

Is My Child Ready for Social Media?

Social media sites and apps like Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook are popular with young people. This often makes parents and caregivers wonder how best to talk to them about social media. Below are questions to help start the conversation.

Why do social media sites ask for a person's age to set up an account?

They do it to follow a specific law. The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (COPPA) protects children under the age of 13 from having personal information collected from them online without a parent's consent. Social media sites collect information such as home town, school, hobbies, friends, likes and dislikes, shares, photos and status updates. So, sites ask users to confirm that their age is at least 13 years old before opening an account. It is legal for people younger than 13 to have social media accounts if a parent (1) is aware of the account, (2) knows what data will be collected about the child and (3) says it is okay for the child to have the account.

How does a person know what to post?

Posting information puts it out into the public. Imagine that the information a person posts to their social media account also show up instantly on a sign in their bedroom window. What would the person want on that sign, and what might be embarrassing? This is useful to imagine when deciding what to post or to keep private.

How does a person know what to send or share?

When you send a picture or message to someone, you are also trusting how they will treat that information. Imagine if they showed it to someone else. What would your reaction be? The answer might depend on how well you know the person and also what you sent. It is important to know that sending texts, messages, pictures and videos also means giving someone else ownership of them.

Why do adults worry about young people using social media?

Starting a social media account can be compared to driving a car. Would an adult put a teen behind the wheel of car without some instruction? Of course not! Adults understand that other drivers, the speeds of roads and changing traffic conditions can make driving complicated. Like cars, many adults just want the young people they care about to use social media as safely and wisely as possible. Since it can also be pretty complicated, learning to use social media takes practice and discussion. Talking about social media can help both adults and young people make helpful decisions while enjoying their time online.