

A MESSAGE FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS

MONITORING YOUR KIDS' SOCIAL MEDIA

You keep an eye on your child in the real world. But what about their digital life? Social distancing can mean more time online and a spike in social media threats. These tips from the **Montgomery County Public Schools & Montgomery County Council of PTAs** in collaboration with the **Montgomery County Police Department** can help your kids stay 'social media' safe.

1. **Enforce age requirements.** For Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, you must be 13 to get an account. For YouTube, it's 18, but someone 13+ can sign up with parental permission.
2. **Look for inappropriate activity.** Watch for photos, disrespectful language, bullying, and words or images meant to hurt or offend. Notice who your child's friends are and how they know them.
3. **Ask for passwords.** For pre-teens, you may wish to have their passwords and check their activity. This helps keep them accountable for their online behavior. As your child matures, you may back off more, but don't check out. Find the middle ground between independence and oversight.
4. **Friend or follow your child.** This is one way to keep an eye on your child's social media activity. Tell them that what they post now could impact their future. Be aware that some kids use a different account to hide their posts. And some parents set up a Google alert with their child's name to flag activity.
5. **Check history.** Do routine phone checks to assess search history. Most parents inform their child before doing this. Being sneaky can backfire. Frame these tech checks in a caring way. Show an interest in their digital life. Show respect. Be 'there' to discuss tough topics. Communicate trust in their good judgment. (Your child's desire for privacy doesn't necessarily mean they're hiding something.)
6. **Consider a security app. Review the parental controls.** Adjust the settings on devices to prompt your permission before an app can be installed.
7. **Devices in plain site.** MCPD suggests keeping phones in public spaces of the home; out of bedrooms and bathrooms, for example.

Questions?

Contact safetech@mccpta.org.

1 in 3 young people in 30 countries said they've been a victim of online bullying. 1 in 5 report having skipped school due to cyberbullying and violence

(UNICEF: uni.cf/3eFhJXT)

More youths experienced cyberbullying on Instagram than any other platform at 42%. Facebook follows close behind at 37%. Snapchat ranked third at 31%.

(Ditch the Label 2017 Annual Bullying Survey: bit.ly/392z8bU)

45% of 12- to 15-year-olds report encountering hateful content online. Most hate material was encountered on social media.

(HateLab, 2017: <https://bit.ly/39cWxHK>)

50% of teens feel they're addicted to their smartphones

(Common Sense Media: bit.ly/2CkBSW5)

Of children currently experiencing a mental health problem, 68% say they experienced cyberbullying in the last year.

(Safety Net & YoungMinds: bit.ly/3jdltdp)

24% of teens whose household income is less than \$30,000 a year say they have been the target of physical threats online, compared with 12% whose annual household income is \$75,000+.

These experiences do not differ by race, ethnicity, or parent's education level.

(Pew Research Center: pewrsr.ch/3jg0nUO)

Hate groups use social media to organize and recruit. Online platforms' business models depend on maximizing 'hits' and viewing times. It's how they make money.

(socialnomics.net: bit.ly/2CFRHGP)

27.1% of U.S. high school students who self-identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual report being cyberbullied in the past year, compared to 13.3% of their heterosexual peers.

(www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/lgbtq)

"YouTube may be one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the 21st century." — Sociologist Zeynep Tufekci.

Social media platforms are exempt from liability for actionable speech by users. The 1996 Communications Decency Act says magazines and tv networks can be sued for publishing defamatory information they know to be false. Social media platforms cannot be found similarly liable for content they host.

(Council on Foreign Relations: on.cfr.org/2WsUfyZ)