

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Although digital technology is beneficial for children's social relations, social media use raises important concerns about children's emotional well-being and online safety. Use of social media sites has been associated with negative outcomes such as peer harassment, sleep problems, depressive symptoms and anxiety. In a recent survey, 64% of parents reported worrying about their child being exposed to inappropriate content and 34% indicated that their child spends too much time using social media sites.



Below are some tips to help your child develop safe, healthy habits for social media use.

SET BOUNDARIES WITH TECHNOLOGY

Establish the amount of time that your child can spend on social media each day so that it does not take the place of healthier activities. For younger children, keep computers in a "public" location. Store phones and computers somewhere other than your child's bedroom at night to prevent unsupervised use. For older children, have open, honest discussions about what sites they can access and what content is off-limits. Set up filters to restrict access to inappropriate content. Supervise your teenager's social media use (but don't "spy" on them). Active participation and communication are preferred over strict monitoring (e.g., use of activity tracking applications, access to private messages), unless there are serious concerns about your child's online activity.

PROVIDE EDUCATION

Ensure your child knows how to block and report users. Talk to your child about the risks of location tracking and sharing. Review with your child each application's privacy settings so that they understand what is private and what is public. Remind your child that everything that they share is likely to be permanently accessible. Talk to them about inappropriate or unsafe online behaviors (e.g., sending or sharing hurtful messages, posting personal information). Discuss how online messages can easily be misinterpreted, as you can't rely on tone of voice or facial expressions to help you understand the intentions and feelings of others. Model the digital behavior you expect from your children or teens.

REPORT CYBERBULLYING

Encourage your child to come to you if they witness cyberbullying or other troubling information online. If cyberbullying involves a classmate, report it to the school's principal and/or the school superintendent if your initial inquiry receives no response. Report all threatening messages to the police and document any text messages, emails or posts on websites.

BE MINDFUL OF DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL

Many social media websites have an age minimum of 13 to ensure that younger children are not accessing inappropriate content. Do your research and understand the media your child is using (and how they are using it). Know the audience (e.g., younger children, teenager, adults) and purpose (e.g., educational vs. recreational) of each platform before allowing your child to create a profile.

WATCH FOR RED FLAGS

Children and teens will misuse social media. Be empathetic and use this opportunity for teaching. However, if your child is involved in sexting, bullying, or posting self-harm images be sure to intervene early and enlist professional help if necessary.

RESOURCES:

American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2011/03/28/peds.2011-0054.full.pdf>

American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/digital-guidelines>

Child Mind Institute: <https://childmind.org/article/media-guidelines-for-kids-of-all-ages/>

Pediatrics in Review: <https://pedsinreview.aappublications.org/content/41/3/112>

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Family media plan and media time calculator: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>

Social Media, Television, and Children: <https://www.stac-study.org/>