# **Teaching Kids to Be Smart About Social Media**

**Source: Elana Pearl Ben Joseph, MD**

Most teens use some form of social media and have a profile on a social networking site. Many visit these sites every day.

There are plenty of good things about social media — but also many risks and things kids and teens should avoid. They don't always make good choices when they post something to a site, and this can lead to problems.

So it's important to talk with your kids about how to use social media wisely.

### What's Good About Social Media

**Social media can help kids:**

* stay connected with friends and family
* volunteer or get involved with a campaign, non-profit, or charity
* enhance their creativity by sharing ideas, music, and art
* meet and interact with others who share similar interests
* communicate with educators and fellow students

### **What's Bad About Social Media:**

The flipside is that social media can be a hub for things like cyberbullying and questionable activities. Without meaning to, kids can share more online than they should.

**Most teens:**

* post photos of themselves online or use their real names on their profiles
* reveal their birthdates and interests
* post their school name and the town where they live

This can make them easy targets for online predators and others who might mean them harm.

In fact, many teens say they have:

* been contacted online by someone they didn't know in a way that made them feel scared or uncomfortable
* received online advertising that was inappropriate for their age
* lied about their age to get access to websites

### **Concerns and Consequences**

Besides problems like cyberbullying and online predators, kids also can face the possibility of a physical encounter with the wrong person. Many newer apps automatically reveal the poster's location when they're used.

And photos, videos, and comments made online usually can't be taken back once they're posted. Even when a teen thinks something has been deleted, it can be impossible to completely erase it from the Internet.

Posting an inappropriate photo can damage a reputation and cause problems years later — such as when a potential employer or college admissions officer does a background check. And sending a mean-spirited text, even as a joke, can be very hurtful to someone else and even taken as a threat.

Spending too much time on social media can be a downer too. Seeing how many "friends" others have and the pictures of them having fun can make kids feel bad about themselves or like they don't measure up to their peers.