

OCMH guidance compiled from the Child Mind Institute

When is the right time for kids to be on social media?¹

There is no magic age when it is OK for kids to be on social media – it depends on their maturity (things like their ability to read social cues, their impulse control, and their vulnerability to criticism or rejection).

As a parent, ask yourself:

- Is the child mature enough to handle online risks like cyberbullying or comparison?
- Does the child understand privacy and safety online?
- Are you ready to guide and monitor their usage?
- Do you understand the apps your child wants to use?

If kids are on social media, they need to know the risks and importance of protecting themselves and that they will likely be exposed to content that promotes unhealthy or ugly content (e.g. violence, porn, misogyny, racism, discrimination, and self-harm).²

Parental oversight is crucial when kids are starting to use social media¹

Have lots of talks with your child ahead of them using social media. Go on social media sites together and share what you think are appropriate and acceptable posts.

- Be clear on what your rules are and what the consequences are. For example, some parents set rules on who their kids can share posts with, what they can post, how long they can be on sites, and no selfies.
- Start small with a basic phone for calls/texts before a smartphone.
- Check-in often with your child by reviewing apps and talk about their online experiences together.
- Discuss what your child should do if they encounter offensive language, frightening content, or inappropriate images.
- Talk about the algorithms that social media platforms use to keep users online, such as infinite scroll.

Parents are role models³

Kids learn by watching your behavior:

- Curtail your own social media use and set the example you want your kids to follow.
- Establish technology-free zones in your house and technology-free hours when no one (including parents) uses their phone.
- Spend time offline. Get your kids involved in something they are interested in, like sports, music, volunteering, etc.

Monitoring your child's social media²

- There are a number of apps on the market designed to allow parental controls and access to your child's devices.
- Know their passwords.

- Follow their profiles.
- Do physical checks. Asking your child to hand over their device can be part of an agreement. This can look like them handing over their phone every night or part of a random-check policy.

Family Media Plan – American Academy of Pediatrics

Creating a Family Media Plan can help you and your children be on the same page with social media use. Update it regularly. Access the [American Academy of Pediatrics' Family Media Plan](#).

What to look for in monitoring²

- Inappropriate content in their feeds, posts they are tagged in, or their own posts. This could include sexually inappropriate images or messaging, offensive language or hate speech, unkind language, or mature content.
- Bullying. Notice if your child is being bullied or doing the bullying. This could look like snarky or derogatory comments, making fun of someone, spreading rumors, being purposely left out, name calling, or threats. It can take place in public posts, private messages, or group chats.
- Unhealthy messaging. Look out for content or posts promoting disordered eating, unreasonable beauty standards, dubious physical or mental health advice, or anything that seems like it is negatively affecting your teen's self-esteem or well-being.
- Revealing photos. Private messages and deleted photos tend to be where this sort of content resides.
- Predatory behavior. People are not necessarily who they say they are. Check feeds and messages for signs of foul play, from catfishing and financial scams to grooming.

How to respond to problems if your child is not following the rules²

Some kids find workarounds to parental controls. When this happens entering into a power struggle rarely works. Instead, approach pushback with a problem-solving mindset, trying to see things from the perspective of your teen and work together to find mutually acceptable solutions.

If that doesn't work, you may choose to limit or remove phone or social media privileges as a natural consequence for not engaging safely or appropriately.

Hopefully, over time, your child will need less and less social media oversight. With a strong foundation in media literacy and online safety, they will be able to make smart and safe choices.

References

¹ [Child Mind Institute – When Are Kids Ready for Social Media?](#)

² [Child Mind Institute – How Much Should you Monitor Your Teen's Social Media?](#)

³ [Child Mind Institute – How Using Social Media Affects Teenagers](#)