences:**

I understand that if I break any of the above rules, I will have the following consequences:

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Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Teen/Tween Signature)      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent Signature)      Date: \_\_\_\_\_