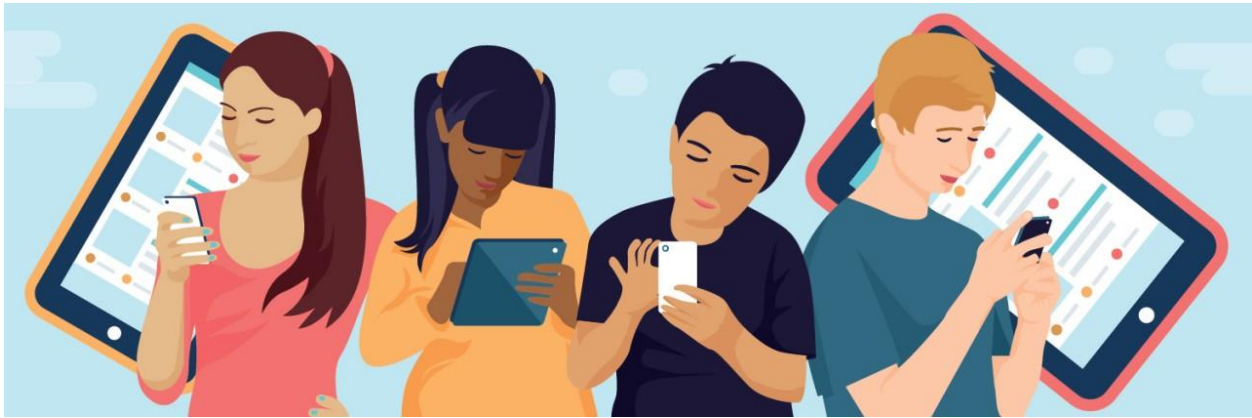


Social Media & Technology Safety



(image credit: [Children's Use of Technology and Social Media \(linkedin.com\)](#))

Our kids live in a world of technology. This can be an invaluable tool, but it also comes with potential dangers that we must acknowledge. A 2022 Pew Research ([Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022 | Pew Research Center](#)) study found that 35% of teens say they use YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and/or Snapchat “almost constantly.” Additionally, they found that almost 1 in 5 teens who use YouTube says that they use it “almost constantly.” These two facts alone show us how immersed in social media teens can be. Not only are young people using social media to connect with others, but they also use it to keep up with current events, follow trends, and learn information. It is our responsibility, as their parents and educators, to help them learn to navigate these platforms in safe ways, and to ensure that they have a healthy balance of use.

In this guide you will find our recommendations as well as links to other helpful guides and resources.

1. Recommendations regarding technology and social media use:

- a. Navigating social media and technology use with your kids can be very challenging. From wondering when an appropriate time to give your kid a phone is, to knowing which apps are appropriate for them to use, there are countless scenarios for you to make decisions about. Unfortunately, there is no “one size fits all families” answer to any of these. However, we do want to offer our suggestions based on developmental research as well as a few resources to help you make the best decisions for your families.
- b. Helpful reading:
 - i. [Social Media and Your Family | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
 - ii. [Screen Time and the Brain | Harvard Medical School](#)
 - iii. [Adolescent brain and the natural allure of digital media^{SEP} - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)
 - iv. [Teens & Young Adults - The Digital Wellness Lab](#) (ages 13 – 22)

- v. [School Age - The Digital Wellness Lab](#) (ages 6 – 12)
- vi. [Cellphones and Devices: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers | Common Sense Media](#)
- vii. [Family Tech Planners | Common Sense Media](#)

c. ***When should I give my child a phone?***

We recommend that you wait until 6th/7th grade to get your child a phone. Of course, this is not always possible, and that is okay. We'll say more about how to set healthy boundaries/use expectations around phones for kids of all ages below.

Pre-teens' and teens' brains are still in development, and the later they can wait to have interference in that development from a phone, the better. A phone also requires a lot of responsibility and self-control, two traits that they are still developing. Here again, the older they are, the more responsibility they may be able to manage.

