

Social Media & Texting 101 for Parents

"My child would never do anything like that! I check her Facebook page/cell phone/tablet all of the time!"

This is a statement we often hear in the school office when parents come in for a meeting because of social media issues with their child. While we all strive to keep up with ever-changing technology, many times trouble starts with apps and usages parents don't even know exist. We hope this information helps families become aware of not only how your children may be putting themselves "out there" but to also put you in a position to help steer your child away from situations that may cause problems now or in the future.

Communicating via a smart phone is a way of life for many of us. We are more organized, made aware of events faster and able to access information more rapidly than ever. To a teenager, being the "one of the first to know" is critical. Instead of the news, weather or traffic updates their parents see, they want to know what is happening in *their* world of friends. Not only are they actively participating in the news, so are others; some friends, some not friends.

Years ago, students passed notes to one another. The contents of these notes were only known to the sender and receiver. Today, such notes are written on social media via their smart phones and anyone with access can see the message, share it, take sides, or inflame the issue. Often, people without knowledge of the issue will use their "invisibility" of being online and the use of an on-line name providing anonymity to make nasty comments that others may believe to be true. **Many students are vulnerable to having a reputation built for them on-line that causes them to be ashamed, angry, embarrassed resulting in a loss of self-esteem, lower grades and withdrawal from friends and family.**

A recent report indicated that parents keep their child on their family plan, paying for their cell phone use until age 32. While you wish to trust your child, it is important to realize that some of the situations students today are facing due to the use of social media result in harmful behaviors. You have a right to know what not only your child is doing on their phones but more importantly what others are saying to and about your child. The purpose of this paper is to help you, as parents, understand how your son or daughter may be using social media and provide you with the knowledge to help your child avoid online situations that may become detrimental to their well-being. The following are some of the sites you should be aware of and how your child may be using them.



Adults are probably most familiar with **Facebook**, which is a great way to keep in touch with family and friends. You have probably seen the Facebook app on your child's phone or on the family computer or iPad. Perhaps your teenager stays logged in and you have even looked at their Facebook account and have seen nothing startling.

Did you know many teenagers have two Facebook accounts? Did you know that the one you are looking at is where they post what is considered "politically correct?" Some teenagers want you to feel free to look at their first account. They are not opposed to anyone seeing what is posted, as this is where the post harmless information. Often times the second account is under a false name, perhaps a nickname, their friends will know. The students we have talked with have said, "Always assume there is more than one Facebook account."



Many teens have made **Twitter** their app of choice. Using Twitter to stay connected is fun. Using Twitter to talk derogatorily about others or to threaten them is not. **Twitter can become a high school student's worst nightmare.** In a second, someone can post 140 characters about your child and even attach a photo.

Your teen may only send a message and perhaps a provocative photo to their boyfriend or girlfriend trusting that it is "for their eyes only." As we all know, school romances don't always last. Feelings get hurt when a break-up occurs and the next thing you know one of the trusted recipients re-tweets the message and photo and a teen's personal business is now known to everyone!

What can you do to assure your child does not get themselves in such a position of humiliation and gossip? The answer is simple: **open a Twitter account and follow your child on Twitter!** Once you are following your child on Twitter, you can click on "News Feed" and see everything they have "tweeted" and anything "re-tweeted."

If you see @ before a name on their Twitter account when you are following them, this means they are in a conversation with one or multiple people. Simply click on the @ and you will see who your son or daughter is in contact with and explore their conversation and the context of what is being said. It may not be about your child but it may be about another child. This is when you can intervene and tell your son or daughter that the comments are inappropriate and they should remember to treat others on-line as they would like to be treated on-line. This age old adage may be better understood by your child if you tell them to "Tweet about others as you would like to be Tweeted about." By following your child on Twitter, you will be able to see who your child is "hanging out with" on-line.

Twitter has a feature where a user can block another user from seeing their account. If you try to follow your son or daughter and are blocked, you will see the following: **"Sorry, you cannot follow (name) because they have blocked you." If you see this, you will know that your child does not want you to see what they are tweeting.** Be aware, **any user can DM (direct message) another person thereby hiding what is being tweeted.**

If you want to find out about conversations others may be having about your child, Twitter comes with a search engine. Type in a key word or a friends name and you will be able to see all conversations. **Twinator** is another site you can go to on your computer to use any key word or name to see the conversations taking place on Twitter.



How can sharing photos be a bad thing? Normally it is not, however the remarks about the photos can cause hurt feelings and a loss of self-esteem. **Instagram** allows anyone signed in to not only post pictures but also anyone can comment on the photos. We have all been captured in photos at random with a funny look on our face or appearing silly. Unfortunately, teens can be cruel! Comments made on Instagram can be rude, cause others to comment and gossip, and be very demeaning for a young person.

