COUNSELING DEPARTMENT

8 Ways to Keep Your Kids Safe On Social Media

There's no doubt that we live in a digital world. Now more than ever, children are exposed to technology in school and at home with remote learning, cell phone use, and the enticement of social media sites. As children become more and more tech savvy in this digital age, it's important that parents maintain a vigilant sense of security when it comes to a child's online presence. Without education, guidance, boundaries, and rules children can quickly get themselves into trouble online and inside social media platforms. Children need to be taught what is and is not appropriate when navigating the world wide web.

While having the ability to be instantaneously connected to the world around you and to share your experiences at your fingertips has several benefits, it also opens up a whole new world of risks. From predators to cyberbullies, a child's misuse of a social media network can have serious consequences. Social media use has also been linked to an increase in both depression and anxiety among children. Children and teens begin to internalize comments made on social media and determine their worth by the number of "likes" they get on their personal posts. It is the ultimate responsibility of the parent to monitor their child's use of social media and to create boundaries regarding site access and time online.

1. Educate yourself about social media.
Do you remember when the only big social media sites were Facebook and Myspace? That's not the case anymore. As a parent, it's important to familiarize yourself with what sites are out there and which are appropriate for your child. Here are some of the most popular social apps and sites for kids and teens:

WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Tumblr, Pheed, Kik, TikTok, Reddit

2. Establish an age limit for your child to start using social media.
While you're familiarizing yourself with what social media sites are out there, you should take a look at what the required minimum age is for each site. Most social media sites require users to be 13 or older to create an account without their parents' permission.

3. Regularly check your child's privacy settings.
Once your child has set up a social media account, it's important to remain vigilant about keeping their privacy settings updated. Also, make sure you have complete access to the content of your child's social media account. Let your child know up front you will be monitoring their activity and with any sign of misuse you have the authority to cancel the account and/or take away his/her technology.

4. Keep your child's profile private.
Most social media sites give you the option to make your account private. This means that only people who your child has friended will be able to see the content on their profile. This is an important step to take in order to keep their content private and away from people who may misuse it.

5. Make sure they're not posting personal details, including phone numbers, address, or check-ins.
Social media has become such a normal part of people's lives that it's not uncommon for people to share information about themselves that shouldn't be shared. Never share current location, address, phone number, passwords, or any other identifying information.

6. Don't allow them to post photos or videos which jeopardize their safety or character.
While most people post pictures and videos with the best intentions, it's easy for things to be taken the wrong way or out of context and when everyone is online, the wrong message can have long-lasting consequences. Talk to your kids about this and make sure they understand to only post pictures and videos that present themselves and others in a positive light.   Have them get into the habit of asking themselves…. "would I want my mother to see this post?" "Will I regret this later?" "Would I want this on a billboard outside of my school for all to see?".

7. Never allow them to accept friend requests from people they don't know.
This may be self-explanatory, but there are a lot of people out there who use social media to stalk people and steal their information to cause harm. It's always best practice to only accept friend requests from people your child knows such as his/her friends and family. If you don't know them completely then don't accept them as "friends". Teens often feel it's okay to "friend" a lot of people because it causes their friend list number to be high, making them appear popular. This can be socially reinforcing.

8. Keep an open dialogue with your child.
You can't monitor your child's social media activity 24/7, so maintaining a strong line of communication is important to understand what's going on with your child online. Ask them to inform you whenever they receive messages or invites from strangers. Talk to them about the consequences of misusing social media. Ask them to tell you if someone is teasing or harassing them as those could be signs of cyber-bullying. Teach them how to be resilient in the face of mean and hurtful comments made online.

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