

What Parents need to know about their Children & Social Networking



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Social media is continuously becoming more and more popular- especially among young people. Most children are exposed to social media on a daily basis. By age ten, close to 60% of kids have already used a social networking website (Williams, 2014). Many parents have their own Facebook profile online, or are at least somewhat familiar with Facebook. However, there are several other social media websites children and young teens may be using. Here are the top 7 social media sites children use besides Facebook:

Twitter:

Twitter is used to send instant “tweets” (status updates) for your followers to view. These messages are very short- less than 140 characters, and often include “hashtags” which when clicked on direct you to thousands of posts related to that particular topic. For example, “#Twitter” would bring you to posts about and related to twitter.

What to be aware of:

- **Privacy settings:** It’s important to set your Twitter profile to private because if not tweets will be public for the world to see. However, tweets can still be “retweeted” by followers. This means your tweet will appear on their profile and can be seen by the public, or whoever follows the person who “retweeted” it. Children should be aware that they need to be careful about what they post because it may be viewed by more people than they think (Schryver, 2014).
- **Celebrities use it as a promotional tool:** One reason Twitter is popular because most celebrities have an account and their followers can see what they have to say. However, children need to be aware of the fact that celebrities often use Twitter as a promotional tool (Schryver, 2014). One quick 140 character message instantly becomes an ad for millions of their followers to see. Kids need to realize that the celebrities they look up to and follow on Twitter may not be posting about something they really enjoy and want others to know about- they may just be getting paid by a brand or company.

Instagram:

Instagram allows you to take photos, edit them in the app, and post to your Instagram profile. Similar to Twitter, Instagram also uses “hash tags” in the photo captions. When clicked on these “hashtags”, it brings you to a page full of other users photos who have hashtagged the same thing in their photo’s caption.

What to be aware of:

- **Privacy Settings:** Your Instagram account is automatically public unless the settings are changed to private. Therefore, strangers may be able to see your children’s photos and even “direct message” them photos (Schryver, 2014).
- **The “popular page”:** If a photo has a lot of “likes” it will appear on Instagram’s popular page. Users from around the world appear on this page, and many photos can be quite unsuitable, especially for children.

Snapchat:

Snapchat is an app that allows you to send photos taken on your phone to a list of friends. The photos appear for a specified amount of time (1 to 10 seconds) and then disappear.

What to be aware of:

- **Photos are not necessarily private:** Snapchat is mostly used to send funny or embarrassing photos with little risk of others seeing them. However, the person who received the photo can take a screen shot of it and then the photo is available to them on their own phone to do with whatever they want. One danger of snap chat is that it makes users feel safe sending pictures (Schryver, 2014). Children need to be aware that others may see the photos they are sending and therefore they should not be sending inappropriate pictures.
- **Friends list:** The good thing about Snapchat is you are only sending photos to the people who are on your friends list. If someone wants to send you photos, you need to accept their friend request. It's important to know who your child has on their Snapchat friends list.

Tumblr:

On Tumblr, you are able to create a blog where you can post and share messages, photos, and videos. You can also follow others blogs and see what they are posting.

What to be aware of:

- **Content can be extreme:** Inappropriate photos and videos can be easy accessed by anyone- including children.
- **Privacy is difficult:** Tumblr's default setting is public. In order to have a profile that is completely private (and password protected), users must create a second profile (Schryver, 2014). Making it so difficult to achieve privacy means that if your child has a Tumblr account, it's probably public. Their posts can therefore be viewed or "reblogged" by anyone.

Vine:

Vine allows users to post and watch 6 second videos.

What to be aware of:

- **Video content:** Videos posted by other vine users can often be unsuitable for children and young teens, setting a bad example. They may think it is okay to post similar videos to their vine account and can get into trouble. It's important to see what types of videos your child is posting.
- **Privacy settings:** Like most social media, it's public unless otherwise changed. If your child's profile isn't set to private, anyone can see what they're posting, who they are following and what they are commenting (Schryver, 2014).

Omegle:

Omegle is a chat site as well as an app that allows you to either video chat or text chat with a stranger that you are randomly paired with (Schryver, 2014).

What to be aware of:

- **Strangers have easy access to children:** There is no friends list on Omegle. Parents really have no way of knowing who their child is talking to or what information they are revealing.

Not for children and teens: Even though Omegle contains some parental control software in their privacy policy, the risk of children being exposed to dangerous strangers is very high (Schryver, 2014).

Ask.fm:

Ask.fm is a website that allows you to ask and be asked questions by other users (Schryver, 2014).

What to be aware of:

Anonymity can lead to bullying/ harassment: When people think they can post whatever they want without consequences, the results are often very mean. By using Ask.fm, children are opening them up to bullying. However, children can choose to not allow others to ask them questions anonymously. This may lessen the risk of bullying or harassment (Schryver, 2014).

These websites and apps, as well as others like them, are gaining popularity among children. Many parents are very unsettled by this and wonder if their efforts to keep their children safe online are enough. In fact, only “32 per cent of parents feel 'very confident' about helping them stay safe online” (Reporter, 2014). It’s extremely important to make sure your child understands the risks of social media and how to be safe. To learn more about how to keep children safe online visit:

<http://www.parenting.com/gallery/social-media-monitoring-kids>

References

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