

Social Media: What Parents Need to Know

Social media is more than just Facebook and Instagram. According to Oxford Dictionary, social media is defined as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking”. There are thousands of online platforms that allow for information sharing among users. YouTube (85%), Instagram (72%) and Snapchat (69%) are the most popular online platforms used by U.S. teens ages 13-17, followed by Facebook (51%), Twitter (32%), Tumblr (9%) and Reddit (7%) (PEW Research). PEW also found that in 2018, 95% of teens reported they have access to a smart phone, up from the 73% of teens who reported having access to a smartphone in 2014-2015 (PEW Research). With the rise in the number of teens that own or have access to a smart phone, it is more important than ever for parents to be aware of social media trends and ways to keep their child safe online.

Here are the apps we are hearing the most about:

YouTube, not to be confused with YouTube Kids intended for kids under the age of 12, provides access to videos from all over the world with a variety of content. With hundreds of videos uploaded every minute, youth can easily spend hours watching videos. YouTube suggests videos based on your recent searches and a new video automatically begins to play when the one before it ends, which can make it easy to lose track of time and difficult to put down. In order to be compliant with new guidelines set by the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), YouTube now requires users to identify if their video is appropriate for children or not. (Additional information on new regulations found here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0CzTAeLNRbg>). The new parameters are a step in the right direction, but parents still need to be cautious of adult content on YouTube. There may still be videos that look like they are for youth, like cartoons, but the subject matter is in fact inappropriate for youth.



Snapchat is an app in which users take and send a “snap” to other users and the snap will disappear after a brief period of time, typically a few seconds. A snap is commonly a photo with or without a caption, but can also be a message or video. Users can also create “stories”, which is a series of photos and videos. Users can subscribe to accounts to view public stories as they are posted. When users send snaps back and forth, a snapstreak begins. Snapchat rewards users with emojis the longer the streak continues. Teens have reported that they feel like they are being a good friend by keeping the streak going or that they feel popular for having streaks with multiple people. They put a significant amount of pressure on themselves to keep streaks going by asking friends to log into their account to keep the streak going when they don’t have access to their phone (Business Insider). For some students, particularly those that have an existing mental health concern, this can trigger anxiety or stress. Snapchat does not have parental controls that are easy to navigate. In fact, most of the settings can be changed back. Here is a step by step guide to help you adjust settings in Snapchat: <https://protectyoureyes.com/apps/snapchat-parental-controls/>

YOLO: Q&A is a Snapchat add-on app that allows users to send and receive anonymous questions and answers from other Snapchat users. YOLO first hit the market in 2019 and is currently one of the top free apps in the Apple store. Apple gave YOLO a 17+ age rating, but with the popularity of Snapchat among teens, it is likely they are also taking an interest in this add on app as well. Note that a rating is only a recommendation; it does not prevent users from downloading and using the app. The potential for bullying is very high with this app because of the anonymous sharing. Parents have stated that soon after downloading the app, children receive hateful messages and sexually suggestive comments (commonsensemedia.org). If your child is going to use this app, make sure that their account settings are set to private.

TikTok (formerly called musical.ly) is an app for users to generate and post music videos. Users can utilize filters and effects within the app and can even edit videos. There are several different types of videos from Memes, Comedy and Sports to Food and Pets. Kids find the app entertaining. Many users report that it can be easy to lose track of time. They like that the videos are short and they can message other users, which cannot be done on YouTube. Videos may have sexual content or swearing, making them inappropriate for young kids. Due to a settlement that was finalized in 2019, users under 13 now have their own section for video viewing. Parents still need to talk to their child about appropriate use and to report bullying.

Social Media is not inherently bad, but without educating youth on how to properly use social media there will be greater instances of risky behavior. For example, numerous challenges have circulated online that have caught the attention of youth. The latest challenge circulating on TikTok is the “skull breaker challenge” or the “tripping challenge”, in which three people plan to jump in the air at the same time, but instead the two on the outside kick the legs out from under the middle person. This challenge, like others (Tide Pod Challenge, choking game, Momo challenge etc.), easily gain popularity online through social media. Teens have a tendency to experiment and take risks. Social media has just provided a place for bad ideas to catch on and tempt adventurous youth at a greater rate than before through social media. It is important to have regular conversations with youth about how to be safe online and the consequences that their online behavior can have.

Tips for parents:

- Know what your child is using. If you do not know how an app works, download it and learn how to use it.
- Approve apps before your child downloads them. You can have your child use your app store or account to download apps, so that they must be approved by you before they are downloaded.
- Engage in conversations about trending apps. Youth trends are always changing, one of the best ways to stay up-to-date is to ask youth what they are into.
- Recognize the warning signs. If social media begins to impact your child’s life in a negative way (decline in grades, lack of sleep, withdrawal from activities etc.), it may be time to seek help.
- Discuss appropriate communication online. Help them understand the consequences of their actions online.
- Get youth to think about consequences of their actions by talking about online challenges and risky behaviors. Ask them whether they think the challenge is safe or dangerous.

Resources:

Set up Parental Controls on iPhone, iPad, and iPod: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201304>

Set up Parental Controls on Android tablets and phones:

<https://support.google.com/googleplay/answer/1075738?hl=en>

References:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>

<https://yourteenmag.com/technology/the-most-popular-apps-for-teenagers>

www.common sense media.org

<https://protectyoungeyes.com/>

<https://www.businessinsider.com/teens-explain-snapchat-streaks-why-theyre-so-addictive-and-important-to-friendships-2017-4>

Homebound- Tips to Help Manage School Closures and Social Distancing

Children and families across the country are becoming all too familiar with the term “social distancing”. As medical experts press upon families the importance of staying home, learning to navigate such lifestyle changes may be difficult for kids. According to the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, not only are boredom and frustration common during extended periods at home, “the lifestyle changes may also contribute to social isolation from peers and teachers, anxiety, and tension among family members due to a lack of personal space at home.” Over the past couple of weeks, several resources have surfaced to support families in better managing their time at home. Below are some of our favorite tips and ideas.

