

Social media safety tips for parents

For kids and teens, social media is a great way to connect and communicate with friends and peers. It is their reality, and without it, they can feel lost or isolated. As a parent, you can help them navigate this new world in a healthy way. This tip sheet offers an overview of what you need to know about the social media platforms your child or teen is using.

Kik

What is it? Kik is an instant messenger that allows users to connect with brands and chat one-on-one or in groups with text, emojis, memes, videos and photos.

What you should know: Kik can be used anonymously, and is known to be widely used for sexting, which makes your teen vulnerable to sexual victimization. Encourage your teen to choose a username that's hard to guess. Include letters, numbers and symbols to help control who can contact them on Kik.

WhatsApp Messenger

What is it? WhatsApp is one of the most popular instant messaging apps with over 1 billion users. Kids and teens use it to chat or call other WhatsApp users around the world.

What you should know: People share fake news, spam messages and spam links. Kids and teens can be fooled into clicking on them, or giving out personal information or a credit card number to get new upgrades. Tell your child or teen to ignore or block messages that ask them to tap on an unknown link, a link that 'activates' new features or one that asks for personal information. Guide them to the App Store or Google Play Store to access new features.

Snapchat

What is it? Snapchat is a messaging app that allows users to post videos and pictures that "disappear" after a few seconds.

What you should know: Kids and teens assume that their snaps disappear forever, which gives them a false sense of security about sending risky or embarrassing photos. Other users can replay a snap or take a screenshot to share an image. Remind your child or teen that the photos they post are never really gone, and that the Internet is never private. What they consider a private chat could lead them down a dangerous road – possibly even toward criminal charges.

Instagram

What is it? Instagram is all about selfies, filters and followers. Kids and teens take, crop and modify photos to share them with their contacts. They can also use hashtags to reach a lot of people very quickly.

What you should know: Instagram has a 'stickers' feature that lets them post where their pictures were taken. This makes it easier for anyone to track their whereabouts, and leaves them vulnerable to stalkers. Ask your child or teen to turn off their location tagging by setting their account to ghost mode.

YouTube

What is it? YouTube is great for watching videos, posting videos and following other “YouTubers.” Kids and teens love to set up their own channels and grow their following.

What you should know: YouTube comments are notoriously negative. Posting personal videos can leave your child or teen vulnerable to criticism and may attract trolls – people who intentionally start negative conversations. Encourage your child or teen to ignore negative comments and to block the user if they experience harassment. Discuss what they should and shouldn't be posting, and remind them to steer clear of hateful discussions about other people's content.

Skype

What is it? Skype allows users to have unlimited video and audio calls, exchange messages, and share photos and files with other users.

What you should know: If your child or teen sets up a Skype account without adjusting the privacy settings, any user can send them messages, calls or videos. Online predators often pose as someone else by using a false account with a fake profile picture, or pretending to have a “broken” webcam. Discuss why it's never a good idea to Skype with someone your child or teen has never met, especially if they claim their camera is “broken.”

Twitter

What is it? Twitter is a news and social networking site that teens use to follow celebrities, news, events and each other. Users “tweet” short messages using hashtags.

What you should know: Twitter has been a longtime vehicle for online harassment. Some users tweet out “rants” and mean tweets that can quickly turn into personal attacks. Help your teen find the “mute” function on Twitter, which allows them to discreetly block other users or stop a person's content or hashtag from appearing on their feed. Remind them to avoid “subtweets,” which are often negative messages that don't tag the user – similar to talking behind someone's back in public.

Facebook

What is it? Facebook is a social networking site that allows users to share photos, comments and status updates.

What you should know: Teens sometimes forget that what they post on the internet can be shared by others, and that not every post will be appropriate to every situation. Employers increasingly research Facebook pages to find out more about job applicants before making a hiring decision, for example. Encourage your teen to build and maintain a positive online reputation and presence. Let them know that even so-called “private groups” are never private. They should never post something online that they would not be willing to say in public.

FIND OUT MORE

Most of these apps offer safety tips for users that contain important steps to protecting privacy. There are also many online resources for parents who want to learn more about the apps their teens are using, including: mediasmarts.ca, techwithoutviolence.ca, ProtectKidsOnline.ca, internetmatters.org, connectsafely.org