One concern that often plays into parents choosing to get their child a phone is safety and the ability to communicate easily with them. If you are not ready to get your child a phone (opening up the world of social media to them) but would still like the ability to contact them/allow them to contact you when the need arises, you have options! This article lists a few smart watches and "training wheel" phones that allow voice calls and text to limited parties.

[The 4 Best Smartwatches and Phones for Kids of 2024 | Reviews by Wirecutter \(nytimes.com\)](#)

[Why these parents say the GizmoWatch is a great smartwatch for kids | Featured News Story | Verizon](#)

d. ***When should I allow my child to use social media?***

This decision varies based on your child's level of maturity and ability to make responsible choices. We recommend that children younger than 8th grade do not use social media. Social media exposes kids to a wide variety of influences – positive and negative – and the older they are before they are exposed to these influences, the better. No matter what age your child is when they begin using social media, we recommend that you set expectations and boundaries for use as a family. Unfettered access on any social media platform can be harmful and dangerous, no matter the age of your child. If your child cannot abide by the expectations agreed upon by the family, they may lose their privileges.

i. Helpful reading:

1. [Parenting, Media, and Everything in Between | Common Sense Media](#)
2. [Parenting, Media, and Everything in Between | Common Sense Media](#)
3. [What Are Some Basic Social Media Rules for Middle Schoolers? | Common Sense Media](#)
4. [What Are Some Basic Social Media Rules for High Schoolers? | Common Sense Media](#)

e. ***What if my child says "but all of my friends have _____, it's the only way I can socialize! I'll be left out if I don't!"?***

This statement has been made to parents for decades about all sorts of forms of socializing.

While, yes, it is true that many teens use social media as a primary form of socializing and communication, it is not the *only* way to do so, and it is likely untrue that *everyone* is doing so.

We encourage you to communicate with the parents of your children's friends – what are they doing? Can you agree upon the same message to give to your kids?

Keep in mind that it is also okay to have different rules than other families. You might say, "I understand your frustration. Here are the reasons I am not comfortable with that....If it is really important to you, can we agree on some steps that we might take first that will help me feel more comfortable?" These steps might include paths to growth that show you levels of responsibility, critical thinking, and safe decision-making skills.

f. **How do I monitor their use?**

- i. Do not monitor your children without their knowledge. While they might not be happy that you are doing so, it is important that you are transparent with them about your intentions. This promotes respect and trust.

We also encourage you to make it clear to your kids that you monitor their use for safety and health reasons, not to “be in their business.” To this point, remember that monitoring use is not only about *what* is on your child’s phone/devices, but also when and how often they are using them. We will return to this topic below when we talk about finding healthy balance.

