

*Parenting Tools:*

## **Allowing Access to Social Media**



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## **Parenting Tools: Teens & Social Media**

At the time of this writing, most 6th graders are using social media. Social media requires a lot of responsibility and maturity on the part of those using it. We hope some of the following suggestions will help you disciple your child in the use of social media.

### **Explain how social media, like everything else, is to be used for the glory of God.**

In conversations with your children, help them to understand that even social media has eternal significance. As all things in life, God is Creator and Sustainer. All things were made by Him and ultimately for Him. Discuss with your child ways that social media can be used for the glory of God.

(Colossians 1:16–18, Colossians 3:17)

### **Help your child find identity in Christ rather than in a social media profile**

Most social media outlets serve as an expression of the self and allow a person to write a bio, share photos, and express ideas. With social media, people tend to present themselves to the world in hopes that they are perceived as they would like to be perceived. Because of this, it is extremely easy for social media users to find their identities in their social media profiles.

Users may tend to conclude whether they are popular or not by how many friends or followers they have. Secretly, narcissistically we ask ourselves, “Do I have more followers than the people I am following?” It is easy to perceive our value based off of how many likes we get after posting a photo. Furthermore, if a picture we post does not get enough “likes,” then we may decide to delete it. Being

discouraged by a lack of “likes,” teen girls may be driven to post immodest photos in hopes of getting more likes and comments.

Approaching social media in these ways contradicts a biblical understanding of who Christ has created us to be. As you talk with your children about their use of social media, help them to understand that social media is not an accurate way to determine who they are. Only the Bible gives us assured truths about ourselves.

(Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:10)

### **Teach your child how to interact appropriately on social media.**

Just as parents should teach their kids how to interact with others face-to-face, so, too, parents should advise their kids how to interact with others in the social media realm. Most social media outlets are designed for people to connect with one another. Therefore, there is the need for teens to have wisdom and tact as they use social media.

Just as you might imagine, conversations similar to those that take place at a sleepover or at the school lunch table when adults are not around can take place through social media. Teens often participate in a social media activity called “TBH” (To Be Honest), which is similar to a game of “truth or dare,” without the dare part. Teens may also take part in what is called “rating,” a practice in which students will rate each other with a number according to good looks. These social media activities, among many others, are constantly evolving and are ways that teens are likely to interact with each other. Parents should make their children aware that similar social media conversations like these take place. Parents also need to explain that the difference between face-to-face and online conversations is that while face-to-face conversations usually can

stay between a small group of people, social media conversations are usually on display for everyone to see.

### **Advise your child about social media safety.**

Inform your child about some of the safety risks of social media. Explain that since social media is through a screen and is not a face-to-face interaction, it can be easy for people to present themselves deceptively online and then actually be a different person in real life. Help your child know when to block access to another person or avoid people that he or she does not know.

Parents, understand that your child lives in a culture that praises those who have the most followers/friends. It will be tempting for your children to compete for followers for the sake of popularity, even if it means that they do not know who is following them.

In addition to safety from strangers, parents should also warn their children about the dangers of sexually explicit content. Whether it is YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Vine, or Snapchat, it is not hard to access images or dialogue about sexually explicit content through these social media venues. Help your child be aware that sexually explicit content is prevalent in each social media outlet and can come in the form of direct messages containing revealing photos sent privately to your child, searches for swimsuit models, or pornography.

### **Model to your child how to be in the world but not of the world.**

Probably the best way to approach social media is to “be in the world but not of the world.” Social media’s influence is growing and becoming an established and accustomed way in which people connect and communicate. To not engage in social media is almost to avoid being in the world. Since it is the language of the people, it

is profitable and fitting that Christians be involved with social media with a missional mindset.

As our Legacy Principle communicates, it is impossible to expect our children to “be in the world but not of the world” in the realm of social media, unless we as parents are modeling this practice before them. For these reasons, we encourage you to be on every social media outlet that your children are using; this allows you to do two things. First, as parents you are able to supervise and protect when necessary. Second and more importantly, you can model how to missionally be “in the world but not of it.”

(John 17:15–18 , Ephesians 5:1–2, 8–16