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ON THE FAMILY

# A PARENT'S — GUIDE TO — SOCIAL MEDIA



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# Train Your Teens to Manage Technology Wisely

**Our long-term goal as parents is to raise children who will practice self-control and manage technology well on their own.**

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When my daughter Lucy was only 4, she was mesmerized with my new phone. As her chubby little fingers tapped the screen with all the brightly colored apps.

I quickly realized I couldn't mindlessly let her play with my phone just because it was sometimes convenient.

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"This is a no touch when Mommy isn't with you," I told her. "It is Mommy's phone."

Kids love to use technology. We don't have to bribe them to use a tablet or beg them to play video games. We have to do the opposite and constantly manage our kids' runaway screen time. But eventually, we won't be there to apply the brakes.

Our long-term goal as parents is to raise children and teens who will practice self-control and [manage technology](#) well on their own. Here are three ways to help your children develop these skills.

### Ask, "Digital vegetable or candy?"

Not all screen time is created equal. Toddlers and teenagers need to learn the difference between healthy and unhealthy screen time. To help them, explain that digital vegetables include such things as attending school online, Skyping Grandma, using a Bible app or watching videos on how to play an instrument.

Just like actual vegetables, digital vegetables make us feel good. They strengthen our minds and bodies and aren't addictive. I've never had to tell my kids, "Stop eating so much broccoli!" Kids who consume a portion of digital vegetables will walk away nourished and satisfied.

That's not the case with digital candy—the feel-good entertainment choices like TikTok, Netflix and video games. Once they get a taste of candy, kids want more and more. It's exciting and amusing, designed to hook our children's attention and never let go. It's junk food for the mind and heart. A little might be OK, but hours and hours of digital candy will make our children sick.

Teaching kids the difference between digital vegetables and digital candy can help them become more aware of what they're "eating" online. They can even use these categories to describe their screen time. My 16-year-old son, Ethan, loves to play chess online, which might be categorized as a vegetable rather than candy (though it's probably more like a sweet potato with melted butter and sugar).

### Help Your Teens Practice the “Technology Pivot”

Many of us spend so much time looking at our screens that we don't look at each other. One of the healthiest habits we can teach our children is to pivot away from their devices whenever someone enters the room. This communicates, “You are more valuable to me than a piece of hardware.”

Performing the pivot is as easy as 1-2-3:

1. Notice when someone approaches and get ready to pivot
2. Lift your head from your device and physically turn from the screen toward the person.
3. Smile and look the person in the eyes for the ultimate communication experience. Practice body language that says, I'm listening.

Lucy, who's now 11, says, “Pivot! Pivot!” to remind me to turn toward her instead of my computer. I can say the same thing when I need to get her attention. It works both ways.

### Stop Sleeping with a Digital Baby

What's the quality of your sleep when you have a baby in the house? You walk around like a zombie, exhausted after sleepless nights. Today, phones are like digital babies that cry throughout the night with notifications, texts, tweets and temptations.

If we allow our children and teens to sleep with technology in their bedrooms, they will find it difficult to manage their digital habits well. Many foolish and damaging decisions are made in the middle of the night when self-control is at a low ebb.

Even “good” nighttime texts and posts can interrupt sleep. Research shows that sleep and mental health are strongly related. Sufficient sleep helps our children's brains process and recall emotions, thoughts and memories. But a lack of sleep can lead to moodiness and emotional reactivity, as well as suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

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[Establishing a family rule](#) that devices aren't allowed in bedrooms at night will help protect your children from harm. This is much easier to do when kids are young. With older kids who already sleep with their phones, you'll need to set a new guideline and collect their phones before bedtime.

Training our kids and teens to better manage their technology now will equip them to handle it wisely as adults.

Source : <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/train-your-kids-to-manage-technology-wisely/>



# Teens Using Media: Why Social Media Shouldn't Define Your Teen

**Instagram and Snapchat may seem harmless and fun, but they can be addicting and damaging for your teens, when these apps are used in excess.**

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## Teens Using Social Media Today

Our culture's obsession with self-esteem has a new vehicle, and it fits in your teen's pocket. Teens using social media today prefer to watch TikTok and YouTube videos over their parents' former obsession with MTV. On average, teens spend a mind-boggling [nine hours a day](#) using technology, most of which is sharing every detail of their lives on apps like Instagram and SnapChat. Our teens' quest is affirmation.

