

# **Social media advice for parents of teens**

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The 13-year-old was glued to her smartphone as her fingers rapidly tapped out a message to her followers. She could then be seen scrolling through a variety of pictures and occasionally stopping to click a "Like" button.

Her parents knew that their daughter could be on her phone for several hours doing this if they let her. They were getting concerned about her total reliance on her phone's social media apps but were puzzled as to what to do about their concerns. They did not want to kill her social life but still wanted her to be safe.

Many parents see similar smartphone behaviors in their teenagers and share the same concerns with the parents above. Even the most conscientious parents can have a hard time keeping up with the most popular social media apps. Just when parents get used to Facebook, their teens have moved onto Instagram, Snapchat, or Vine.

The good news for parents is that many of these social media services and apps overlap considerably. This means that when new apps and services come along, they are often not that different from apps of which parents may already be familiar.

While most teenagers use social media apps safely, parents should be aware of some features that can cause teens trouble. One feature to be concerned about is a public default setting. This means that when teenagers start to use the service, their profile and postings become available by default. Parents should check to make sure their teens have gone into the privacy settings and made their profile private on all social media apps.

Another feature many social media apps can incorporate is location tracking and sharing. Apps such as Instagram will allow the location of where a picture was taken to be posted. This can mean users can be tracked to within a city block of the location where the picture was taken. Teens who use apps with location tracking should turn off the location settings on their phone and within the social media app.

A third feature that is relatively new is the ability to live stream video. Apps like Periscope and soon Facebook allow teens to put up live video streams to an audience.

The fact that the stream is live means that teenagers can inadvertently share things they do not want to share and do it in front of people they do not know who are watching the feed. Parents should discuss with their teenagers about why they want to share video of themselves and what they should and should not share.

A fourth feature in many social media apps is the trend to have "temporary" pictures and videos. This feature was popularized by Snapchat but is also incorporated in other apps. As with all things online, even disappearing pictures and messages can be saved and shared with others. The danger of this feature is that teenagers may be less careful in what they post, believing it is only temporary. Parents should let them know that nothing is truly "temporary" and that they should consider the possible consequences for sending any message or photo before posting it online.

Teenagers are using social media apps and features frequently. Parents can feel overwhelmed trying to keep up. By focusing on the features and not the specific apps, parents can still keep their teens safe without becoming experts on every single app that is being used.