Safety in the Online Community

A conversation with your 13-year-old about Facebook and Instagram

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center
The end of bullying begins with you

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Connecting Responsibly

Just a generation ago, teens were asking their parents for a phone in their room – maybe even one with a separate line or three-way calling – so they could connect with more friends.

What is Facebook?

Facebook lets teens and adults connect with each other through chat, personal messages, and sharing of photos, videos, links and other kinds of information. Teens typically use Facebook to announce achievements, wish each other a happy birthday, and plan social events such as going to a movie or a visiting a friend's house.

What is Instagram?

Instagram is a photo- and video-sharing app that is popular with teens. People on Instagram connect through comments, captions, emoticons, hashtags, and links on photos and videos.

Today, a teen's desire to connect with friends has not changed, but the options for doing so have grown tremendously. Children are not only asking for their own mobile phones at a younger age, but they also want access to popular social media sites, like Facebook, and apps such as Instagram. While these platforms offer teens the opportunity to share ideas, photos, videos, and more, they come with the need for social responsibility too.

Setting up a new account

When you and your 13-year-old decide it is time to set up a Facebook or Instagram account, you should consider the following:

Begin with a conversation
Talk with your kids about safety and technology early and often, in the same way that you talk with your kids about being safe at school, in the car, riding public transportation, or playing sports.

Ask how Facebook and Instagram work
Share your teen's interest for connecting with others, and ask them to show you how Instagram, Facebook, and other social media platforms work. Teens are usually the experts. You can learn a lot from listening to them and, it shows that you value their interests and knowledge!

Establish some guidelines
Discuss with your teen what is and isn't appropriate information to share online. Ask them about privacy settings, and suggest that you regularly review the information together. Create a code of conduct, such as:
- We will not use social media to humiliate or embarrass other people.
- We will treat others online with the same respect that we do in person.
- We will not post videos or photos of others without their permission.

Decide how you will interact online
Consider if you will interact with your child's account. If you have a Facebook account, and have friended your child, respect the same boundaries you use offline. Let your relationship dictate how you interact – whether you join a conversation among your teen's friends or if you post on their wall, for example. Think of social media as a get-together where kids gather at a friend's house, and how you might interact with them in that setting.

Safety Tips

While the majority of teenagers may never experience inappropriate behavior online, it is important to have a conversation about online safety with your child. When the doors of communication are open, if your teen becomes uncomfortable with someone's online behavior, they will be more likely to:

- Know how to recognize that the behavior is inappropriate.
- Trust that you won't respond by removing access to their accounts.
- Know that there are ways to prevent it from happening again.

- Recognize their rights.
- Tell you about it.
- Have more confidence in how to handle the situation.

Take action

If your teen tells you that they are being hurt, humiliated, or harassed on Facebook or Instagram, there are several steps they can take to make it stop. Share these tips with your child:

Ignore it – If the incident is something that doesn't really matter to you and won't affect your reputation, take a deep breath and let it go, and use some of the tools described below, like blocking and unfriending. Most bullies are looking for a reaction, so show them you're confident by not responding.

Unfollow or untag yourself from the offending post or photo – If someone has posted something you don't like, you may unfollow the post (on Facebook) or untag yourself from the post or photo (on Facebook and Instagram).

Unfriend the person – On Facebook, you can remove a connection to a friend that you are no longer comfortable sharing with by unfriending them.

Report the content to Facebook or Instagram – You can report any content that violates Facebook's Community Standards or Instagram's Community Guidelines. Remember

to give a clear description of where the content is. You may also want to take screenshots of any offending posts, photos, or conversations with the person who is bullying you.

Block the person – If you are being harassed by someone, or if you don't want to be visible to them on Facebook, you can block the person from your timeline. When you block someone, they can no longer add you as a friend, send you messages or see your timeline, and you can no longer see theirs. On Instagram, you can also block another person, which means that they will no longer be able to see any of your photos or videos. Keep in mind that blocking someone also means you will no longer be able to report their content.

Social Reporting – Facebook offers the social reporting tool, which allows you to communicate directly with a person about content they have posted that you don't like. In cases of bullying or harassment, where you don't feel comfortable reaching out to the person directly, you can use social reporting to get help from a trusted friend.

"If you know someone who is being bullied, reach out to them and take action. Tell them to talk to someone that can help! It's amazing how much a few friends can help."

Grace, 15, Florida

Safety is a shared responsibility

Everyone has a right to be safe. We also have a responsibility to look out for each other, both in online and offline communities.

Encourage your child to speak up when they see something that is inappropriate or makes them uncomfortable on social media, whether it's directed at them or someone else. Safety is the shared responsibility of an engaged community.

Commonly Asked Questions

What is COPPA and why does my child need to be 13 to sign up for Facebook and Instagram?

The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) requires websites to obtain consent from the parents of children who are under the age of 13 before sharing their information. Because of this rule, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms require children to be at least 13 before signing up and using these services.

How do I start the conversation about online safety with my teen?

Have conversations about online safety with your teen early and often. When your teen approaches you about social media sites and apps, ask them why they feel it's important to be online and who their friends are. Get involved in the process by asking them to show you how to set up a Facebook account or share a photo on Instagram. Let your children know that they can tell you if they, or someone they know, are being hurt or harassed online.

