

**Social
Media
Family
Conversation
Guide**

Social media has a powerful influence and impact on our society today.

On the positive side, social media connects us to friends and family. I love to stay in touch with childhood friends, college roommates and old colleagues. It is always fun to see my friends' kids grow up through family photos shared. I like getting recipe ideas and vacation tips on social media as well. Also, social media is a great resource to galvanize support for important causes, bringing communities together around a common goal.

Yet, social media can be distracting, isolating, polarizing and destructive. Social media platforms were developed by some of the world's brightest minds to capture our time and attention. They've intentionally engineered these apps to be highly addictive through what's called persuasive design. Addictive design features and algorithms keep children and adults online as long as possible, exposing us to a rabbit hole of harmful content.

Apps like Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat have destroyed the lives of many people—especially children. Research shows the more time spent on these platforms, the worse kids feel about themselves. With the introduction of social media, anxiety, depression, and suicide rates have skyrocketed for children. **I have many concerns with you starting to use social media.**

CONCERN 1

A major worry I have is how much time you will spend on social media.

You only get one childhood. I want your childhood to be overflowing with adventure, exploration, learning, connecting, dreaming, and creating, not consuming, scrolling, liking and following. Many teens spend upwards of four to seven hours scrolling endlessly on social media apps. I don't want this to become your reality. If you spend hours on social media, you are losing hours to sleep, study, read, connect with people in person, and devote time to passions you love (like basketball, soccer, art, piano etc.).

CONCERN 2

I worry about you suffering from FOMO.

FOMO—fear of missing out—haunts children and adults alike.

The dictionary defines FOMO “as anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on a social media.” Spending endless hours on a newsfeed of someone’s fabulous trips, new acquisitions and exciting social life—which may or may not represent reality at all—is bound to make you question your own happiness. Comparing “likes,” “followers,” “streaks,” and “shares” will likely leave you with a feeling of inadequacy and huge surge of FOMO.

CONCERN 3

I don't want the endless loop of unattainable perfection on social media to influence how you feel about your body.

On social media, image after image showcases altered and filtered photos where **physical beauty is valued above all else.** Apps like Facetune thin out girls’ waistlines, plump up lips and define cheekbones. Accessing this false perfection loop can lead to a waste of time, energy, and emotions spent comparing yourself to unrealistic beauty standards.



CONCERN 4

I fear you will be exposed to inappropriate and dangerous content.

Social media opens the door to toxic beauty imagery, pro-anorexic material, access to lethal drugs such as fentanyl, hazardous social media challenges and pornography.

SEXTORTION. HAVE YOU HEARD OF THIS BEFORE?

Unfortunately, more and more kids are facing sextortion, especially on social media.

Sextortion is a type of extortion in which a predator—or sometimes, sadly, someone you know—will use a sexually explicit image or video of another person to either engage with them in a sexual or exploitive relationship, or to exploit money from their victim.

A typical sextortion case occurs when someone poses as a teenage girl. “She” requests to follow a teenage boy on Instagram. The “girl” then messages the boy directly and starts flirting with him. She convinces him to share nude photos and or videos of himself. Then she threatens and blackmails him saying if he does not pay her, she will “ruin him” and disseminate the photos or videos. Sadly, some teenage boys have felt so hopeless in this situation they have taken their own lives.

While sextortion is more common with boys, it also is happening to girls.

The best defense against sextortion is not share nudes with anyone on social media or texting. Period. I know that may be hard sometimes. Kids face so much pressure to cave on this. I

know you want to be liked and valued, but this is not the path. Anyone who truly cares about you will like you regardless of whether you share intimate photos of your body.

The inevitable request to share nudes will happen, though. What are some ways you can quickly shut down that request?

Remember you always can use me as an excuse and say your mom monitors your phone and social media accounts. “No way. My mom has a monitoring service on my accounts that will red flag this in a heartbeat.” Or “I can’t. My mom checks my phone.”

If you do make a mistake and share a photo or video you regret, remember I am here for you.

I never want you to feel like a situation is hopeless. If you are in a corner and struggling with what to do about a situation online, I am always here for you. Sharing with me about what is going on is crucial. I can’t help you if I don’t know about the challenge you are facing.

CONCERN 5

I am concerned social media will make you feel like you are not enough.

I know you are enough. You are more than enough, yet I know the power social media has on self-esteem. I am concerned you will equate your worth to the number of followers, likes and comments you receive. There is no doubt about it: Social media can negatively impact your mental health. A survey conducted by Dove's Self-Esteem Project found that 8 in 10 youth mental health specialists say social media is fueling a mental health crisis. I want to protect you from this mental health crisis.

CONCERN 6

I worry about cyber-bullying on social media.

The minute you join social media you become an easy target for bullying. If a group of kids wants to shame you about anything, all they must do is tag you in a social media post or relentlessly direct message you insults and harassment.

CONCERN 7

I am alarmed by the misinformation flooding social media and worry it will influence how you think about people and important issues.

Social media companies promote more provocative content because it keeps us there. It grabs our attention. I don't want algorithms promoting inaccurate news and conspiracies to shape how you view the world.



CONCERN 8

The countless number of predators lurking on social media scare the heck out of me.

There are so many terrible people on social media seeking to harm children. I have read story after story about predators on Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok grooming kids to convince them to share nudes or meet in person. Some of these kids are never seen again after these meetups. I love you so much and want to protect you.

CONCERN 9

I am nervous you will post something you will regret.

Everything you comment on or post about becomes part of your digital footprint—forever. A picture from a crazy party or a sarcastic remark meant to be funny can come back to haunt you in terms of relationships, college applications and future job opportunities.

CONCERN 10

I worry about the amount of peer pressure you will face on social media.

