

KIDS AND SOCIAL MEDIA: how to keep tabs



Today's kids and teens are using the Internet, for better or worse. Although it can be a fun and useful tool, parents need to be aware of their kids' online activities, especially social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat.

Potential threats like cyber bullying and Internet predators are realities for kids today. And, with smartphones and other portable devices, kids can be targeted anywhere, at anytime. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following tips to keep kids safe:

Be connected with them.

Talk with your kids about which social media outlets they use, and make sure you check these outlets too. Tell them the rule is that you will be "friends" with them on any sites they use. Talk with other parents about their kids' social media sites and stay up to date on the latest ones.

Have regular checks.

If your child has a smartphone or tablet, check it once a week or more often to ensure they're being safe and appropriate. Rather than keeping it a secret, be honest with them about these checks. It will be less like "spying" and more like regular, open monitoring. You want to keep good communication and trust with your child.

Tell them about consequences.

Any photo or message posted online can be shared with the world. If they wouldn't announce it on national TV, they shouldn't share it online either.

Set time limits.

Don't let kids have their phones or devices in their rooms at night. Not only will it interfere with needed sleep, but it could be an opportunity for inappropriate social media usage. Consider capping their usage at two hours a day for total screen time.