

Social Media and Your Child's Safety

This month is National Bullying Prevention Month; therefore, we'd like to take some time to provide you some information about social media and safety. Technology is everywhere today! Children spend a great deal of time on devices in today's world, but want to encourage you to provide supervision and to teach them how to appropriate use apps to help prevent bullying. The following are a few of our recommendations for families:

1. Decide what level of technology is appropriate for each child in your family. Don't blindly give your student a phone with a full data plan without appropriate training, supervision, restrictions, and guidance. Consider gradually giving students more phone/internet/ app privileges as they mature and demonstrate responsible behavior. Set appropriate consequences if students fail to abide by family policies.
2. Regularly check and monitor apps and text messages on your student's phone. Set up restrictions on your student's phone and explore options that allow you to monitor your student's social media and internet activity. Start restrictively and gradually give your student more privileges if they use technology appropriately.
3. Have frequent discussions with your student regarding what is appropriate to post on social media and how to respond to inappropriate posts, texts, and requests. **Discuss** what information is appropriate to make public. **Ask** your student what they are seeing on social media. **Guide** them in how to deal with negative posts. **Encourage** them to "unfriend" someone who is being nasty or sending harassing messages.
4. Monitor the "friends" or "followers" on your student's social media accounts. Many times students blindly accept strangers as "friends".
5. Require your students to set all social media accounts to "private" so only accepted friends can view posts. Check on these settings frequently - many times app updates change default privacy settings.
6. Set up "no cellphone" times such as mealtimes, bedtime, and family time. Consider setting up guidelines that all family members follow.
7. At bedtime, have a designated spot for cellphones (kitchen counter/parent bedroom) to keep phones out of your students' bedrooms at night.
8. Do not feel guilty for "invading the students privacy" by monitoring cell phone activity. Parents always ask questions--"Where are you going?"..."Who are you going with?"...What are you doing at their house?". Parents even check to see if the student is where they said they would be or check out who their student is actually hanging out with them. In this digital age, it is important to do the same with cell phones and internet activity as your student grows and develops through middle school.

POPULAR APPS FOR TEENS



Snapchat is one of the most popular apps for teens today. Pictures and/or videos can be shared to someone's "story." Images and videos on the story are visible for 24 hours. Pictures and videos can also be shared privately (individually or to a group) and can be set to "self-destruct" after 1-10 seconds.



Sarahah (the Arabic word for Honesty) is an app that allows people to send anonymous comments to users with no way to track who the comment came from. This app is linked to Snapchat accounts. This app has recently been in the news as it has caused a rise in bullying behaviors online.



Instagram unites the most popular features of social media sites: sharing, seeing, and commenting on photos. Instagram also lets you apply filters and effects to your photos, making them look high-quality and

artistic. Hashtags can make pictures more visible to the public. Mature content is easily accessed. There is an ability to send private messages.

 **Twitter** is an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short 140-character messages called "tweets". Registered users can read and post tweets, but unregistered users can only read them. Although you adjust the setting so your tweets are private, public tweets are the norm for teens.

 **Facebook** is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. The site is available in 37 different languages; however, it is on the decline with teens.

 **Kik** uses a device's data plan or wifi to send messages. Kik also allows users to share photos, sketches, mobile webpages, and other content. Users cannot verify contacts' identities. Even if you leave a conversation, you can continually be added back in. This opens the door for cyber bullying.

 **Ask.fm** is an online social network that enables people to send questions to each other and answer them, when they want to. When you **ask** a question you can choose whether to **ask** it anonymously or you can reveal your name. If you want, you can choose not to receive anonymous questions. Bullying is a major concern on this app and the anonymity can encourage bullying behavior.

 **Musical.ly** is one of the fastest growing social media apps. It is used almost exclusively by children to chat, send videos, and create new music. It is similar to the former Vine app, in that users can post short, looping videos. There is an age restriction of 13 on this app (to reduce liability for the company); however, it is easy for kids to navigate around that. The songs within the app are not always age appropriate.

 **Voo** allows users to video chat (similar to Facetime), but it allows users to chat with someone on any device. Profiles are set to public by default. There is also an age restriction of 13 on this device, but no verification of age. Content is unsolicited.

PROACTIVE APPS FOR PARENTS

 **KnowBullying** is a free app that provides parents directed age-specific conversation starters for their children, regular reminders, social media strategies and tips, and suggestions on how to help their children deal with difficult social situations.

 **TeenSafe Control** allows parents to monitor their child's cell phone activity, including sent and received text messages (even deleted texts), call and web history. However, the feedback is not real-time. There is a Live GPS Location Monitoring feature. Parents need to know their child's Apple ID and password to set up an account. One free week trial is available and then, for continued service, users pay a monthly fee.

 **OurPact – Parental Control** is an app that allows parents to locate family members and limit screentime by blocking internet, texting, and app access during desired times or indefinitely. This is a free app that can be upgraded to premium for \$4.99/month.