Another reality we must face is that Instagram can be used to post photos from other sites. Remember the above comment about trusting someone with a provocative picture? These can be transferred from Twitter to Instagram thereby increasing the "viewing audience" and opening the door for additional detrimental comments. Again, innocent teenagers will get talked in to this by others and before long their reputation is ruined. It is important to discuss this with your son or daughter and to look at what they are up to on Instagram



Snapchat, found only on iPhones or Android Phones, probably **causes more school disruptions than all others combined**. It might be best to have your child delete this app in front of you, even if your child pays for his/her own cell phone. Snapchat is for picture sharing however it has taken on a life of its own as a vehicle for "sexting." The reason for this is that the sender can allocate an amount of time the person being sent the photo can see it. If a teenager is tempted by another to send a nude photo to a "friend," they may think they can set it so that the person receiving the photo will only see the picture for 1-10 seconds – the set a time before the photo self-deletes. What senders do not consider is that recipients can take a screen shot of the photo, thereby saving it to their phone. They can then share that picture with anyone.



A new app called Sobrr (www.sobrr.me) has been called Snapchat's "lecherous uncle." According to the its own PR release, Sobrr is "a new location-based mobile app where everyone you friend and **everything you post expires in 24 hours**." The idea is built around this promise: "If you only had 24 hours to live your life to the fullest—with no baggage from the past and no future to worry about—what would you choose to do?"



The **Ask.fm** site is anonymous, meaning **anyone can ask a question to another person without them knowing who is asking the question**. Once a person responds, their comments and the comments of others can be followed by anyone. This site is viewed by many young people as a site to be intentionally mean to others. The questions are often vicious statements. Others like to add more insulting comments. Still other young people just like to follow the comments as a means of entertainment. They talk about what is being said on ask.fm and this turns in to a "he said, she said" situation causing disruptions to the true mission of school. This is another site that if seen, you may wish to consider having your child delete it.



The Meet Me main page sounds very friendly: "Every day, we help millions of people around the world make new friends whether on the web or their mobile phones. We are committed to our mission – to build the leading social network for meeting new people." More than 15 million people are currently using the app, which allows people to meet based on age, gender, and location. A new feature of the program, "Hit Me Up," appears in chat boxes to indicate a person is available to chat immediately. What seems like a "friend" site, is really a dating site where people can find your child. In fact, of the top online dating sites (OkCupid, Match.com, PlentyofFish, Zoosk, EHarmony, Christian Mingle, Meet Me, JDate, Tinder*, Skout*), both Tinder and Skout **allow you to use GPS location to find people**. The others ask you to type a location in.

Texting

The written word can be interpreted in different ways by different readers. Without facial expressions, a reader may interpret something innocent as something derogatory. Simple texting of messages often causes disruption in school and hurt feeling because of interpretation of the message. It is wise to **check your child's texting history**. See what messages have been sent. If you see derogatory or inflammatory comments in the messaging history, talk to your son or daughter in order to help them cope with what is being said and to not be part of negative comments being made.

The students we have asked to tell us about Social Media and it use amongst teenagers will be the first to admit they do not always want their parents to see what they are texting. Parents will review their monthly bills and see very few text messages, mainly from their child to them. The parents will assume their child does not text. Our students tell us that is because students will **text their friends by using sites such as: "Text Free", "Kik" or "Haywire"**. **These apps allow a person to text without any texting charges.**

What Parents Can Do

As you can see, the world of Social Media has evolved rapidly. It allows us to be in touch constantly and be the first to "know" when news happens. It is a powerful tool that can enrich our lives. However, with power comes responsibility. We must all be responsible for our actions. With young people, this is a learning process.

As parents, we must work with our children to teach them to be responsible in all aspects of their lives, especially in the use of Social Media. The "Golden Rule" applies to *Social Media* as it applies to all aspects of our lives: "Treat others as you would want to be treated." Hopefully the information provided above will assist you in helping your son or daughter develop proper habits for using the power of Social Media for good and also keep you aware of how some choose to use the power of Social Media for negative purpose.