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## Affirmation & Fame

Forget 15 minutes of fame. They're only looking for sixty seconds – that's the minimum length of a video on TikTok, the app that has taken teens using social media platforms by storm. They even have the stories to prove it.

For example, in 2019, a teen became famous from her short dancing videos posted on TikTok. Those videos launched her into stardom. Her fame turned to a documentary series and couple of animated films, as well as being one of the most followed people on social media.

## Why Social Media Shouldn't Define Your Teen

Although watching that creative video is fun and harmless, hanging out online isn't without risks. We already know that teens using social media give away every detail of their lives. This can lure stalkers, provide bullies with potential fodder, and affect how future colleges or employers view them. There's also a serious issue that is a growing problem with teens: **technology and smartphone addiction**. New research shows that [half of American teens](#) believe they are addicted to their smartphones.

## The Reality of Media Addiction

Researchers believe that as teens become hooked on social-media apps, they are less able to regulate emotions, manage impulses, and make good decisions. Social-media addiction also creates **lower self-esteem** – the direct opposite of what teens use social media for. This addiction has also resulted in the nation's first cellphone addiction rehab center for teens.

The bottom line is that when our teens spend an excessive amount of time online, they are on a journey to find their identity by comparing themselves to others. The fame, beauty, wit, status, and identity of other online teens become the measuring stick by which they judge their value. They can never measure up; they are susceptible to **anxiety** and **depression**.

A parent's greatest error could possibly be turning a blind eye to how much time teens spend online and what they're doing there and why.

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Fortunately, there are things we can do to help our teens using social media to appropriately navigate technology and avoid becoming addicted to its promises of identity, fame, and celebrity status.

## Set Limits

The biggest problem with a teen's value being formed by media is that teenagers are often being lied to. How many of those Instagram photos of your daughter's friends are perfected beyond reality? Is Lizzo's newest music video really an expression of art or could it be mild porn? Being aware of the content your teen is consuming and **setting limits** can help them accurately see reality.

## Content on Media

One reason we set limits is so that our children can live in the real world with real relationships – friends who have zits, pores, and love relationships built on serving each other. What can you do? **Limit the exposure** and boycott the bad stuff. It's OK to say no. You are the parent. It's your job to discipline and correct your teen when their desires run counter to what God says is best for them.

<sup>8</sup> *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. [Phillipians 4:8](#)*

## Time on Media

Almost a quarter of all teens admit to being online "almost constantly." You've seen it. You go out to eat with your family and you notice teens using social media at other tables. They have little to no interaction with the people they're with. They're busily attending to their smartphones. It's OK in these situations, to say no to your kids and **encourage in-person interactions**.

Time limits on social media are a small cross to bear, but they will feel like one nonetheless to a teen. Just as we set curfews because we love our

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teens and want to keep them safe, we can set time boundaries on technology as well. Especially, during times when their attention should be on the other people during meals or school hours.

### Identity in Christ

Christ offers a real and lasting sense of worth. Instagram doesn't. Self-denial, not self-esteem, is actually the solution to our insecurity as we find our value in Christ. Despite what the culture tells your teen, *that's* the way to overcome their insecurity, not another follower on their Instagram profile.

Spend time in [prayer](#), asking for the Lord to be with your teen as they interact with and consume media. Take time praying with your teen, encouraging them to seek refuge in the Lord, not in social media. Find time in the Word, find scripture to uplift your teen with when their hearts become heavy with anxiety from social media.

### Final Thoughts

Though technology and social media are huge parts of society today, it is possible to encourage your teens using social media to turn to the Lord for affirmation instead of their "loyal" followers. Your teen is being raised in a unique world where technology is around every corner. However, there is hope. The Lord is with you as you navigate boundaries with you teens and **[He is your strength](#)**.

