



# The Secret Lives of Teens on Social Media:

**HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

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Social media has become an integral part of our everyday lives. Parents use it, just like their children. However, on average, teenagers are the ones who spend the most time on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and similar platforms.

This leaves many parents worried. Some are afraid that this habit will grow into an addiction, while others are concerned about cyberbullying, over-sharing, and an “all-about-attention” attitude. Author Donna Lynn Hope asks an important question: **“How different would people act if they couldn't show off on social media? Would they still do it?”**

If our children were to be born in more innocent times, without social media, would they be any different?

### Consider these questions:

- How do we know what our children are doing online?
- Is there a way to control our child's behavior on social media, without invading their privacy and breaking their trust?
- How do we recognize if social media is negatively affecting our children?



This topic is complicated, and there are no simple answers. However, if you ask your child about the time they spend on social media, you might be surprised at how willing they are to talk about it.

When you speak with them about their emotions and challenges, and address potential issues in self-esteem, you may find that social media won't pose such a threat to them.

**Even so, you may still be wondering how you can safely explore your child's secret life on social media.**

## These solutions will help:

**1. Dignify their devices.** If you want to limit your child's social media usage, avoid taking away their device. They will find another one. Help them find effective ways to self-regulate, instead.

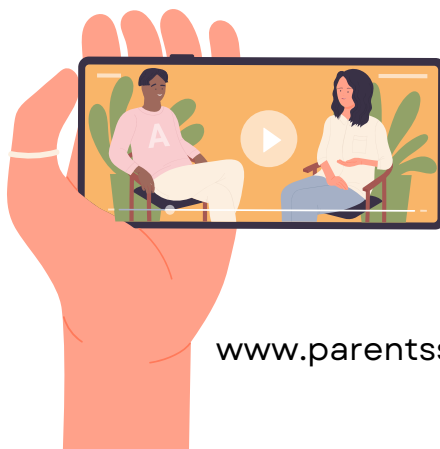
- Fear of missing out often motivates the time spent on social media.
- However, teens are aware of the consequences this habit creates. Encourage them to reflect on these consequences and focus on the impact social media overload has on their personal, academic, and other goals.

**2. Ask about the apps.** Ask your child which apps they spend the most time on. Is it Instagram, Facebook, or perhaps Snapchat? Once you find out, install those apps on your phone, too, and figure out how they work.

- Some apps have geolocation which can pose a real danger. Try to manage your child's social media activity by informing them of the danger rather than imposing your opinion.
- **Don't be a manager, be a mentor.**

**3. Help them to protect their privacy.** Talk about privacy settings on different social media accounts. Some teens are not aware of this option.

- **Agree with them to accept only the followers and friends that they know personally.** This is not an easy task for a teen because the number of followers is often the barometer of popularity.
- However, if they understand the necessity for well-managed online presence, this shouldn't be a problem.



**4. Talk about sexting.** Parents find the infamous conversation about “The Birds and the Bees” just as awkward as children do. However, now you have another level to deal with – sexting.

- Teens can often confuse sending explicit messages and photos for intimacy that might not exist.
- **Talk about what it means to have a healthy relationship and how to develop and maintain one.**

**5. Overcome social media prejudice.** Many parents believe that social media is completely, or almost completely, bad. However, it is neither good nor bad per se. It's a new form of communication.

- When parents talk to their children about social media from this standpoint, the child is likely to withhold and hide information.
- Genuine curiosity and an open mind about your child's interest in social media can make a significant difference.

**6. Care about their emotions.** Teenagers want their opinions to be heard. This especially goes for the things they're passionate or angry about. Social media offers instant feedback to their posts, which makes kids feel listened to, validated, and acknowledged.

- **However, if you offer empathy for challenges your child is facing, you can provide listening and validation inside of your family, too.** This will give you an insight into what your teen posts on social media and an opportunity to help them self-filter.

When your child asks you for the first time if they can open a social media account, avoid judging them or jumping to conclusions. Accept their need to engage in such community-based way of communication, talk about it, and help them build a safe profile.

**Teach them how to protect themselves and what to expect.**

You'll never have all the information about their activity, but if you're interested and understanding, you might get just the right amount.

