

Your teen and social media: Experts offer tips to parents

July 31 2023, by Steven Reinberg



When parents meet U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy, one

concern comes up time after time.

"The most common question [parents](#) ask me is: 'Is social media safe for my kids,' " [Murthy](#) said. "The answer is that we don't have enough evidence to say it's safe, and in fact, there is growing evidence that [social media use](#) is associated with harm to young people's mental health."

Cyberbullying, cyberstalking, anxiety, inappropriate content, other [social pressures](#), a distraction from school, and body image issues are but a few of the potential pitfalls.

"We can't just take away our kids' phones or computers," said [Mari Radzik](#), a [clinical psychologist](#) in the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA). "It's about figuring out how we can guide them in using and navigating these tools."

Here are tips parents can use to help teens ease the negative effects of social media:

1) Set rules: A [federal law](#) makes it illegal for children under 13 to have [social media accounts](#), and legislation is being considered to protect kids' information until they are 16. It's best to put off social media for as long as possible, experts say.

Parents should talk with their kids, reviewing rules and privacy settings, said pediatrician [Dr. Jennifer Hartstein](#), who is part of the CHLA Care Network. If you're unfamiliar with the sites or apps they're using, take the time to check them out.

2) Follow, or "friend," your kids on social media. Monitoring your child's online activity doesn't mean spying on them, but they should know that parents are aware of what they're up to.

3) Model the right behavior. "As parents, ultimately, you only have control over yourself," said Sarah Voyer, lead [social worker](#) in the Division of Psychiatry at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. "So, being conscientious of your own behaviors, whether that's with phone usage or diet and health, is a big part of parenting. If you do something hypocritical, they're going to see that."

4) Recognize any behavioral changes and offer to talk. Has your teen's mood fluctuated? Are they eating differently? Sleeping more or less than usual? Are they isolating in their room? These are signs parents should be aware of and be prepared to talk about.

If it's clear that social media is affecting your child's physical and mental well-being, parents should recommend taking a break. "There are some kids who can break the cycle, and sometimes it takes the parent to help with that," Radzik said.

5) Check-in regularly. Talking to children and teens about [social media](#) isn't a one-time thing. The key is checking in frequently and being attentive to and aware of your kids' media use.

"Active, attentive parenting is crucial," Radzik said. "I know it can be exhausting, but it's our job as parents to be mindful of what our kids are doing and how we can help them feel confident, self-aware and resilient."

More information: For more on kids and social media, visit the [American Psychological Association](#).

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Citation: Your teen and social media: Experts offer tips to parents (2023, July 31) retrieved 29

April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-07-teen-social-media-experts-parents.html>

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