I understand unfriending and removing a post but what is Social Reporting?

Often, when a teen is bullied or sees a friend being bullied, they feel alone. Social Reporting is a way for teens to ask for help from a trusted friend by sharing a piece of content and a message about the situation through Facebook. Social Reporting can also be used by teens to help a friend in need.

Why should I encourage my child to take steps to address hurtful posts in online communities?

Technology and social media are an integral part of teens' lives, and they need to understand the importance of responsible online behavior. When teens address hurtful posts, whether directed at them or someone they know, they're learning about the power of self-advocacy and an engaged online community.

How is Instagram different from Facebook?

Facebook is an online community that allows people to chat and share links, photos, videos and other online content. Instagram is an app that allows people to share photos and videos with their followers or a select group of friends. They can also view, comment, and like posts shared by friends on Instagram.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Access innovative resources and tools from PACER's National Bullying Prevention Cente: **PACER.org/bullying**

Explore tips for keeping your teen safe on Facebook: **facebook.com/safety** and **facebook.com/safety/bullying**

Discover Instagram's community guidelines and tips for teen safety: **help.instagram.com**

Learn more about teen bullying on PACER's Teens Against Bullying website: **PACERTeensAgainstBullying.org**

"If someone threatens or harasses you through social media, there are steps you can take to make it stop. You can block the person bullying you or – better yet – report him or her. Talk with an adult. We truly care and will do our best to protect you, but we need your help."

Don, School Vice Principal

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5 DISCUSSION POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN TALKING WITH YOUR 13-YEAR-OLD

1 Passwords

- Set a strong password that is unique and that others won't know or easily guess.
- Confirm that they will not share password information with anyone, including friends.

2 Privacy Settings

- Talk to your child about how privacy settings work – you can share publicly and privately.
- Set a timeline to review your child's privacy settings with them.

3 Friends

- Establish if your child can add friends whom they have not met in person, such as a friend of a friend.
- Discuss any questions you have with your child:
  – Will you be adding them as a friend?
  – How many friends can they add?
  – What will they do if they feel uncomfortable with the content their friends have posted?

4 Sharing media

- Talk with your child about sharing videos or photos.
- Outline what information your child is allowed to share online. Determine what is appropriate and what is not appropriate to share online. This can include your child's school, phone number, email address or other personal information.
- Talk with your child about options like "comment," "like," or "share" for posts from friends.

5 Setting rules

- Talk about the ground rules for using social media accounts and create guidelines to hold your child accountable.
  – Example: We will treat others online with the same respect that we do in person.
- Questions to discuss with your child include:
  – Will there be a time of day in which social media is off limits, such as during homework or at bed time?
  – How often will the rules be reviewed?
  – What are the consequences if your child breaks the rules?

5 OPTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO HARASSING OR HUMILIATING SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

1 Untag yourself from the offending post or photo
- To remove a tag, hover over the story, click ∨ and select Report/Remove Tag from the dropdown menu. You can then choose to remove the tag or ask the person who posted it to take it down.

2 Unfriend the person
- Unfriending removes the connection between you and that person. If your posts are private, they will no longer be able to see them.
- How to unfriend someone:
  – Go to that person's profile.
  – Hover over the **Friends** button at the top of their profile.
  – Select **Unfriend**.

3 Block the person
- When you block a person, they can no longer add you as a friend, send you messages or see your timeline, and you can no longer see theirs. This is best if you no longer want to be visible to someone on Facebook.
- How to block someone:
  – Click 🔒 at the top right of any Facebook Page.
  – Click **How do I stop someone from bothering me?**
  – Enter the name or email address of the person you want to block and click **Block**.
  – If you entered a name, select the specific person you want to block from the list that appears.
    • If you can't find someone using this method, try going to the person's profile and selecting **Block** from the ••• menu on their cover photo.

4 Report the content to Facebook
- You can report any content that violates Facebook's Community Standards.
- How to Report on Facebook
  – Messages
    • Open the message you want to report.
    • Click ⚙ **Actions** in the top right.
    • Click **Report Spam or Abuse**.

– Groups
  • Go to the group you want to report.
  • Click on ••• icon in the top right corner.
  • Select **Report Group**
– Photos & Videos
  • Click on the photo or video to expand it
  • Click **Options** in the bottom right
  • Select **Report Photo** for photos or **Report Video** for videos
– Posts
  • Hover over the post you want to report and click ∨ in the top right corner
  • Click **Report this Post**

5 Social Reporting
- Social Reporting gives you a set of tools that allow you to communicate directly with a person about content they have posted that you don't like, but that doesn't violate Facebook Terms or Community Standards. You can also use Social Reporting to get help from trusted friend.
- Facebook uses smart tools to put you into the Social Reporting process, depending on the reporting options you choose, such as "I'm in this photo and I don't like it", or "This video is harassing me".
  – Depending on the reason you selected, you will be given a list of options that may include sending the person a message, unfriending or blocking them, submitting it to Facebook for review, or reaching out to a trusted friend for help.
  – If you choose to send the person a message or reach out to a trusted friend, you may enter your own message or use the suggested language provided.

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