

Five Things You Absolutely MUST Teach Your Teen About Social Media



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Only a parent of a teen knows the struggle. Yes, there have always been struggles between parents and their teens, but to say that we are pioneers of a new kind of parenting isn't just our generation's attempt to minimize the tough time parents of hippies or greasers or, I don't know, Disney channel stars, have had to endure. We truly are parenting an entirely new kind of teen – the iGeneration teen. And it's hard.

I wrote often about parenting this unique generation in my column at the OC Register and I will continue to write about them here on my blog. Heck, I'm even writing a book about them. Out of necessity – my husband and I have one teen now and three more waiting in the wings – I have a vested interest in learning everything I can about today's teen.

Here are five things I have taught my teen to help her understand social media and its impact on her life, her future and others.

1.) Be careful what you say, there is no sarcasm font.

Even though your teen may be “just be kidding” in a snarky text or comment or post, it’s important to teach teens that comedy can be taken the wrong way on social media. A sarcastic comment can hurt feelings or get them in trouble if taken out of context. Since there isn’t a sarcasm font that denotes they are joking around, it’s best to not risk it on social media.

2.) You are not responsible for what others say in a group chat.

The group chat is a staple in the teen communication diet. They form groups of friends in group chats on text or Instagram. (Think modern-day Pink Ladies from the movie Grease.) Just like in a live in-person conversation, we talked to our teen about the way other kids use bad language or are just plain mean in some group chats. And just like in a real life situation, she isn’t responsible for what they are saying, but she does have the option to “walk away” or in social media terms – leave the group.

In one of the shining moments of my daughter social media life, she decided to leave one group that wasn’t a positive influence in her life. SHE decide. This is what we are going for here – our kids making these decisions for themselves. I sweated it out for a few weeks looking through the groups’ conversation but in the end, she made the decision to leave herself.

3.) If you share other people’s content – Ta-da! It’s now your content.

The concept of sharing content by doing things like re-Tweeting, re-Vineing or reposting other’s content is a specific one to social media and may take parents a while to understand. Most social media channels give you the capacity to share other user’s content. Teach your teen that when she

does this, it is the same as if she were saying it, or doing it herself. For instance, if she re-Tweets something with foul language – she is using foul language. If she shares a Vine of someone doing something that is inappropriate, then she is endorsing it. Follow this rule up with real consequences. That will drive the point home to your teen – she shared it = she said it = bye-bye phone!

4.) No screen-time is important time.

In our house there is no screen-time after 8 p.m. No phone. No computer. At first this was hard for our older kids to take, but over time I think they enjoy the relief of not being tied to communication. We know as adults that it can be exhausting to always be checking emails and social media. You will get a fight if you don't have anything like this in place but I assure you, it is worth it!

5.) It's rude to not respond to texts from friends and especially from *ahem* parents who pay for your cellphone.

This one seems self-evident but every parent of a teen knows this struggle too well. You text your teen simple questions, a friendly "hi" or direction and you get a whole lotta nothing back. But you can see they seem to be posting on Instagram or texting other people or they respond only when they need something. Teaching a teen to have social media etiquette is an important lesson since this is the world they will be living in for the rest of their lives. When a friend asks about a homework assignment and she doesn't respond it is rude. When a parent sends a text and she doesn't respond it's unacceptable. Remember – without our help they won't have a phone. Use that power.

We truly are pioneering a new way of parenting. If you sometimes feel overwhelmed or at a loss for what to do it's understandable – parenting kids online and social media use was never modeled to us. The key is to be knowledgeable about

their social media life and make the best decisions you can for their well being. You read this whole blog post so you're doing GR8 ☐