

# Protect Your Children when using Social Media



The keys to protecting your children when they engage in social media are the same as in many areas of life: set clear house rules and discuss risks.

- Provide age-appropriate supervision. The American Association of Pediatricians makes the following recommendations:
  - Children under age 10 should not be on the computer without direct supervision.
  - Children between ages 10 and 14 should be visible to parents while online.
  - Children ages 15 to 18 should only have access to computers in public areas within the home.
- Use parental control features and software to manage computer use, including what sites they can visit, whether they can download items, and when they can be online.
- Use pop-up blockers to prevent your child from being directed to inappropriate web sites.
- Discuss adult content and what your child should do if they accidentally visit an inappropriate site.
- Insist that your child does not share personal information online, such as real name, age, address, phone number, or passwords.
- Explain that your child should only post information online when you, and they, are comfortable with others being able to view it for the rest of their lives.
- Instruct your child that they should never post location information online. They should not post where they are, where you are, or if they are alone. They should not discuss when you will be out of the house.
- Tell your child that they should never respond to messages that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, or threatening. Encourage your child to tell you if they encounter such messages. If you or your child receives a message that is harassing, of a sexual nature, or threatening, you should contact the police.
- Remind your child that people online may not be who they seem. Because you can't see or even hear the person, it would be easy for someone to misrepresent him- or herself. Thus, someone indicating that "she" is a "12-year-old girl" could really be a 40-year-old man.
- Teach kids to "read between the lines." It may be fun to check out new people online, but be aware that, while some people are nice, others act nice because they're trying to get something. Flattering or supportive messages may be more about manipulation than friendship or romance.
- Teach your kids to trust their gut if they feel suspicious. If they ever feel uncomfortable or threatened by anything online, encourage them to tell you.
- Tell your child they should never arrange to meet a stranger or online friend in person.

## Protect Your Children when using Social Media checklist



- Encourage your child to use aliases (assumed names) or avatars (images that are not their face) rather than provide personal information online.
- Use privacy settings to restrict who can access and post on your child's website or profile page.
- Visit where your kids go online. Sign up for, and use, the social networking spaces that your kids visit. Let them know that you are there and teach them how to act as they socialize online.
- Review your child's Friends list. You may want to limit their online "friends" to people your child actually knows in real life.
- Understand website privacy policies. Sites should spell out your rights as a parent to review and delete your child's profile if your child is younger than 13.
- Supervise purchases and downloads. The cost of downloading music or online purchases can add up quickly. Free software can contain viruses and other malicious code.
- Explain to your child that online gambling is prohibited. If your child has access to a credit card, make sure they understand your rules.
- Have conversations about ethics and bullying. Discuss appropriate conflict resolution and when matters should be brought to the attention of adults.
- Talk to your children about how everything they read online might not be true. Any offer that appears "too good to be true" probably is. When researching online for schoolwork, they should discuss what makes for a legitimate source of information with you and their teachers.
- Monitor behavior on mobile devices. The same rules apply with phones as with computers. Children should be careful who they give their number to and how they use GPS and other technologies that can pinpoint their physical location. Because communication on mobile phones feels more temporary than communication on a computer, children can be tempted to let their guard down. Discuss what kind of information and images are and are not appropriate for transmission.

*This information is provided for general information purposes only. It does not constitute professional advice and does not create a broker-client relationship. Please consult a HUB advisor about your specific needs before taking any action.*