- ii. We encourage you to enable parental controls on all of your child’s devices (phone, laptop, iPad, etc.) Here are instructions for some devices. If your device is not listed here, instructions should be easy to find on Google.
1. [How to set up parental controls on iPhone/iPad | NordVPN](#)
 2. [Parental controls available on your Galaxy phone or tablet \(samsung.com\)](#)
 3. [Set up content and privacy restrictions in Screen Time on Mac - Apple Support](#)
- iii. Additionally, here are a few apps that provide parental control features:
1. [10 Best Parental Control Apps 2023 | ConsumersAdvocate.org](#)
 2. [The best parental control apps for Android and iPhone 2023 | Tom's Guide \(tomsguide.com\)](#)
- iv. Monitoring use is not just about enabling parental controls. We encourage you to:
1. Know what apps your kids are using and how they use them. Have them show you and ask questions to understand.
 2. Follow your kids on social media and ask them to show you their social media on a regular basis. They may not like this habit, but if you make it an expectation of their social media use they will know it is a part of their ability to engage on social media in the way that they want.
 3. Know who your kids are communicating with. You may also choose to occasionally check their texts to ensure appropriate communication.
- v. Helpful reading:
- [Parenting, Media, and Everything in Between | Common Sense Media](#)
[Family Guide to Parental Controls - ConnectSafely](#)
[How to Block Pornography on Your Child's Devices | Common Sense Media](#)
- vi. **What safety measures does the school put in place on my child’s school laptop?**
1. Our network is protected by a Fortinet firewall along with Internet filtering provided by Lightspeed Systems. Internet filtering on student laptops follows the laptop wherever it is used.
 2. The most common attempt at bypassing Internet filtering is in the use of VPN extensions through non-standard browsers. We approve and install Microsoft Edge and Chrome browsers and have blocked the ability to add extensions in these browsers. Unfortunately, there are many non-standard browsers that will allow installation even without local administrative rights. As a parent you can look for other browsers being present on the laptop like TOR browser or Onion browser as examples. We are continuously adjusting our policies to address unwanted software, but there are no filters or policies that are 100%.
 3. The use of cellular data plans on smart phones for internet access is not filtered by our internet filters. We also prohibit the use of smart phones as an internet hotspot. However, if the laptop is connected to the phone as a hotspot, the laptop will still be filtered by Lightspeed Systems.

4. For additional filtering for your home internet that will not conflict with the school filtering software, consider using the tools built into most home internet routers. Most routers provide online tutorials on how to setup filters that govern Internet access to those devices connecting to your home Internet.
5. Helpful reading:
 - a. [How Can I Make Sure My Kid's Privacy Is Protected When They Use Tech for School? | Common Sense Media](#)

vii. What apps/social media are kids using today?

1. Popular apps are constantly changing. We advise that you remain in frequent communication with your kid about what they use and check online regularly to see what is most popular.

[Popular Apps Among Kids and Teens: Pros and Cons \(benetpositive.org\)](#)

[8 APPS All Parents Should Know About - Hanley Foundation](#)

2. What about hidden apps?
 - a. Teens will sometimes hide apps that they know are inappropriate, that they are not allowed to use, or that they don't want their parents to check. This article talks about why and offers some solutions: [ways-kids-hide-apps-on-android-and-ios.pdf \(finalsite.net\)](#)
 - b. Additionally, here is a list of the most popular apps used to hide content: [Most Popular Hiding Apps Parents Should Know About | Security.org](#)

2. Finding Balance

A healthy balance of social media and technology engagement is crucial to our health.

Part of the appeal of technology and social media for all of us, not just teens, is the immediate dopamine release that it often provides. Teen and pre-teen brains are primed to be searching for adventure and attention/acceptance from their peers. In her article (linked below), Zara Abrams quotes the American Psychological Association's Chief Science Officer Mitch Prinstein, saying "We know that social media activity is closely tied to the ventral striatum. This region gets a dopamine and oxytocin rush whenever we experience social rewards." So, teenage brains are searching for an effect that social media/technology can give them in a matter of seconds, making it instinct to return to time and time again.

Additionally, we must consider that, as humans, we need connection. It may feel like we are fulfilling that connection through social media, but there are innately missing components when our primary form of connection is online rather than face-to-face. While teen brains have always been primed to be searching for acceptance, in person interactions allow us to walk away & for our brains to focus on something else. Social media allows teen brains to spend a significant part of their time searching for and worrying about acceptance. This hyper fixation can be harmful to self-image & development of confidence.

As your children start using social media, we encourage you to have conversations with them about boundaries surrounding time limits & what type of feedback they are receiving online.

Below are some resources that can support you in helping your children and family find the right balance.