Source : <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/why-social-media-shouldnt-define-your-teen/>



# Using Social Media to Engage With Your Teen

**They may sleep in your house and eat at your table, but teens live on social media.**

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Tracy Sheppard and her teenage daughter, Kelsey, are friends. They don't roam the high school halls wearing matching outfits and giggle about boys. But Facebook doesn't care. In the world of social media, a "friend" is any contact invited in and given access to an individual's profile. Tracy finds that the best way to stay connected with her kids is to "friend" them.

Tracy explains, "Being part of their network is a prerequisite." For Tracy and her husband, it's less about invading Kelsey's online hangouts and eavesdropping on her conversations than it is about building relationship. But like many parents, it took the Sheppards time to feel comfortable in that environment.

### Learning to get along

Ever since MySpace was king and teens discovered texting, parents have had an uneasy relationship with social media. Facebook. Twitter. Pheed. Instagram. Snapchat. Those strangers and others keep showing up at our door, asking to play with our kids. What to do: Invite them in? Or pretend no one's home and hope they'll go away?

Well, they haven't gone away. In fact, the whole brood has moved in next door. Now it's our job to learn to coexist in this ever-changing digital neighborhood. The best scenario, as the Sheppards discovered, involves using these high-tech tools to strengthen our families.

Are there still dangers? Without question. Experts agree that unsupervised and unlimited social media use can have negative effects on teens. Still, with nine out of 10 teens experienced in the use of social media, according to Commonsense Media, parents can't afford to ignore new technology or remain oblivious of how teens are connecting.

So where are teens connecting today? Anywhere they can satisfy a craving for validation. Teens want "views." They covet "likes." They collect "friends" and "followers." This generation desires attention and affirmation – often without discretion. And with teens' activities becoming more mobile and multifaceted, parents are finding it harder to monitor.

### Be intentional, not intimidated

Fortunately, moms and dads willing to explore new technology and use it to their advantage can forge tighter bonds with their children. Research proves it. Psychologists have found that teenagers who connect with their parents on social media feel closer to them in everyday life. These young people are also less depressed, delinquent and aggressive.

"Although today's technology certainly has its downside, it also has plenty of upside for the parenting journey," says Bob Waliszewski, the director of PluggedIn.com and author of *Plugged-In Parenting*. "For instance, parents can send a 'note' of encouragement by text or a photo with a sign saying, 'I love you.' They can 'like' their child's social media post, play a video game

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online together or share a humorous or uplifting video clip, podcast or music video. Today, there are ways for parents to further connect with their teens that parents of past generations couldn't have even imagined."

An added benefit is the chance to model appropriate behavior in digital environments. It's one thing for Tracy to tell Kelsey how to act online; it's another to show her. But teachable moments aside, parents will enjoy having new forums for fun interaction.

You may choose to launch a family Facebook page. At least one family has kept their teens checking in with them on social media by posting a daily trivia question and offering a reward for the right answer. Another staged a Twitter scavenger hunt that sent licensed teens driving around town in search of clues.

Meanwhile, if it's true that a picture is worth a thousand words, why limit yourself to a 140-character microblog? With teens' online activity becoming more image-driven in the era of Tumblr, Snapchat and Instagram, consider ways a photo might generate a smile or deliver a blessing.

Indeed, just as we used to scrawl "You're awesome!" on the bathroom mirror or drop an encouraging note into a young child's lunchbox, a timely text or prudent post could build a bridge with a teenager. Emphasis on prudent. Remember, some channels are more social than others. Resist leaving a note where their friends might see, comment and share it. Rule No. 1: Avoid viral embarrassment.

[Adolescents today have grown up with social media.](#) They're digital natives. It's not a question of whether they'll embrace technology that could give parents a nervous tic, but rather when and how. Will we make the most of an evolving social-media world that has an app for everything? It will take work and wisdom, but it's more profitable than isolating ourselves from those quirky new neighbors. In fact, we could make a few new "friends" ... starting with our teens.

Source : <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/using-social-media-to-engage-with-your-teen/>

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