

Social Media Tips for Parents

Below is a good article about Social Media by a social media specialist, and how to stay on top of your children:

My 17-year old niece was recently grounded. Part of her grounding included the restriction of internet usage. What did not occur to her father (my brother) was that teens are smart – and may be on social platforms that parents are less familiar with. I spotted a picture posted on Instagram during school hours, notified my brother, and thus began a conversation with my brother on being informed and involved in his children's internet and social media use.

Set expectations: Make sure your children know what they can and cannot do and how you will be monitoring their online activity (you WILL monitor their online activity). This is not a breach of privacy, but a practice to make sure your children are safe. I also think it prudent to ask your children to keep you informed as to what platforms they are on. Of course, this assumes a certain level of trust and honesty.

Educate your kids: Make sure they understand bad guys exist and that they should use care and judgement when utilizing social media. Set aside a family night to present a recommended social media and internet usage plan. One reason I brought up the issue of my nieces' accounts on Instagram was that the younger one loves to post pictures of herself with a high frequency.

Think about content: This ties into point 2. I have a 15-year old niece that loves to take pictures of herself. Call me old, but today's teen generation is far more narcissistic when it comes to social media. I struggle to friend or follow any teens for the simple reason that it grates on my nerves. Too many photos. The reason I bring this up is that, teens (and children) don't think about the dangers of the world. Why does this matter? Because there are bad guys out there and they know how to find your child based off of information found in your teen/child's photo stream. Teach your children about what is safe to show in videos and photos and what content to never share in any medium.

Know the platforms: My brother's problem was that he a.) did not consider my niece being able to use her iPod for internet and b.) was unaware of her account on Instagram. Or his other daughter's account, for that matter. If you aren't aware of the social platforms out there, take some time and become familiar. A few for your consideration are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Google+, MySpace, Vine, Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo, FourSquare, Tumblr, Snapchat. The top three are: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Snapchat is also very popular with teens right now.

Make sure your child's account is set up safely: Today's generation wants to share everything (literally, everything – there is no such thing as an overshare in their world) and be a part of every single cool, new social media application. It drove me crazy that my nephew (and many other friends' children) have ignored Facebook's 13+ age rule and input a fake birth year to gain access. My nephew was 11 at the time but his Facebook account said he was 21. Advertisers can target age groups. A 21-year old would be subject to very different content than a 13-year old (or in this case, an 11-year old who should not be on Facebook). If your child is under 13, keep them off of Facebook. Other platforms, like Instagram and Twitter offer private accounts, make sure your child has this type as opposed to a public facing account.

Follow your kids: Be where they are. If you truly want your children to be smart and safe, friend and follow your children. Not only will you know what they are posting to the world (and be able to deem appropriate vs. inappropriate), but you will also help them to pause before posting. If a parent can see a post, a child will be less likely to post “no-no” items. My above mentioned 17-year old niece became angry when my brother joined Instagram and called it a violation of her privacy. But guess what? Parents aren't meant to be friends and her account is public facing. There will be no more “tramp stamp” pictures posted on Instagram any longer.

Be flexible but firm: Look, parenting is never easy. In today's world, we have very different challenges than our parents did. The parents that I have found to be most successful with their children, tweens, teens, and now adults, are the ones who were clear about expectations and rules, participate alongside children on social media, use it to be more involved in their children's lives, and who have regular and open discussions about content, changes, and whatever else might come up.

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