

Social Networking—Pros, Cons, and Advice

Social networking is the use of applications or software to communicate or form communities online. Examples of social networking tools include the following:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Snapchat
- LinkedIn
- YouTube

ALL of these are designed for people over the age of 13 and should, even then, be considered carefully for teens. This age limit has more to do with privacy legislation in the USA than it has to do with suitable fit for age.

Social networking sites allow users to post comments, images, videos, and links. They require an online profile that may require personal information.

Whether your child has been involved in social networking or not up until now, their involvement will most likely increase. Wanting access to friends, knowing what’s going on and being said, and feeling accepted and important will drive most teens to social networking.

They more than likely have access to a smart phone or another mobile Internet-connected device. They must require your permission. Make this part of the technology rules. Some social networking sites are safer and better managed than others. You help choose the one that best suits your child.



Even at this stage, be aware that your child’s life will be no less joyful or productive without social networking programs.

Your child does not need to access social networking. It is a tool you can decide to allow or not.

As your teen gets older, they need to be encouraged to make informed choices. Stay involved. Here’s what you need to consider.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s free—the applications and the chat (in comparison to phone SMS expenses or telephone calls). • Social networking can be used as a learning tool to teach children how to interact appropriately online in a social setting. • Children enjoy it (although, of course, this is not guaranteed, and it can lead to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds another layer (time) for parents/carers to consider and monitor/control. • Gives others (mostly strangers) access to your child and their information 24 hours a day. • Gives your child a platform to make poor and impulsive choices instantly without the opportunity to think. • Creates a permanent record of what they



problems).

- Can create a sense of belonging and connection—family, friends, people with similar interests (e.g., online games)
- Can be used to express creative or individual thoughts/products (such as images they create to express their feelings or thoughts or videos that amuse them)
- If managed properly, can help our children feel accepted
- If used properly, can instill positive mindsets relating to appropriate communication, what is and isn't acceptable, and the limitations of technology regarding privacy and control
- Enables us to highlight to them that we need to be part of their online world

say and do in a public place to be seen by others.

- Can encourage them to waste time
- May become obsessed with affirmation and what others think
- May be exposed to inappropriate content or information
- Will be exposed to older users that find teenagers an attractive target
- Connects your child with other people that may cause issues for your child

Cyberbullying brings school issues into your home. The bullying no longer stops at the school gate. Indeed, some children are nastier online than in the school yard.

Even if your child isn't the one being bullied, they may be part of the chat and see it happening.

- Virtually all sites have no monitoring, moderation, or, more importantly, identity verification. (You can't be confident the person is who they represent themselves to be.)
- Increases the likelihood that your child will be exposed to inappropriate or unsuitable topics, images, or discussions
- Requires your child to place some personal information into the public arena
- **Most people in social networking sites are adults.**
- Your child may accidentally provide personal information that makes their identity, location, or personal details available in a public place.
- Some social networking sites have location tracking or GPS coordinates attached (e.g., linked to images or Facebook check-ins). Make sure these functions can be switched off.



CHECKLIST – SHOULD YOUR CHILD HAVE ACCESS TO SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES?

Here are some questions to consider:

- Why does your child need the network?
- Why does your child want to use social networking?
- Is this a good match for your child? Every child is different. Is your child well equipped for or suited to social networking tools?
- Is your child able to deal with nasty comments, being excluded, or watching others get hurt?
- Are you prepared to be on the same tools and 'friend' your child as a safety net?
- Do you have a family social networking site your child can join?
- Do you and your child know how to report offensive, abusive, or pornographic content?

STRATEGIES THAT WORK

- Don't offer social networking tools to your child. Wait for them to ask.
- If they do ask, put them off. Make them wait awhile. Consider the options only if they persist. Often they are not that passionate about the idea and can be distracted.
- Be sure they really want to be involved in social networking sites because they can be difficult to get out of.
- Only if they are persistent and you have CHOSEN to allow them access—give access to one site only, make sure you know how that site works, and join the site too.
- Use the usual technology rules.

Rules

You've decided to allow access to particular apps/sites. Here are some specific rules to consider:

- You decide which programs can be used.
- You have the password.
- Set rules regarding language—links back to ethics, social skills, and their digital footprint.
- Set rules about who they can connect with.
- Determine when and where they can use social networking tools.
- You sit down with them and see what's happening in their account (semi regularly and without warning).
- You or a responsible adult should be an online contact or friend.

Teens will join social media sites and will not understand the risks
unless you are involved.
If they can't see you as a reliable source of guidance,
who will they trust?