# What is social media?

Social media refers to any digital platform, system, website or app that enables people to create and share content, and connect with each other.

The term social media refers to a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Social media is internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content, such as personal information, documents, videos, and photos.

Facebook

A free site where registered users (aged 13 and up) can share pictures, links, videos, and other content with their 'friends'. Friends are other registered users you have connected with within the network. Most of the time, anything you share will only be seen by the people you have 'friended'. Facebook changes its privacy settings regularly so it's important to stay up-to-date with their settings and policies.

Instagram

A free image sharing service that is used mainly on mobile devices. On Instagram, it's common to connect with people you don't know but share common interests with (for example, Taylor Swift). You can have a public account or a private account where only friends can see your posts. Instagram also has their own privacy settings to stay up-to-date with.

Snapchat

A mobile phone messaging application that allows you to send video or picture messages to one or more people at a time. The messages are only viewable for a few seconds at a time, as determined by the sender. However, there are ways of saving the images using other phone functions.

TikTok

A free video sharing platform where users can shoot, edit and share short videos. Like other social media apps, users can follow, like and comment on everything they see. The bulk of TikTok users are 24 and younger.

Tumblr

A blogging website where people can publish their own articles and share it with people who follow their blog or profile. They also view the content of people they follow. On Tumblr, it is more common to connect with people you don't know in real life than people you do.

# WhatsApp and messaging services

WhatsApp and messaging applications let you contact friends using internet data (or wifi) instead of your mobile carrier, which reduces the cost of messaging. It can be used without a sim card if connected to a wi-fi network. It is popular because it allows you to send messages to a group of friends at one time.

# Why teens use social media?

Social media is a way for teenagers to stay in touch with their friends. Teens have always talked after school, long before social media – hanging out at the bus stop, at the local park, chatting on the phone – now they just have a different platform to do so. It is an important part of socialising and connection in the modern world. Teenagers and social media use is increasing, the main reasons teenagers regularly use social media include:

* talking to friends
* joining in on group conversations
* learning about current events and staying up to date with online content
* meeting new people
* not having anything to do, or feeling bored
* feeling like they might miss out if they aren't always up to date with social media.

# What are the benefits of social media for teenagers?

Being socially connected is very important for the psychological development of your child, and in this day and age, the online environment is where they get a lot of this. By connecting with others through social media, your child could:

* develop better social skills
* feel less isolated
* learn about new cultural and societal ideas and issues
* bond with their friends
* have fun
* be creative and share their own ideas with friends
* be better equipped to be active citizens in society
* develop real world skills to help them become more independent learn about world events and current affairs outside of their immediate environment.

# What are the risks of using social media?

Like any form of social engagement, social media comes with risks. Some of the most common risks include:

* spending too much time online and being disconnected from the real world
* being the victim of online bullying
* damaging your online reputation
* having your personal information shared online
* being harassed or annoyed by someone you do not want attention from
* being the victim of an online scam
* having reduced self-esteem (for some teenagers) like:
* being withdrawn
* quiet

Just like in the offline world, there are things you can do to protect your child from these risks. It's important to prepare them for how to respond if these things do occur. Check out our 'things to try' for tips and ideas on minimizing the risk of using social media.

Sometimes teenagers can feel a 'compulsion' to check their social media accounts frequently, but this is generally only in extreme cases. Helping your teenager to develop positive habits like taking regular breaks from checking social media, and making sure notifications are turned off so that their mobile device isn't distracting can help reduce the compulsion to check in with social media so often.

* When to know if something is wrong
* Whatever your child is doing, it's important to be aware of their behavior and their wellbeing. If you notice big changes in:
* their energy levels and enthusiasm for offline life
* their engagement in normal conversation
* the amount of time they spend doing other activities, like sport, homework, and other hobbies

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