PROTECTING YOUTH ON SOCIAL MEDIA: IT STARTS AT HOME!

LEARN HOW YOU CAN PROMOTE A RESPONSIBLE, SAFE, AND HEALTHY ONLINE EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR CHILD.

The internet has unlocked children's access to the world, giving them opportunities to learn and engage with others in ways previous generations could never imagine. Having information at their fingertips is a powerful tool, but one that requires guidance and supervision.

Recent survey data [1] reveals that majority of teens are using social media "almost constantly." The content to which they're being exposed and the sheer amount of time spent on the platforms can at times be alarming and harmful. What can you as a parent or caregiver do to protect and guide your child? It starts with understanding the research regarding youth on social media, using the platforms' tools to promote online safety, and leveraging resources to guide your child's online experience.

KNOW: What Does the Research Say About Kids on Social Media?

MONITOR: What Tools Exist for Oversight?

CONNECT: Where Can I Access Resources for Help?

TALK to your kid about using social media. Check in and check the platform(s) regularly. You can promote **responsible, safe, and healthy** online experiences and guard against negative effects. **It starts at home!**

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KNOW: What Does the Research Say About Kids on Social Media?

Social media can offer youth valuable social connections, positive interactions, and supports that they may not be able to access face-to-face in their local community. [2],[3] It also provides access to information and creates a space for self-expression. [4]

However, adolescents may not experience social media in the same ways, and for some, there could be a heightened risk of harm. Brain development is a critical factor, and the period of age 10-19 is when kids engage in risky behavior and when mental health challenges typically emerge in response to things like peer comparison and social pressures. [5] Therefore, exposure to social media during this time warrants extra supervision and guidance by families and caregivers.

Some have been quick to suggest that the root cause of increased poor mental health and suicides among youth is due to social media use, but there's no clear scientific consensus to confirm that. [6],[7] In short, the research isn't settled. [8] This is not to say that there are no negative psychological effects associated with social media, but the science has only demonstrated correlation, not causation. That is, there's an observed relationship, but there's no evidence that one causes the other. However, the relationship alone underscores the need for families and caregivers to be vigilant in making sure that kids' online experiences are positive and healthy.

MONITOR: What Tools Exist for Oversight?

There is an ever-growing selection of children's online safety tools that can help parents, families, and caregivers to navigate their child's social media use.

Check out the Competitive Enterprise Institute [9] and Common Sense Media [10] for great resources available from internet service providers, social media apps, and more. These will help with oversight and guidance; you can select the tools best suited to your child's needs.

PCMag, [11] a technology review publication, tested a variety of parental control softwares and listed their top picks. Many of the tools listed include app blocking and the ability to schedule and limit kids' usage.

Finally, people often turn to online platforms like those available through reddit.com in search of community and support that they're unable to find in their in-person circles. Adults can offer support to children by regularly engaging in open and honest conversations about their mental health, safety, and online activities. Ongoing communication, equipped with knowledge of the real risks of internet activity, can create a strong foundation for safe social media use.

CONNECT: Where Can I Access Resources for Help?

Common Sense Media's "Parent Tips and FAQs" [12] offers explainers for some of the most popular social media apps. Understanding how the app works and what options are available is a powerful step in preventing and treating any harms that might occur. Access their Parents' Ultimate Guide to TikTok, [13] Instagram, [14] and Snapchat. [15]

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) [16] has resources and reporting mechanisms available for families, teachers, and other caregivers who are concerned about children's safety or suspect illegal activity. NetSmartz, [17] an online safety education program, has educational resources and a tip line for reporting exploitative online behavior.

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LINKS TO LEARN MORE:

[1] https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023/

[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/11/28/teens-social-media-habits-and-experiences/

[3] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5143470/

[4] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29093035/

[5] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26419496/

[6] https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00127-019-01825-4

[7] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10294999/

[8] https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/the-science-isnt-settled-on-social-media-and-kids/

[9] https://cei.org/children-online-safety-tools/

[10] https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-parental-controls

[11] https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-parental-control-software

[12] https://www.commonsensemedia.org

[13] https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-tiktok

[14] https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-instagram

[15] https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-snapchat

[16] https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/parents-and-caregivers-protecting-your-kids

[17] https://www.missingkids.org/NetSmartz/home

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