kid T.I.P.S.

Tough Issues, Proven Solutions

A publication for parents on the emotional, social and behavioral development of children.

Setting Expectations for **Social Media** with **Children and Teens**

Ensuring that children use social media appropriately and safely is one of the biggest challenges parents face today.

While it often gets a bad rap for the negative ways some people use it, social media isn't really bad. It's just new. And kids are always just a few steps ahead of their parents when it comes to technology. They usually are much savvier than their parents, and parents always seem to be catching up!

But just because kids know how to access social media doesn't mean they know how to use it correctly. That's where the rules you set come in.

Granted, there are risks related to social media. There are also benefits children can enjoy when they learn to use social media safely, such as strengthening friendships, learning new perspectives and connecting with experiences they wouldn't typically have.

It can be difficult as a parent to change with the times. It's normal to think things like:

- *What if my child makes a big mistake?*
- *I need to protect my child from dangerous content on social media.*
- *I'm afraid social media will take over my child's life.*

While these concerns are valid, they simply present considerations that you, and your whole family, need to address. Here are some helpful tips:

Do your homework. Many parents don't feel confident talking about technology and aren't sure how their children are using social media. Take time to learn more about it with your child, your technology provider and online resources. Learn about passwords, privacy settings, data updates and Internet access. Talk to your Internet provider about parental controls that may benefit your family's situation. Educate yourself about age-appropriate content, public versus private settings, location-tracking and sharing, ads and in-app purchases, "disappearing" videos and pictures, and cyberbullying. Having a better understanding of

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what social media is and how it is being and can be used can help you feel more confident when you set rules for your child. Here are some handy resources: commonsensemedia.org and internetmatters.org.

Monitor the time your child spends on social media, games and apps.
Parents are often more successful when they focus on how their children are using technology rather than on the types of technology they are using. You can assume that if your children have access to devices with apps, they are accessing various content (social media, videos, games, etc.). Gaming apps often have a social media component, so it's important to teach children how to manage their conversations, sharing, etc. when gaming, too. Setting rules that help you monitor and manage your child's use of any technology will give you a clearer picture of your child's involvement.

As a family, develop a device/cellphone agreement.
Create an agreement that fits your family's needs and clearly spells out easy-to-follow rules everyone can understand and follow. Here are some examples of rules for a child's cell phone use. (The following examples are only considerations and may not cover all areas you want to include in your agreement.)

- **Device time limit in AM, PM and weekends:** Can use phone for 30 minutes in morning once ready for school; can use phone for 1 hour after homework is completed; can use phone after completing chores on Saturday and Sunday.

- **Acceptable settings and times:** Cannot use phone in bedroom or bathrooms, only in family room and kitchen; cannot use phone at dinner table or during other family activities as defined by parents.

- **Evening check-in:** At 7:30 PM, child puts phone in charger in parents' bedroom (or kitchen) for the night.

- **Morning check-out:** At 7:15 AM, child checks out phone before leaving for school.

- **Routine monitoring and settings:** Child allows parents to look at phone whenever they want

and to set restrictions. Parents never need permission to look at phone or change restrictions.

- **Managing passwords:** Child is to share all passwords with parents and notify them about any changes. Child cannot place additional passwords on phone.

- **Managing risk:** Child will tell parents when he or she receives unknown/unusual/strange phone calls or texts, or finds an unauthorized app.

- **Appropriate conduct:** Child will use phone to post/send/share appropriate content (no nude pictures and no personal/identification information) and engage in appropriate interactions with peers (no bullying or leaving others out of conversations).

Set consequences for violating rules; these can include losing phone privileges for a predetermined length of time.
A task-based "earning back" system, where a child must complete an extra chore before he or she can use the phone again, typically helps children learn about taking responsibility and making better choices in the future.

Additional Resources

→ **commonsensemedia.org**
→ **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.

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