

# *A PARENT'S GUIDE*

PREPARING YOUR TEEN FOR SOCIAL MEDIA



by *sociallymedia* **soci  
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# ABOUT ME



I'm Courtney, an advocate for healthy digital habits and social media education. I have a Master's degree in Mass Communications. I've also walked the path myself, growing up as a teen in the early days of social media. This firsthand experience, combined with my professional experience, gives me a unique insight into the challenges teens and parents face today and the tools they need to thrive.

My passion for helping families navigate social media stems from my belief that understanding and preparation are key. Social media isn't going away, so it's essential that we empower teens to use it responsibly and mindfully.

I'm here to help parents by educating and preparing the household for the social media journey. Together, we can create a framework for safe, healthy online engagement that fosters confidence and resilience.

## INTRODUCTION

Navigating social media with your teen is overwhelming, but you do not have to do it alone. This guide has been designed to walk you through each stage of preparing your teen for social media in a way that helps you feel informed and confident. The key is approaching the topic with empathy, open communication, a strong commitment to your teen's well-being, and trust in yourself as a parent.

In this guide, you'll find practical strategies, actionable tips, and essential resources backed by research and real-world experiences to help you engage in meaningful conversations and establish healthy, sustainable social media habits with your teen.

### STEP 1: Is your teen READY?

**Brain Development:** Teens' brains are still developing, specifically their ability to regulate emotions and make long-term decisions. Social media contains a variety of overwhelming stimuli, making it difficult for teens to process information in a balanced way.

**Emotional Maturity:** Social media introduces teens to social validation, comparison, and potential online conflicts (bullying, exclusion). Consider the following: Has your teen developed emotional resilience, self-esteem independent of likes, comments, or followers, self-regulation of mood, time management skills, sense of responsibility, and the knowledge of when and how to notify you if there is an issue?

**Building Real-World Connections:** Encourage your teen to focus on nurturing in-person friendships and activities before diving into the digital space. Face-to-face social skills are foundational and help prevent the reliance on online interactions for validation.



**QUICK TIP:** *How to help BOOST your teen's confidence and self-esteem.*

**Develop Hobbies & Passions:** Encourage activities that build your teen's self-confidence outside of social media. Whether it's sports, arts, music, or other interests, by urging your teen to explore various activities, they can find a sense of fulfillment and identity that's not reliant on online validation.

**Building A Community:** Take advantage of and even create opportunities within your community for your teen to strengthen their in-person social network. Strong, healthy and consistent relationships can buffer against the pressures and anxiety that sometimes come with social media interactions.

## **STEP 2: Create an Open Dialogue**

**Start with Curiosity:** Ask your teen why they're interested in social media. What do they hope to get out of it? Are they feeling peer pressure? By asking open-ended questions and listening intently, you validate their feelings and open the door for honest dialogue.

**Empathize with Their Feelings:** Share your own experience and struggles with social media or other technologies. Let them know you understand the allure and the pressure to join, but you also recognize the potential risks.

**Explain Your Reasoning:** Instead of simply saying "no," explain the reasons behind your decision. Discuss the impact on mental health, privacy, and the importance of being emotionally ready. Let them know you are making these decisions to help protect and guide them, and ways they can build trust.

**NOTE:** Teens are resourceful and if they don't understand the reasoning behind your decision (and the consequences of breaking your boundary) they will find ways to go behind your back - especially when pressured by peers. **Be Clear & Stand Firm!**

## **STEP 3: Set Healthy Goals for the Future**

**Create a Family Social Media Plan:** Before your teen joins social media, set boundaries together. This could include time limits, privacy settings, who they can follow, and rules about how they use the app. Make it a collaborative effort so they feel involved in the decision-making process. It is a plan to help set intentional boundaries with social media - NOT just a contract for them to sign.

**Model Healthy Social Media Behavior:** Practice implementing the healthy habits you want your teen to have, into your own media usage. Your teen will likely imitate how you engage with social media. If you demonstrate responsible and balanced use, they will see it as normal to have boundaries and limits.