There will be pressure to dress and look a certain way. You may feel like you need to present yourself in a way that is not true to yourself. There could be pressure to live a lifestyle of partying and drinking.

These are my many concerns about social media, yet I know you are growing up and you would like the responsibility to navigate social media responsibly. You are 16 now. You are driving a car and taking college level courses. You will leave home in a couple of years, and I do want to teach you how to use social media appropriately and moderately before you go into the world. **So, we will cross this social media bridge together with boundaries.**

We will start with one social media platform. It is too much for our family to learn how to navigate multiple social media platforms at once.

Where you go, I go. I will check your social media account.

Your social media account will have **guardrails in place.**

Your account will be **private.** If you change this to public at any point, your access to social media will be restricted.

You will **only add friends/followers you know in person** and have talked with in real life.

Sometimes people will reach out on social media posing as someone else. Social media accounts are easy to make and a breeze to fake. Do not automatically trust a new follow request. Someone may say they are Colton (AKA the high school football star) when it could be a 65-year-old conman in Brazil hoping to pry some nudes out of you to make some quick money by blackmail.

You are likely to encounter strangers on social media—do not connect with them.

There's a good chance you will be approached by someone you don't know on social media who may ask you to share a nude photo. According to a study by Common Sense Media, a large percentage of girls – 58% on Instagram, 57% on Snapchat and 46%

on TikTok – reported being contacted by a stranger online in a way that made them “uncomfortable.”

A good rule to keep in mind is that if you don't know the follow request in person you should not be connected to them on social media.

As a family, we will minimize risks associated with strangers on social media.

As mentioned before, all social media accounts will be private. Do your research before accepting any follow requests. If you realize someone is not who they say they were, come get me, and we will figure out together what to do. Please come to me or another trusted adult right away to talk about anyone asking for personal information, a nude, or if someone is making you uncomfortable online in any way. If something about the situation does not feel right in your gut, trust that and get help.

Be safe with what information you share on social media. Do not share your address, location, phone number, email address, social security number or the name of your school on social media. Never share passwords to any of your accounts. Also, don't broadcast if you are at home alone.

There will be a time limit installed on your phone to encourage moderate social media use. If you attempt to get around this with any tech loopholes, your account will be suspended.

You will be intentional with what you post.

Never post anything illegal such as underage drinking, vandalism or drug consumption. Whatever you post, you should feel comfortable with your family, your teachers, potential colleges and future employers seeing. Never post anything you would not want read over the school loudspeaker or featured as a headline on the latest news.

Unkind words, personal attacks, and snide remarks should not be posted. Your digital footprint on social media should be marked with kindness, creativity, and thoughtfulness.

Questions to ask yourself before posting.

- 1 Do I need to post this now? By posting now, will it help me delight in the moment or distract me from the moment?
- 2 Do people in this photo know I am posting it to social media and are they comfortable with it? Please do not post anything without asking people first.
- 3 Will any of my friends feel left out by what I am about to post?
- 4 Is what I am posting offensive?
- 5 Would I say what I am about to post in person? If the answer is no, don't post it.

- 6 Am I upset? Don't post anything when you are sad or upset. Strong emotions should be a red flag to wait to post. Your gut reaction to a situation might be to use social media to loop in your friends for support—but hold off, or you might make the situation worse. Come talk to me or think about inviting a friend over to vent in person.
- 7 Is this post spreading rumors or hurting anyone's reputation?
- 8 Am I sharing or bragging with this post?
- 9 How will I feel about this post next week? In a year, or even 5 years?

As a family, we will take breaks from social media.

We know from research that taking a break from social media helps to improve well-being and reduce anxiety and depression.



Periodically, we will do a **social media checkup**.

Our purpose in checking in is to make sure social media is adding value to your life instead of causing stress or harm.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA CHECKUP

- 1 On average, how much time do I spend on social media a day? Is this too little, too much or just right?
- 2 Are there times during the day when I am more likely to use social media? Why?
- 3 Am I using social media at the appropriate time? Do I constantly struggle checking it when I am bored, especially at school?
- 4 Do I spend more time connecting with my friends in person or on social media?
- 5 Am I taking breaks each day from social media?
- 6 What is a good goal to set for how much time I spend on social media?
- 7 What are my favorite social media accounts to follow? What is it about the content I like?
- 8 How many people follow me or how many people am I connected to on social media? Are all of these positive connections? Do any of my social media friends make me nervous or worried about being judged? Do I need to eliminate any unhealthy social media connections?
- 9 Are there any influencer accounts I follow that make me feel worse about myself? Are there any accounts displaying a constant highlight reel of perfection? It is important to unfollow accounts causing stress or struggles with self-esteem and self-worth.
- 10 Is social media helping or hurting me to have true connections with my friends?
- 11 How do I feel after I use social media? Happy? Stressed? Anxious?
- 12 Does how I am using social media line up with what I believe and value in life?

At any point in the journey, if I feel like you are struggling with handling the responsibility of social media, we will hit the pause button.

Social media used appropriately and in moderation can bring joy, laughter and connection to our lives.

However, we must guard against social media's potential dangers and distractions. Adults and teens must be intentional with how, when, with whom and how much we use social media in our lives. We must remember the addictive nature of social media platforms and adhere to the guardrails and standards we have discussed in this guide.

Now that we have discussed concerns and boundaries with social media, let's complete this social media plan for our family.

OUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN

The social media platform I will start with is: _____

The benefits and reasons why I would like to use this app are: _____

The purpose of this account will be: _____

A healthy time limit for this social media app is: _____

I will determine if I should accept a follow request by the following criteria: _____

I will not use this social media app when I am: _____

Together with my parents, I will do a social media check up every _____

The first one will be _____