- a. [Why young brains are especially vulnerable to social media \(apa.org\)](#)
- b. [How to Help Kids Balance Phones and Screens with Sleep | Common Sense Media](#)
- c. [How to Help Girls Have Healthier Social Media Experiences | Common Sense Media](#)
- d. [Be a Role Model: 4 Ways to Balance Screen Time Around Children | Common Sense Media](#)
- e. [Family Tech Planners | Common Sense Media](#)

- f. [YouTube Content That Supports Tweens' and Teens' Mental Health and Wellness | Common Sense Media](#)
- g. [Kids' Mental Health Apps and Websites for Anxiety, Depression, Coping Skills, and Professional Support | Common Sense Media](#)
- h. [How to Help Teens Manage the Effects of Social Media on Their Mental Health | Common Sense Media](#)

3. Conversations with Your Kids

- a. Phone use:
 - i. [Cellphones and Devices: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers | Common Sense Media](#)
 - ii. [4 Conversations to Have with Older Kids and Teens About Their Screen Time Habits | Common Sense Media](#)
- b. News:
 - i. [Explaining the News to Our Kids | Common Sense Media](#)
 - ii. [Our Kids Are Watching: Racial Violence in the News & Viral Trauma | Common Sense Media](#)
 - iii. [How to Talk with Kids About Violence, Crime, and War | Common Sense Media](#)
- c. Exposure to inappropriate material/online predators:
 - i. [Talking with Teens and Preteens About Pornography | Common Sense Media](#)
 - ii. [How To Keep Teens Safe Online - Yes \(justsayyes.org\)](#)

4. *I'm worried about cyberbullying and/or the possibility of my child interacting with strangers online – what should I look out for?*

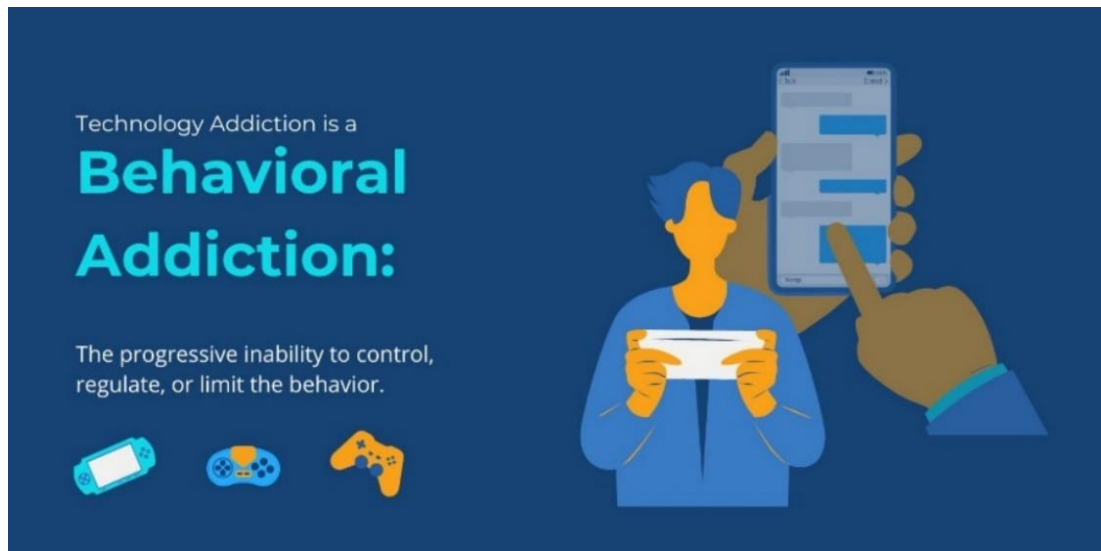
- a. Unfortunately, both of these are possibilities as your children use the internet. Below are some articles that offer advice about what signals to look out for and how to get help.
 - i. Cyberbullying:
 1. [Is My Child Being Cyberbullied? – Cybersmile](#)
 2. [How To Guard Against Your Child Becoming A Cyberbully – Cybersmile](#)
 3. [Dealing With A Cyberbullying Incident – Cybersmile](#)
 - ii. Online Predators
 1. [Internet Safety for Kids: Staying Safe from Online Predators \(gcfglobal.org\)](#)
 2. [How to Keep Your Teen \(or Tween\) Safe Online | SafeWise](#)
 3. [NetSmartz Home \(missingkids.org\)](#)
 4. From “Just Say Yes” online: *How Keep Teens Safe Online* ([How To Keep Teens Safe Online - Yes \(justsayyes.org\)](#))
 - a. **“Monitor Your Child’s Accounts:** Between tablets, smartphones, and laptops, many kids have access to the internet starting at a very young age. Be vigilant when it comes to your child’s technology and social media accounts. Know their usernames and passwords and check them frequently for red flags. There are many parental control apps that allow parents to monitor and restrict what their children can do on their devices. Check out this article by verywellfamily.com for the [Best 7 Parental Control Apps](#).
 - b. **Set Limits:** It’s important to establish and enforce boundaries when it comes to the use of technology. Set limits from screen time, including time spent on a smartphone, online gaming, or any other web-based activity your kids are into. Store computers, laptops, tablets, and

