

THE PARENT GUIDE TO MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Parenting a middle schooler has never been easy, but today's social media influence has made it more challenging than ever. Social media use in our society brings an entirely new set of challenges to parents as well as students. It is important to know how to navigate these challenges as a parent and how to guide your child in appropriate use.

by Teresa Woodruff, LPC, ATR-BC, CPCS
Director of *Art It Out Therapy Center*

1 BE INFORMED

Currently, the most common social media platforms for middle school students are: Instagram, Youtube, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Vine, WeChat, & Reddit. Learn about the specific platform that your child wants to use.

2 BE OPEN & FLEXIBLE

Encourage open conversation about social media and teach appropriate use. Let your child know that if he has questions, you are a resource and would be happy to help him navigate social media challenges without judgement.

3 TRY NOT TO FORBID

Oftentimes when parents discourage all social media use, the child continues to use it or uses a friend's account without the knowledge of a parent.

4 GRADUALLY GIVE MORE FREEDOM

When teaching your child to drive a car, you don't start on the interstate. Apply that same logic to social media. Start with one platform. Some experts recommend sharing an account at first.

5 DEVELOP AN AGREEMENT

Before starting social media, mutually agree on how often their accounts will be reviewed by you. Define the rules and expectations, and listen to your child's opinion about what the rules should be. Be sure to discuss appropriate vs inappropriate texts/posts and usage. Writing down these agreements may be helpful.

6 FOSTER CONNECTION

Use social media as a way to connect with your child by asking questions and expressing interest in what they find entertaining and what your child and peers are posting.



7 MODEL APPROPRIATE USE

Studies show that middle school students use social media platforms or text constantly, disclosing use of "several times an hour." Intentionally try to model setting personal limits, such as: try not to check your own phone during dinner and look family members in the eye (instead of looking at a phone) when speaking with them. Additionally, encourage your child to turn off notifications and take the phone out of their room at night so it is easier for them to resist the urge to check their social media accounts all the time.

8 CONSIDER YOUR OWN POSTS

If you use social media, ask your children if it is okay to post a picture of them or share their accomplishments. Be respectful of what you share about your child, and intentionally model appropriate use.

9 RESPECT PRIVACY BUT BE HANDS ON

Find the balance of monitoring your child's safety while maintaining your child's trust and respecting their privacy. Be careful not to spy on your child or access their account without their knowledge. Instead, encourage them to show you their account and look at peers' accounts together.

10 SAFETY & PRIVACY ARE KEY

Teach your child how to use privacy settings and set them together. Turn location settings off so that the platform cannot track your child's location. Also, teach them to never share their passwords with friends or anyone other than you.