



DIOCESE OF CHARLOTTE
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Magisterial Teachings on Youth and Social Media

In 2018, Nellie Bowles wrote an article in the *New York Times* [“A Dark Consensus About Screens and Kids Begins to Emerge in Silicon Valley”- Nellie Bowles (Oct 26, 2018)] that revealed a frightening reality about social media and children that many were unaware of—not only is social media destructive for school age children, but *the developers of these platforms and software won’t let their own children anywhere near them!* Here are just some of the things contained in the article:

“We thought we could control it,” Mr. Anderson said. “And this is beyond our power to control. This is going straight to the pleasure centers of the developing brain. This is beyond our capacity as regular parents to understand. ...I didn’t know what we were doing to their brains until I started to observe the symptoms and the consequences,” Mr. Anderson said. “This is scar tissue talking. We’ve made every mistake in the book, and I think we got it wrong with some of my kids,” Mr. Anderson said. “We glimpsed into the chasm of addiction, and there were some lost years, which we feel bad about.”

To be clear, this goes beyond just one person’s testimonial:

“Tim Cook, the C.E.O. of Apple, said earlier this year that he would not let his nephew join social networks. Bill Gates banned cellphones until his children were teenagers, and Melinda Gates wrote that she wished they had waited even longer. Steve Jobs would not let his young children near iPads.”

“But in the last year, a fleet of high-profile Silicon Valley defectors have been sounding alarms in increasingly dire terms about what these gadgets do to the human brain. Suddenly rank-and-file Silicon Valley workers are obsessed. No-tech homes are cropping up across the region. Nannies are being asked to sign no-phone contracts.”

If the C.E.O.s of these companies don’t think social media is safe for their children, why would it be safe for our children?

An important thing for both students and parents to keep in mind is that if a product is free, *you* are the product! Companies are selling *you* to advertisers and making money off of *you*. And what might the side effects be in return?

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anxiety• Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullying• Distorted view of self-worth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Screen addiction• Loss of personal contact
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We must be cautious that we and our children do not put ourselves in a compromising position through social media, and that we truly understand our intrinsic self-worth is not dictated by likes or online presence.

Our most recent popes have recognized these dangers of social media and have offered advice and warning.

Pope Francis teaches that while social media can be an opportunity to promote a greater encounter with others, often times it leads to greater social isolation among our youth:

“The Net is an opportunity to promote encounter with others, but it can also increase our self-isolation, like a web that can entrap us. Young people are the ones most exposed to the illusion that the social web can completely satisfy them on a relational level. There is the dangerous phenomenon of young people becoming “social hermits” who risk alienating themselves completely from society. This dramatic situation reveals a serious rupture in the relational fabric of society, one we cannot ignore.”

-Pope Francis, “We are members one of another” (Eph 4,25). From social network communities to the human community.” (Message for the 53rd World Communications Day, 2019)

Pope Benedict warns about the loss of human dignity that can occur through the use of social media:

“Those who are active in the production and dissemination of new media content, therefore, should strive to respect the dignity and worth of the human person. If the new technologies are to serve the good of individuals and of society, all users will avoid the sharing of words and images that are degrading of human beings, that promote hatred and intolerance, that debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or that exploit the weak and vulnerable.”

-Pope Benedict XVI, "New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship." (Message for the 43rd World Communications Day, 2009)

Creators of social media may not always have the best interest of your children in mind when developing and marketing new software:

“While affirming the belief that many people involved in social communications want to do what is right (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Ethics in Communications, 4), we must also recognize that those who work in this field confront "special psychological pressures and ethical dilemmas" (Aetatis Novae, 19) which at times see commercial competitiveness compelling communicators to lower standards. Any trend to produce programmes and products - including animated films and video games - which in the name of entertainment exalt violence and portray anti-social behaviour or the trivialization of human sexuality is a perversion, all the more repulsive when these programmes are directed at children and adolescents. How could one explain this ‘entertainment’ to the countless innocent young people who actually suffer violence, exploitation and abuse? In this regard, all would do well to reflect on the contrast between Christ who “put his arms around [the children] laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing” (Mk 10:16) and the one who “leads astray ... these little ones” for whom “it would be better ... if a millstone were hung round his neck” (Lk 17:2). Again I appeal to the leaders of the media industry to educate and encourage producers to safeguard the common good, to uphold the truth, to protect individual human dignity and promote respect for the needs of the family.”

-Pope Benedict XVI, "Children and the Media: A Challenge for Education." (Message for the 41st World Communications Day, 2007)

Pope Benedict offers a reminder about the vital role and duty that parents have to ensure the prudent use of social media for their children:

“Training in the proper use of the media is essential for the cultural, moral and spiritual development of children. How is this common good to be protected and promoted? Educating children to be discriminating in their use of the media is a responsibility of parents, Church, and school. The role of parents is of primary importance. They have a right and duty to ensure the prudent use of the media by training the conscience of their children to express sound and objective judgments which will then guide them in choosing or rejecting programmes available (cf. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, 76). In doing so, parents should have the encouragement and assistance of schools and parishes in ensuring that this difficult, though satisfying, aspect of parenting is supported by the wider community.”

-Pope Benedict XVI, "Children and the Media: A Challenge for Education." (Message for the 41st World Communications Day, 2007)