phones in a central place in your home where you can monitor activity.

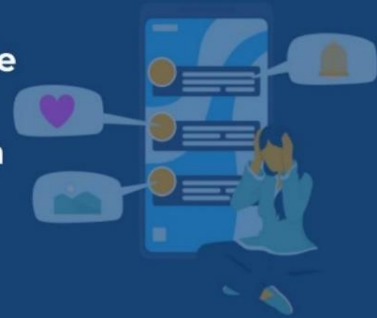
- c. **Stranger Danger Applies to the Internet:** Teach your child to stay away from strangers on the internet. Whether it's an email from an unknown source, a suspicious link, or a friend request they don't recognize. Encourage them to run things by you if they are unsure if something is unsafe so you can decide together.
- d. **Have Ongoing Conversations:** Communication is key to keeping your child safe online and in the real world. Technology is here to stay, and it's never too early to start talking with your child about internet safety. Let them know the online threats you are concerned about and discuss how to steer clear of them. By starting a dialogue with your child, you are paving the way for them to come to you if something strange or scary happens to them online."

5. ***I'm worried about my kids' health and their dependence on technology – how can I get them help?***

- a. [My Kid Seems Addicted to Their Phone. What Do I Do? | Common Sense Media](#)
- b. [Could My Child Be Addicted to Video Games? | Common Sense Media](#)
- c. Can technology be an addiction? (*graphic credit to* [Technology Addiction - Teen & Young Adult | Sandstone Care](#))
 - i. This link ([Technology Addiction - Teen & Young Adult | Sandstone Care](#)) also includes resources on "Tips for Managing Gaming", "Tips for Managing Smart Phones", and "Tips for Managing Technology at Night"



Technology addiction is a compulsive behavior that is difficult to quit, despite the adverse effects it has on an individual.



Types of Technology Addictions



Gaming



Online Gambling



Online Shopping



Social Media

Technology Addiction Symptoms



Headaches



Neck pain



Poor hygiene



Sleep problems



Weight gain



Eye problems

6. Want to learn more? Follow these reading recommendations:

a. Websites:

- i. [Common Sense Media: Age-Based Media Reviews for Families | Common Sense Media](#)
- ii. [Help Center – Cybersmile](#)
- iii. [Home | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

b. Books:

- i. *Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive (and Survive) in Their Digital World* by Dr. Devorah Heitner
- ii. *Parenting Generation Screen: Guiding Kids to Be Wise in a Digital World* by Jonathan McKee (note that guidance is grounded in Christian religion)
- iii. *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood & Family Relationships in the Digital Age* by Dr. Catherine Steiner-Adair with Teresa H. Barker
- iv. *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* by Andy Crouch
- v. *Focus & Thrive: Executive Functioning Strategies for Teens* by Laurie Chaikind McNulty
- vi. *How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success* by Julie Lythcott-Haims