

Social media benefits and risks: pre-teens and teenagers

Key points

- **Social media is a big part of social and creative life for many pre-teens and teenagers.**
- **Social media benefits include connection, learning and creativity.**
- **Risks include exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and privacy and data breaches.**
- **Written guidelines can help pre-teens and teenagers get benefits while using social media responsibly, respectfully and safely.**

About social media for pre-teens and teenagers

Popular social media apps among pre-teens and teenagers include [Instagram](#), [Messenger](#) or [Messenger Kids](#), [Pinterest](#), [Reddit](#), [Snapchat](#), [TikTok](#), [WhatsApp](#) and [YouTube Kids](#).

Online chat in multiplayer video games, like Fortnite, League of Legends, Clash of Clans and The Sims is also a popular social media option for pre-teens and teenagers.

Using social media often involves **uploading and sharing content**. This includes:

- creating online profiles
- posting comments or chatting
- uploading photos and videos
- reacting to or 'liking' other people's posts
- sharing links
- tagging photos and content
- creating and sharing game modifications
- remixing or changing existing content and sharing it.

Social media: benefits

Social media is a **big part of social and creative life** for pre-teens and teenagers.

Pre-teens and teenagers use social media to **have fun**, make and maintain friendships, share and learn interests, explore identities and develop relationships with family. It's an extension of their offline and face-to-face interactions. For older teenagers especially, it's often a key part of how they connect with friends.

Social media can **connect pre-teens and teenagers to online global groups** based on shared interests. These might be support networks – for example, for young people with disability or medical conditions, LGBTIQ+ teenagers, or children from particular cultural backgrounds. Or they might be sites for commenting on and sharing content about particular interests like games, TV series, music or hobbies.

Your child can get **many other benefits from using social media**:

- Learning: your child can use social media to better understand, extend or share what they're learning at school, either informally or in formal school settings.
- Hobbies and interests: your child can use social media to follow their interests and learn new ones.
- Creativity: your child can be creative with profile pages, images, video and game modifications.
- Mental health and wellbeing: connecting with extended family and friends and taking part in local and global online groups can give your child a sense of belonging.

Social media: risks

Social media can also pose risks. For your child, these risks include:

- being exposed to inappropriate or upsetting content, like mean aggressive, violent or sexual comments or images
- uploading inappropriate content, like embarrassing or provocative photos or videos of themselves or others
- sharing personal information with strangers – for example, images, date of birth, location or address
- [cyberbullying](https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/cyberbullying-online-safety/about-cyberbullying) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/cyberbullying-online-safety/about-cyberbullying>).
- being exposed to too much targeted [advertising](https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/media/advertising-children) (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/media/advertising-children>) and marketing
- being exposed to data breaches, like having their data sold on to other organisations.

Managing social media risks for pre-teens and teenagers

Talking about social media use

Talking with your child is the best way to protect them from social media risks and ensure their internet safety. Talking gives you the opportunity to help your child:

- work out how they want to treat other people and be treated online – for example, you can encourage your child to make only positive comments
- understand the risks involved in using social media – for example, your child might be tagged in an embarrassing photo taken at a party
- learn how to navigate the risks – for example, if your child posts an identifiable selfie, they can reduce risk by not including any other personal information
- learn what to do if people ask for personal details, are mean or abusive online, post embarrassing photos of them, or share information that links back to them.

Finding out more about social media

Social media apps and functionality are always changing, so it's a good idea to keep up to date with the social media your child uses. You could ask your child which platforms are popular and which ones they like. You could also get your child to show you how they work.

Thinking about age recommendations

Most social media apps require people to be at least 13 years old to sign up. But these age restrictions aren't always enforced, so pre-teens can often still use the apps. It can be tricky if your child's friends are using social media apps before they're old enough and your child wants to do the same.

If you want your child to wait, here are some options you could think about:

- Could you compromise? What if your child uses a family social media account until they're old enough for their own? This could give your child a way to connect with friends with your help to navigate social media.
- Could your child use a child-friendly social media app, like YouTube Kids or Messenger Kids? These have stronger safety settings and age-appropriate content.

What about banning social media?

It can be hard to ban social media, even for younger children. This is because social media is increasingly a part of children's apps, games, websites and learning environments. Instead, it's better to teach your child how to navigate social media risks and behave respectfully on social media.



[Internet safety for children aged 9-11 years \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/entertainment-technology/cyberbullying-online-safety/internet-safety-9-11-years\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/entertainment-technology/cyberbullying-online-safety/internet-safety-9-11-years) and [internet safety for teenagers \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/cyberbullying-online-safety/internet-safety-teens\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/entertainment-technology/cyberbullying-online-safety/internet-safety-teens), is about identifying and managing risks and also protecting your data and privacy.

Setting up social media guidelines

Some written guidelines about social media can help your child get the benefits of social media while using it responsibly, respectfully and safely. This agreement could be part of a [family media plan \(https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx\)](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx). If these guidelines include [your social media use \(https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/family-life/family-media-entertainment/parent-technology-use\)](https://raisingchildren.net.au/teens/family-life/family-media-entertainment/parent-technology-use) as well as your child's, you can be a positive role model.

Here are things your guidelines could include.

Using social media

This might cover basics like:

- when it's OK to use social media and how long your child can spend on social media
- whether it's OK to use social media during homework time, family meals and so on
- where it's OK to use social media – for example, only in family areas of the house, not bedrooms.

Posting content and comments

It's important for your child to agree to:

- think about why they want to post something and what reactions they might get before they post
- not upload or share inappropriate messages, images and video
- show respect in posts and when sharing content – for example, if it's not OK to say or do something face to face, it's not OK online
- seek consent before posting images of others.

Protecting privacy

It's a good idea to go through social media privacy guidelines and settings with your child.

Your child can protect their privacy by agreeing to:

- not share personal information like location and date of birth – for example, by giving this information to strangers online, doing online quizzes or tests and so on
- not add personal details like phone numbers or date of birth to private profiles
- regularly check privacy and location settings on apps and devices
- keep passwords and log-in details private and not share these with friends
- not use social media or other online accounts on public wi-fi
- log out of all accounts after using public computers.

Staying safe on social media

Safety essentials for your child include:

- blocking and reporting people they don't know or people who post upsetting comments or content
- not clicking on pop-ups – some pop-ups that seem safe can lead to pornography sites or are scams
- accepting friend requests only from people whose identity they know
- taking screenshots of concerning things they see online, and talking to a trusted adult about them.



One way you can teach your child how to be safe and respectful on social media is by making a joint social media account that you can use together. This can give your child the chance to get familiar with social media before they're old enough to have an account of their own.

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External links

- [Children & Media Australia \(https://childrenandmedia.org.au/\)](https://childrenandmedia.org.au/)
- [eSafety Commissioner – Be Deadly Online: Social media and privacy \(https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/classroom-resources/be-deadly-online/issues/social-media-and-privacy\)](https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/classroom-resources/be-deadly-online/issues/social-media-and-privacy)
- [eSafety Commissioner – eSafety parents \(https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents\)](https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents)

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