

# Mother Lode: Social media creates new world for teens

Like many adults my age, I have a love-hate relationship with social media.

I don't kid myself. I know social media is here to stay. But sometimes, I wonder what it is doing to the minds and mental health of our young people.

I can't imagine being in constant contact with my friends. I can't imagine being under constant scrutiny for my looks and my actions. I can't imagine gauging my self-worth by how many people are following me on Twitter or how many friends liked my photo on Instagram.

The minute we as parents gave our kids a cell phone or computer, their lives dramatically changed. Now everyone knows what they are doing all the time. And I don't care how diligent you are at monitoring all the social media activities and the devices your kids have access to, there is no way you can know all they are exposed to or exposing themselves to. It is constantly changing and vastly mind-blowing.

Recently, my younger daughter was having a bad day. As we were talking, her phone was dinging with text messages, her Twitter feed and Facebook updates. I commented to her that I had to believe that at least part of the stress she was feeling was caused by the pressure of being in constant contact with her friends. Having to constantly hear everyone's teenage angst and worries, having to know everyone's every move, being compelled to respond to every text and social media message has to put an enormous amount of strain on a person.

While she nodded and seemed to agree, I know she really won't change her behavior. Even though she seemed to see the logic and benefit of disconnecting a bit, the stakes are too high for that kind of reaction. She's worried it will harm her friendships and put her outside the information loop. And that, to a teenage girl, is unacceptable.

The world I grew up in is different from the world my daughters have experienced. Heck, I had to sit under the dining room table in our living room, trying to whisper into the phone, if I wanted to have a private conversation with a friend.

Of course, I realize things change. I use and even enjoy social media. It's a great way to stay in touch with friends and relatives whom I might not otherwise communicate with on a regular basis. In my professional setting, social media is an essential tool for disseminating information quickly to a large number of people.

But I worry about the implications for our young people. Will they grow up without the skills to be truly alone, even enjoy it occasionally? Will they ever take pleasure in reading something other than a text message? Will they have the ability to disconnect when they get a real job or when life's inevitable demands take over? Will they be able to shut out the world long enough to take care of themselves?

Only time will tell. But I am guessing my parents asked the same thing about the effects of listening to all that rock 'n' roll music or watching television or sending and receiving all those darn emails. I survived. I just hope my kids will, too.