

Social Media and the Internet: The Good, the Bad, and Taking Control



Social media and the internet, including gaming platforms, are how people communicate and express themselves. Your access to and use of apps and platforms means normalcy and fitting in. But navigating these also means taking control and staying a smart digital citizen.

Through social media, you can:

- **Stay** in touch with family, friends, and peers;
- **Keep** informed about issues that are important to you;
- **Engage** in activities that interest you;
- **Find** jobs, housing, furniture, and community resources.

Have a conversation with your parent, trusted adult, or caregiver:

- **Discuss** social media and internet expectations. Work to set reasonable limits and rules. This can build trust and empowerment.
- **Tell** them why and how you use social media, how different apps work, and help them review your privacy settings.
- **Share** your favorite things about social media and your least favorite.
- **Use** this as an opportunity to be a teacher.

It may feel personal to talk about your social media and internet use with your parent, caregiver, or trusted adult. But, sharing your perspectives can give them insight into you and even help you understand how you see yourself in relation to what you do online.

The new ‘public space’

Every app, social media platform, or online community is its own kind of ‘public space’. Each has its rules and behavior expectations. They also allow users access to you and your content in ways you might not expect.

On social media, there is the freedom to do and say anything, but **not** the freedom from consequences.

- **Always ask yourself**, “Who could see what I’m doing?” This isn’t just about your friends or followers, but others who are friends with or following them. These other users may have little to no connection to you and may be people you don’t want seeing your activity.
- Users or platforms can flag your account if you post certain opinions, threats, or about sex or violence.
 - *Posting about drinking, illegal drug sale or use, sex or labor trafficking, weapons, ‘revenge porn’, or gang activity is risky. Law enforcement **routinely reviews** and responds to tips about social media postings that seem to involve criminal conduct.*
- Employers, schools, and coaches do research on social media. Some may ask you for your social media handles and will review them before you have a chance to make deletions.
- Live feeds and map apps can tell others where you are and can confirm your presence at the scene of a crime/or wrongdoing.
- If you have been involved in the juvenile justice system, how you use social media may attract law enforcement attention or violate the terms of your probation, release, or parole.

Think it Out

Before you share or send content, take a moment to think about what the effects might be—for you, your friends, and anyone who can follow you.

Everyone makes mistakes, and sometimes, consequences are only clear after hitting ‘send’ or ‘post.’ If you’re not sure what’s okay, reaching out to your caregiver or trusted adult can give you perspective and help you make informed choices.

The importance of consent:

Social media has made it normal to share content featuring other people without their consent. Platforms have encouraged others to make fun of someone they've never met, share another person's pain or trauma, or broadcast intimate moments—all of which can be humiliating or hurtful.



- **Make** using **empathy** and **kindness** a habit. If you were the subject of content you're about to share, how would you feel?
- **Talk** with your caregiver or trusted adult to help you navigate through consent and personal boundaries.
- **Tell** a parent or caregiver to **respect your boundaries** when posting about you online.

Social Media: It is **everywhere**, users can **hide** their identities, and there is an **endless supply** of content.

Know about the dark side and listen to your gut:

- Cyberbullying, 'sextortion', traffickers, extremist groups, pornography, conspiracy theories, and depictions of physical and/or sexual violence exist across all platforms.
 - *These are not difficult to find, **even if** you're not looking for them. Encounters with this content can be uncomfortable, disturbing, or confusing. If you feel unsafe or upset with what you see, talk to your parent, caregiver, or trusted adult for guidance.*
- On social media, it is difficult to tell someone who is genuine from someone who is manipulative. It is exciting when someone compliments or likes your post. Although some people **are** truly nice, others only **act** that way because they want something.
- If something seems off or makes you uneasy, question what the other user's intentions might be—the good and the bad. This can help you spot what could be an unsafe situation.

Do homework. . . on you:
Search your name or nickname online to see what images or information are publicly available. Adding the name of a social media platform to that search can help refine the results.

Keeping your control:

- Think twice before sharing your passwords or location or making your photos public.
- Strangers can impersonate, stalk, or "catfish" with your content. Having your personal photos (including nudes) or home address leaked can have negative long-term consequences.
- If it starts to feel like social media is negatively affecting you, it's okay to take a break and ask other users to give you that space and time.

Has social media ever made you feel insecure or jealous? Remember, social media is **selective**. People rarely share their insecurities, failures, or unflattering moments, and editing apps fool most people.

Keep the line open:

- A conversation about social media is one that **never ends**. Check in with your parent, caregiver, or trusted adult about your social media use.
- Tell them about your interests, show them who or what you're following, or share a favorite thing that you recently saw. If something on social media is upsetting or challenging, ask for their help in navigating it.