Here are some simple steps to think about when determining how to deal with your child's use of social media:

- First and foremost, **be clear about the rules**. Make sure your child knows what the consequence will be for using social media inappropriately or for causing a school disruption by posting inappropriate things online. Let them know to always treat others online the way they would want to be treated. Depending on the issue, the consequences of ugly posts can include school discipline or even legal consequences.
- **Make sure your child knows what is too much information**. Photos which show local team names & sites as well as just giving out information like phone numbers, school names, etc. can lead people to your child who you may not want around.
- Be sure to **open** every app on your child's phone if you want to know how that phone is being used. When you look at a smartphone or tablet, you can see a variety of icons for email, texting, games, etc. **Did you know that those icons can be changed?** What may look like an innocent calculator function may actually be a new social media app in disguise.
- Be sure your child understands that **certain words are never funny or part of a joke**. Just as you can be prosecuted for shouting "fire" in a movie theater, you can be prosecuted for typing words such as "bomb" in the wrong context on social media. Terms such as cyber bullying and cyber stalking have only been a part of our language for a few short years, but long enough to become real and prosecutable crimes. Many of these issues happen outside of the school and outside of the school day, but become a huge disruption at school. **Sometimes the issues are resolved within the school setting or between students. Sometimes law enforcement has to become involved.**
- **Have random phone checks**. Look for texting history – if there is none or very little, messages have probably been deleted. Also check all icons to see what applications they open.
- **Remind your child that the Internet is forever**. Posts can go viral, apps that erase content after a certain amount of time don't block the ability to screen capture a photo and re-post it, cell phone providers can retrieve records, and the list goes on. Sending a provocative photo to your boyfriend/girlfriend will not turn out well if the relationship sours and someone wants revenge. **If it's something inappropriate for your parent to see, it probably should not be texted or posted.** Colleges, scholarship committees, college athletics, and potential employers all search out potential candidates on social media.
- **Always assume there's a new app** and keep learning. Talk with other parents or young adults about social media to learn what they've seen and get resources if you need them. Just doing an internet search of "How does Kik work?" will give you the information you may need.
- **Search for your child online**. Just Google his/her name and see what comes up. Possibly add the school or town to narrow your search.

Great Sites for Families to Visit

Follow these sites for updates and ideas to keep current on social media trends:

National Center for Missing or Exploited Children: <http://www.netsmartz.org> ; <http://www.missingkids.org>
Microsoft Safety & Security Center: <http://www.microsoft.com/security/online-privacy/social-networking.aspx>
Stay Safe Online (sponsored by the National Cyber Security Alliance): <http://www.staysafeonline.org/>
Common Sense Media: <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>
SafetyWeb: <http://www.safetyweb.com/social-networking-safety-tips>
kidSAFE Seal Program: <http://www.kidsafeseal.com>
TeenSafe Monitoring Program: <http://www.teensafe.com/>

The 15 Most Popular Social Networks Sites as of August 2015

Here are the top 15 Most Popular Social Networking Sites as derived from our *eBizMBA Rank* which is a continually updated average of each website's *Alexa Global Traffic Rank*, and U.S. Traffic Rank from both *Compete* and *Quantcast*. "*"#" Denotes an estimate for sites with limited data.



1 | Facebook – basic social networking
[900,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



2 | Twitter – social networking in 140 characters or less
[310,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



3 | LinkedIn – a more business-oriented – social networking site
[255,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



4 | Pinterest a “visual discovery tool where user collect ideas for projects and interests”
[250,000,000 – Est. Mnth Visitors](#)



5 | Google Plus+ “a social networking and identity service”
[120,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



6 | Tumblr - a microblogging site known for a large amount of pornographic content
[110,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



7 | Instagram – a photo-sharing site
[100,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



8 | VK – A site categorized by spam filters as a pornography site
[80,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



9 | Flickr – Yahoo’s photo-sharing site
[65,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



10 | Vine – a 6-second video share site
[42,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



11 | Meetup – a dating site
[40,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



12 | Tagged a “social discovery network” to find others with similar interests/locations to “help everyone feel love and belonging”
[38,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



13 | Ask.fm a site which allows anonymous questions & answers until posters give contact information
[37,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



14 | MeetMe – a dating site
[15,500,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)



15 | ClassMates – a high school & college class member/class reunion site
[15,000,000 - Estimated Monthly Visitors](#)

A few more sites:

Reddit – is a message board where users submit links. Instead of loading information in real time like Facebook or Twitter, the stream of content is determined by users’ “upvote” and “downvote” choices.

Foursquare/Swarm – The Foursquare app lets you “check in” at a site such as a restaurant or movie theater. Many businesses give away coupons and other promotions for those who check in at their business. The Swarm app lets users see where your friends are, let them know where you are, and then you can chat and plan to meet at a location at a later time.

Pheed – is a newcomer in the social media world. The app, which brings together sites like Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr, “makes it easy and fast to share voice-notes, music, photos, videos and text.” Users have their own “channel” to post information and followers can leave “pheedback” (comments) about the content.

Youtube – while it’s not a social media site, Youtube is one of the most popular search engines in the world. Kids post videos and search for videos throughout the site. It’s common for videos to be saved with quirky names so you can find the content unless someone tells you what specific words to search.