

How to help your teen use social media safely

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(HealthDay)—Social media is now a key part of American youngsters' lives, so parents need to provide guidance and rules to help them enjoy its benefits and protect them from potential dangers, experts say.

Social media can help kids connect and find others who share their interests and concerns, SAY specialists at the Children's Hospital Los Angeles Health Network, which comprises more than 160 pediatricians.

But those benefits come with potential threats. Among them: cyberbullying and cyberstalking, exposure to inappropriate content, distraction from homework, [social isolation](#), [privacy issues](#), and anxiety caused by unrealistic comparisons with others.

While kids can have [social media](#) accounts starting at age 13, it's best to keep them off social media for as long as possible, said Dr. Bhavana Arora, medical director of the network.

When children do start using social media, [parents](#) should talk with them about rules and privacy settings. Parents who are unfamiliar with the sites or apps their children are using should learn about them.

Parents also need to lead by example, putting their phones aside and spending time with their kids, said Dr. Jennifer Hartstein, whose practice is part of the network.

"Be available, and create media-free spaces in your [family life](#)," Hartstein said in a network news release. "Teenagers can get plenty of content online, but they need parents to give them values."

As soon as teens open social media accounts, parents should "friend" them. This might be more difficult when they get older, Hartstein said.

Young people should never allow people they don't know personally into their social media networks, and should never share passwords with anyone. Encourage them to think carefully before posting anything online.

Parents should review their children's privacy settings, monitor their online activity, and talk to them about what they see to identify problems and find solutions together.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [children and social media](#).

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