

Helping Teens Build a Healthier Relationship with Social Media

Social media is a primary source of connection for many, but it's crucial—especially for youth—to balance online interaction with real-life socialization. Being intentional about how we engage with content and having open and honest conversations about responsible usage can help set boundaries that support mental well-being.



Help Recognize the Impact

- Begin by modeling healthy social media usage for your children by checking in with yourself and your own screen time usage.
- Mindless scrolling can consume hours without realizing it – if they are going to scroll, talk to them about setting a timer or another reminder to help them close it down after a short amount of time.
- Emotional reactions to content (comparison, jealousy, sadness) can affect mental health – creators often make content designed to get big reactions out of people for engagement. Help your teen understand that if they are getting big feelings scrolling, it may be time to log off.
- Recognize triggers and remind them that they are seeing highlight reels, not the reality of someone's life. Certain triggers may include viewing an ex's profile, celebrity lifestyles, curated perfection, political or disturbing content and news.

Try a Social Media Cleanse

- A cleanse can help reset their mental space. Try doing a social media cleanse as a family, like identifying dedicated time to be phone-free.
- Support them in other ways of connecting and socializing in real life, where phones and social media are put away.
- Encourage them to disconnect and reclaim their time with non-screen activities they enjoy.
- Remind them they aren't missing out and there is no shame in stepping away, especially when it can improve their mental well-being and give them hours back to their day.

Influencing Their Feed

- Remind them that they are in charge of what they see online. Their searches, likes, and comments all impact the algorithms.
- It's okay to unfollow or block accounts that negatively impact their mood. They don't owe anyone an explanation for curating their feed.
- Help them recognize content that is positive and helpful – fun recipes, fashion advice, learning new things – while keeping in mind that not everything on social media is true or something they need to follow.

Be Mindful of Sharing

- Social media is a highlight reel, not real life. Everyone chooses what to show— talk with them about not comparing themselves behind-the-scenes to someone else's spotlight.
- They get to decide how much of their life to share, and also who is included in their posts. Parents/ caregivers can model respectful behavior by asking their child if they're okay with having photos of them posted.

Manage Time Online

- Show them how to track their screen time to understand their habits.
- Teach being intentional: log on with a purpose, log off when done.
- Set app limits to reduce mindless scrolling. Try doing this with them so it's not a punishment, but an optional step in protecting their mental health.