



## Parenting in the World of Social Media



**S**ocial media and the technology that drives it present unique challenges for parents.

Parents may sometimes wonder how they're supposed to keep up with a constantly changing technological world that their children seem to grasp naturally.

But teaching your child to responsibly access and use social media is not that much different from teaching them to drive responsibly. The biggest difference is that driving has specific rules and regulations that drivers must follow, while the rules that govern social media are often vague, broad and open-ended.

➔ **Here are some tips for raising your social media IQ and setting rules that help your child stay safe and behave appropriately online:**

- **Learn the language.** Get familiar with the websites, terms and language your child and his or her peers are using, especially vocabulary terms like “hashtags,” “tweeting,” “streaming” and “selfies.” Also, educate yourself about passwords, privacy settings, Internet access and things like “the Cloud.” Discuss concerns with your electronics experts; they can answer questions about products, parental controls and software that may apply to your child’s needs.
- **Move slowly but surely.** When it comes to driving, you wouldn’t allow your child to get behind the wheel without any experience or knowledge of the rules of the road, or without hours of supervision and training. Social media should be approached in the same way. Children should have a lot of restrictions on their social media activities when they’re younger or just starting to use it (e.g., parental supervision, frequent monitoring, limited access to sites/devices, minimal screen time, no private passwords). As children prove they can be responsible, they can earn more freedom, access and independence.
- **Keep your child’s maturity level in mind.** You know your child better than anyone. There are numerous devices, apps, access levels and privacy settings that may not be appropriate

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for your child's age or developmental level. Read up on information for these and other items and issues, and monitor your child's use of them. Then you can slowly expand your child's access and online activities when you think your child is ready.

- **Technology is only as good as how it's used.** Technology was not created to make a parent's job even harder. Despite the potential dangers and uncertainties that social media can pose for children, there are online activities that are fun, educational and worthwhile. Work with your child to explore positive ways technology can be used and incorporate them into your family life (e.g., family game nights, visiting distant relatives through FaceTime, watching funny videos).
- **Find a healthy balance between screen time and other activities for your child.** Children shouldn't have an all-access, all-the-time pass to social media. Set screen time limits and encourage your child to participate in other social activities that require face-to-face interactions with other people (e.g., having friends over, playing sports, volunteering, working a part-time job).
- **See missteps as opportunities.** Children will make mistakes when using social media. As a parent, your goal is to help your child learn from his or her mistakes. This learning occurs from having your child accept your instructions and feedback, practice appropriate online behavior and experience consequences like losing devices or screen time for a set period of time.
- **Be a filter.** Ask questions about online games your child enjoys, who he or she talks to through emails, tweets and other messaging technology, and sites or YouTube channels he or she visits. An even better way to be aware and monitor the information your child is receiving is to sit down and visit these sites together.
- **Be a good role model.** How often are you on your phone or tablet? Do you post on Facebook at dinnertime or in the middle of a



conversation? Remember that your children are watching and will pick up cues from you. Set a good example and model how to use social media appropriately.

- **Trust your parenting instincts.** Effective parenting is all about communicating with and supervising your child and his or her activities; setting clear expectations for behavior; consistently enforcing rules and guidelines; and following through with the appropriate consequences, for both positive and negative behaviors.

Now, if you could only figure out how to take a decent selfie.

## Additional Resources

- [commonsensemedia.org](http://commonsensemedia.org)
- [internetmatters.org](http://internetmatters.org)
- *The Art of Screen Time* by Anya Kamenetz

➔ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.