

Dear Parents and Guardians:

As the school year ends, you may be asking yourself, as well as other parents you know, “How do I keep my child socially connected without allowing them to spend too much time on social media?” It can feel as though you are completely out there on your own when trying to set limits on phone and computer time. We can assure you that you are not. Most parents have major concerns about the amount of time their child spends on social media. Below is some information, as well as some suggestions to help you navigate your way through our digital world.

Social media risks include but are not limited to being subject to cyberbullying and online harassment, placing inappropriate content online and decreased sleep.

The US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy says he believes 13 is too young for children to be on social media platforms, because although sites allow children of that age to join, kids are still “developing their identity.” Meta, Twitter, and a host of other social media giants currently allow 13-year-olds to join their platforms. “I, personally, based on the data I’ve seen, believe that 13 is too early. It’s a time where it’s really important for us to be thoughtful about what’s going into how they think about their own self-worth and their relationships and the skewed and often distorted environment of social media often does a disservice to many of those children,” Murthy said on “CNN Newsroom.” In early adolescence, kids are still “developing their identity, their sense of self,” [Murthy said on CNN’s “Newsroom”](#) on Jan. 29. “The skewed, and often distorted, environment of social media often does a disservice to many of those children.”

Of course, social media has benefits. It allows for creative expression, for example, and enables social connections. Beyond cutting back, then, we want to help teenagers maximize “time well spent” on social media in a way that nourishes their values and leaves them feeling fulfilled, not addicted. *Don’t* lecture teens about the consequences of too much social-media use. They likely already know, and it doesn’t change their behavior. *Do* help kids understand how social-media platforms hook you.

1. Educate yourself about social media

Do you remember when the only big social media sites were Facebook and Myspace? That is not the case anymore. As a parent, it is important to familiarize yourself with what sites are out there and which are appropriate for your child. Here are some of the most popular social apps and sites for kids and teens:

- [WhatsApp](#)
- [Snapchat](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Tumblr](#)
- [Pheed](#)
- [Kik](#)
- [ask.fm](#)
- [Reddit](#)
- [Yik Yak](#)

2. Establish an age limit for your child to start using social media

While you are familiarizing yourself with what social media sites are out there, you should look at what the required minimum age is for each site. Most social media sites require users to be 13 or older to create an account without their parents' permission, according to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act ([COPPA](#)).

3. Regularly check your child's privacy settings.

Once your child has set up a social media account, it is important to remain vigilant about keeping their privacy settings updated. Social Media sites are continually adding security settings to ensure that maximum protection is available, but oftentimes they need to be updated manually by the user.

4. Keep your child's profile private.

Most social media sites give you the option to make your account private. This means that only people who your child has friended will be able to see the content on their profile. This is an important step to take in order to keep their content private and away from people who may misuse it.

5. Make sure they're not posting personal details, including phone numbers, address, or check-ins.

Social media has become such a normal part of people's lives that it's not uncommon for people to share information about themselves that shouldn't be shared. It is important that your child understands what kinds of information shouldn't be shared and why.

6. Don't allow them to post photos or videos which jeopardize their safety or character.

While most people post pictures and videos with the best intentions, it is easy for things to be taken the wrong way or out of context and when everyone is online; the wrong message can have long-lasting consequences. Talk to your kids about this and make sure they understand to only post pictures and videos that present themselves and others in a positive light.

7. Make sure they choose a strong password.

"1, 2, 3, 4, 5? That is amazing! I've got the same combination on my luggage!"

The password scene from the 1987 comedy *Spaceballs* was funny back then and it is still funny today because the implications are the same. Would you really use a password as simple as 1,2,3,4,5 to safeguard something important? No, of course you would not and you should get your kids into the habit as well.

8. Never allow them to accept friend requests from people they do not know.

This may be self-explanatory, but there are many people out there who use social media to stalk people and steal their information to cause harm. It is always best practice to only accept friend requests from people your child knows such as their friends and family.

9. Set guidelines/rules for their social media use.

Establishing rules or guidelines from the start is a great way to instill positive habits for your child on social media. However, you don't want to set up rules which are too strict or else you run the risk of your child actively and secretly trying to break them. Try to make rules that empower your child to make good decisions on their own.

10. Keep an open dialogue with your child.

You can't monitor your child's social media activity 24/7, so maintaining a strong line of communication is important to understand what's going on with your child online. Ask them to inform you whenever they receive messages or invites from strangers. Talk to them about the consequences of misusing social media. Ask them to tell you if someone is teasing or harassing them as those could be signs of cyber-bullying.

Have a great summer, and we'll see you in September!
The Mental Health Team Members at SKSD.