1. Keep a Routine- kids are used to following a schedule and thrive on structure. Develop a routine that fits into the “new normal” for days at home. Making a visual schedule that can be posted in a common place within the home can help communicate to kids what to expect. Include times to wake up and start the day, mealtimes, set aside time for learning/school work, provide breaks for exercise and outdoor play, include free time, as well as family activities such as game night or movie night.
2. Help Kids Stay Social- social distancing reduces children/teen’s capacity to socialize with friends. The impact of this may vary depending upon the age and development of your child. For example, teenagers may need more opportunities to connect with peers compared to younger children. FaceTime, Zoom, Skype and certain video apps allow for face to face connections from afar. Encourage kids to pick up the phone and call friends or family members weekly to stay connected. While email and instant messaging are also tools that can keep people connected, it doesn’t replace seeing someone’s face or hearing a familiar voice. Now may also be a good time to introduce kids and teens to the “old fashioned” written letter. Get out the paper, pens and envelopes and mail weekly letters to grandparents, friends or neighbors.
3. Channel Your Child/Teen’s Interests- a key to keeping kids engaged in activities is making sure it is interesting to them. Ask kids to think about a new skill they would like to learn, or a place they would like to visit. Several online platforms like YouTube offer opportunities to learn new skills while there are many online resources to take virtual tours of landmarks and other parts of the world. For older kids and teenagers, time at home may also be an opportunity to teach everyday life skills like how to iron a shirt, do laundry, change a tire, mow the lawn or cook.
4. Tap into Online Educational Resources- Live Science offers a list of games, science experiments, live demonstrations and virtual tours <https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-kids-activities.html>. Scholastic has a learn at home website that offers stories, videos, and fun learning challenges <https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html>. If you are familiar with the ever popular TED Talk platform, TED-ED is TED’s youth and education initiative designed to spark children/teen’s curiosity through a library of video based lessons organized by age level and subject <https://ed.ted.com/parent>.

References: American Academy of Pediatrics; Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress; www.livescience.com; www.parade.com; www.scholastic.com

Managing Youth Anxiety During COVID-19

School closures, activity cancelations, and adhering to the new concept of “social distancing” has quickly become a new reality for our kids and teenagers. Helping our youth make sense of the changes taking place in the world around them is something educators and parents across Nebraska are facing. It is normal to feel fear, uncertainty and worry during wide-scale disease outbreaks that are contagious, especially when the normalcy of everyday life is turned upside down. Additionally, it is hard to escape the endless news cycles detailing the spread COVID-19, which can increase feelings of anxiety. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, these feelings can feel even more overwhelming for a child/teen who is already suffering from an anxiety disorder or who may be predisposed to feeling more anxious during times of uncertainty.

Below are tips to help communicate with you children and teens about the Coronavirus:

Model Calmness- children are perceptive to the behaviors of others in their environment. By behaving calmly, you are sending a message to your child/teen that there is no need to panic. Monitor your own feelings and reactions and if you are feeling anxious, take a break or pause to take a few deep breaths before communicating with your child/teen.

Maintain Normalcy- changes to everyday routines and schedules can be stressful for kids. During school closure, structure during the day may help ease anxiety. Attempt to maintain normal household routines as much as possible. For example, stick to regular mealtimes and bedtimes and build time into the day for educational and enrichment activities as well as exercise.

Listen and Validate- Actively listen to your child/teen’s thoughts, feelings, fears and questions about COVID-19. Express empathy for how they are feeling. Uncertainty about the future can be hard for adults to process, it can be equally difficult for our youth. Acknowledge and be careful not to dismiss their feelings. Validating feelings can help our children and teens feel understood and enhance their ability to process emotions. It may also be helpful to inform them that there are lots of other children and teens around the world who are experiencing some of the same feelings.

Keep Talking- Be mindful that your child/teen may be hearing about COVID-19 on social media, from friends and through news outlets. Limiting and/or monitoring the exposure of your child/teen to news cycles can help ease anxiety. Help kids to understand that every news story may not have all the accurate details. Educate yourself on the facts from reliable sources such as the CDC or your local Department of Health and Human Services. Do your best to answer questions honestly but remember that it is okay if you don’t have an answer. Let kids know that as you get more information, you will update them. Keep in mind that what we share with a younger child is different than what is developmentally appropriate to share with a teenager.

Help Sit with Anxiety- Help your child/teen recognize and verbalize the experience of anxiety rather than avoiding it or trying to distract from it. Putting feelings into words can help individuals process emotions. Sitting with unpleasant feelings can be challenging but it can help kids to realize that it is an experience they can get through and it doesn’t have to define them or their life.

Help Practice Relaxation Strategies- Relaxation strategies like mindful breathing exercises can help children/teens feel calmer. Mindfulness has been found to change the brain in the same way that exercise changes the body. Several apps offer free guided mindfulness exercises such as, “Smiling Mind”, “Stop, Breathe, Think” and “Insight Meditation Timer”.

For additional information follow the below links:

[https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-a-parent-resource?mc_cid=e21891c772&mc_eid=be3546cfc1](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-(coronavirus)-a-parent-resource?mc_cid=e21891c772&mc_eid=be3546cfc1)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/talking-with-children.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

References: Anxiety and Depression Association of America; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); The Child Mind Institute