### **QUICK TIP: *Encourage Alternatives to Social Media for Connection***

**Brainstorm In-Person Activities:** Promote off-line activities for your teen by creating a list of potential things to do as a family/with their friends. Help them understand that social media isn't the only or best way to stay connected with those around them. Teach them how to schedule activities in advance and to follow through.

\*If some activities require payment, brainstorm additional ways your teen can earn money.

**Other Forms of Communication:** Encourage calling or video chatting with friends as alternatives to texting/connecting on social media. These forms of communication foster deeper conversations without the distractions of likes and comments.



#### **STEP 4: EDUCATE Before Joining**

Even if they aren't on social media yet or will not be getting it for some time, use this time to teach them about digital literacy, critical thinking online, and the importance of mindful consumption. Equip them with the tools they'll need when they eventually join.

**Start with the Mastering Social Media Course.** This course will ensure they are aware of and understand the risks & realities of social media, by explaining topics including:

- **Comparison Culture:** Understanding that what they see online is curated and often unrealistic and how it can create pressures and expectations of beauty, success, and happiness.
- **Cyberbullying:** Discuss how to handle negative interactions, report issues, and maintain healthy boundaries.
- **Addiction & Overuse:** Social media platforms are designed to keep users engaged for long periods. Social media can lead to compulsive checking and scrolling, negatively impacting students' focus on school, hobbies, and face-to-face interactions.
- **Privacy & Permanency:** Helping them understand the dangers of sharing sensitive information and how their posts can have long-term consequences.

#### **STEP 5: When the Time Comes, Introduce Gradually**

**Review Your Family Media Plan:** Sit down with your teen and review your family media plan. Discuss where and when they can use social media, help them determine how much time is appropriate, how to track their time, and be intentional with their use.

**Start with One App:** When you feel it's time for your teen to join social media, start with one app and set up the account together. Discuss the importance of having the account as private, and run through who can send them messages/who they should and should not accept as followers.

**Slow and Controlled:** For the first few times, make an effort to sit down and co-view social media together. This allows them to experience the platform with your guidance, talk about what each of you is observing, and assess potential impacts.

#### **INTENTIONAL USE EXAMPLES:**

- Utilizing "Do Not Disturb" mode to silence notifications.
- Setting Screen Time & Privacy controls to limit time spent on phone (reasonably).
- Leaving phone to charge away from bed to start and end each day screen-free.
- Having and knowing your purpose for being on social media.

**Note:** Although social media should not be part of a punishment/reward system, you should remind your teens that you, as a parent, reserve the right to revoke or limit access if you no longer believe the app is suitable for them or that they are struggling with the established rules and boundaries. You can let them know they will have an opportunity to try again later.

**Important: Mistakes will happen. They are part of the learning process.**

### **STEP 6: Foster Ongoing Chats**

**Keep the Dialogue Open:** Social media isn't a one-and-done conversation. Ensure your teen feels comfortable coming to you with questions or concerns as they navigate the online world. Regular check-ins (scheduled or natural) about their social media use, mental health, and any challenges they're facing can go a long way. Use these [conversation starters](#) to guide the conversation.

**Encourage Reflection:** Check in with your teen and ask them how social media affects them. Are they feeling pressure, stress, or joy from their online interactions? Help them reflect on their experiences using the individual [self-audit rubric](#) and encourage changes when needed. You can also schedule times to review your family media plan and reflect together.

**Continuous Learning:** Social media is constantly evolving, and so does the research behind it. It is important to never stop learning to stay informed on social media updates and trends. An easy way to do this is to follow @thesociallymedia on social media platforms and check the website for blogs and other resources.

**Note:** You do not want to come across as controlling or monitoring their every move. The purpose of communicating and checking in is to ensure they know you are a safe and trusted source when they need one.

### **BONUS STEP: Continuous Learning**

At Socially Media, we offer resources to help parents and teens navigate the social media landscape responsibly. Whether it's setting up boundaries, learning online safety, or developing a balanced relationship with technology, we provide personalized strategies to help build a positive digital experience for your family.

- **Courses for Parents & Teens**
- **Digital Literacy Resources**
- **Educational Tips on Instagram**