

What Parents NEED to Know: #GoodforMEdia's Guide to Social Media

Young people are gaining access to technology and social media at younger ages, and it is clear that social media will only become more prominent in people's daily lives. Parents may be left wondering what to do when it comes to handling their family's social media usage. To bridge this divide, our #GoodforMEdia youth leaders created this guide for *you*! We are a youth-driven peer-mentoring campaign focused on promoting positive engagement with social media, and using its power to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of our community.



First, let's talk about the good!

Social media can act as a forum for networking and unlimited knowledge. It can provide information on world news, current events, and politics from multiple different perspectives. Additionally, it can act as a social network, allowing youth to stay connected to friends, express themselves in creative ways to others, and document and share fun events or moments in their lives.

Social media can also be an important method to work through self-image and encourage self-discovery.

Many different platforms can offer advice, life tips, encouragement, and new cultural ideas. On some platforms, there is an exploration page that can show new hobbies, the day-to-day of certain careers, or just about anything for any interest!

At this point in time, social media is a part of everyday life for most teens! Therefore, using social media can be an important way of finding community and feeling involved, especially to folks that teens may not have access to in person.



While safety is a top priority, there truly are ways for youth to connect with folks over social media in a way that can be incredibly beneficial for their mental health.

Social media allows a unique sharing of culture that cannot be achieved in-person in the same way. With it, not only do teens have access to people and ideas from their own physical spaces and communities, but they have multiple other communities at their fingertips.

Many youth find that these internet communities really uplift them, as they are able to hear about and share moments of strength and resilience as well as build community.

To summarize, using social media responsibly can benefit youth! It can leave them feeling more connected and help them find resources for anything they are going through.

now for the not so good..

One of the primary issues with social media is its safety concerns. Some people on these platforms have bad intentions, whether they are scammers, cyberbullies, or predators.

It is important to take protective measures to avoid these dangers such as making your accounts private, not sharing personal information, and blocking suspicious accounts.

You may want to talk to your child about their account settings and what to do if scammers or other strangers reach out to them. Additionally, starting conversations about how to behave online (themselves and others) may be beneficial.



Social media can also have negative impacts on mental health due to the unrealistic standards and expectations it can set for youth. Most social media content is strategically edited and selected to portray the most perfected image and lifestyle, and comparing oneself to these posts can really affect self-esteem. As a parent, knowing that this is an aspect of social media and talking about it with your child may be helpful.

A good strategy to recommend for avoiding comparison is to turn off likes and comments in settings, as well as unfollowing accounts that post content that doesn't feel good.

Another difficult aspect of social media is the amount of misinformation on most platforms.

It can be overwhelming to sort out what is real and what isn't when accounts can post content regardless of its veracity. You can encourage young people to navigate misinformation by suggesting they avoid relying on social media for information or advice, and that they instead consult other resources for topics they are interested in.

The common theme with all of these difficulties is that communication is key for tackling the more negative sides of social media.



It is super important to have these conversations with your child in a way that provides them with support and empowerment to make informed decisions online. Essentially, we want to emphasize that although social media has its downsides, there are solutions to these problems!

As long as youth are being mindful about the ways in which they are engaging with social media, it can consistently be a positive experience that enhances their sense of community and mental health.

Let's get into our advice for conversations about social media!

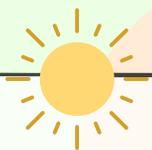
When approaching these conversations, keep in mind that the rhetoric you use dramatically affects your child's reactions. While your feelings are valid and should be voiced, approaching your child with an accusatory tone is not helpful and will most likely elicit an equally hostile response from your child.

Try sitting down with your child and calmly expressing your feelings, not fixating on their actions.

With that said, here is what we think you should focus on (and some common phrases you should avoid saying) when tackling the subjects of healthy phone habits, creating boundaries and responsibilities, and encouraging transparency.



Instead of saying, "It's rotting your brain," you can try...



Suggesting to scroll mindfully; finding pages and accounts that are dedicated to interests that will provide engaging content.



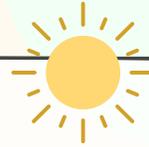
Encouraging them to learn new hobbies, perhaps even use these hobbies to spend time together by watching tutorial videos (for cooking, gardening, etc.)



Instead of saying, "You're addicted and I'm taking away your phone," you can try...



Suggesting they use time-management apps to stay focused. You could also offer to try keeping each other accountable for not being distracted by social media or phones.



Gently reminding them that it's important to finish tasks and attend to their priorities. Give encouragement when they successfully reduce screen time or demonstrate good time-management.



Instead of saying, "You spend all of your time on your phone and never talk to your family anymore," you can try...



Establishing certain norms that your family can adopt so that you all feel satisfied. An example could be everyone putting their phones away at dinnertime to talk with one another.



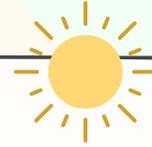
Making usage restrictions minimal. Immediately taking away your child's devices or access to social media can make healthy habits harder to sustain, and also makes children less eager to participate.



Instead of saying, "Social media and the internet are too dangerous," you can try...



Talking with them honestly about the dangers of social media and work together to make a plan if they encounter harmful behavior. Let them know that if they ever feel unsafe they can tell you without judgment!



Making sure they know how to block unwanted content that pops up on their feed and understand other basic safety measures.



Instead of saying, "You aren't responsible enough for a phone," you can try...



Starting with a simpler phone model with fewer features. Make sure to take the time to practice setting boundaries and communicating with your child about phone use.



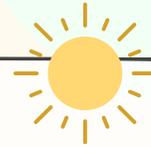
Walking them through the parts of social media or the internet that are concerning you, and set expectations of how they can demonstrate responsible usage of these platforms.



Instead of saying, "Stop texting your friends so much or I'll turn on parental controls," you can try...



Setting up time for your child to spend time with their friends! It is far easier to swap screen time for something else than stop it altogether.



Talking about establishing healthy phone habits, in addition to using the phone's built-in activity usage and rewarding for reduced activity.

Here are some further questions you can ask!



- How do you think you are balancing social media with the other areas of your life?
- How do you feel social media benefits you?
- How do you feel about the amount of time you spend on social media?
- Do you feel safe using social media?
- What's keeping your interest in social media right now?