

# VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES, REAL PROBLEMS.

The formats of social media sites like Instagram, Snapchat, X (Twitter), TikTok, and other networks are very attractive to teenagers and even younger children. Young people love to feel popular, build a network of friends; get messages throughout the day; and follow the accounts of celebrities that they admire. Social networking has exploded so quickly that lawmakers, Internet protection software companies, and parents are all scrambling to keep up with the new threats that it poses to young people.

## CHILD PREDATORS

No possibility is more disturbing to parents than that of a child predator forming a relationship with their child. Predators know how to take advantage of the carefree, seemingly safe environment of social media to deceive a young person and draw them into a dangerous situation. Despite highly publicized sting operations by police, predation online is still a huge problem. Check to make sure that everyone in your child's social network is an acquaintance offline as well, and never allow your child to go to a face-to-face meeting with someone they met online unless you are present. By the time your child realizes they have been deceived, it may be too late to get out of trouble. Many predators have been apprehended and convicted due to the vigilant eyes of parents who alerted police to unusual activity.



## RESOURCES

Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force

[www.icactaskforce.org/internetsafety](http://www.icactaskforce.org/internetsafety)

Be Internet Awesome

[www.beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en\\_us/families](http://www.beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/families)

KidsHealth.org

[www.kidshealth.org/en/parents/net-safety.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/en/parents/net-safety.html)

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## A PARENT'S GUIDE SOCIAL MEDIA



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# New Challenges Online

There are plenty of dangers online in general, but social media carries their own set of potential hazards. Parents need to be aware of the ways that child predators, identity thieves, and bullies use social sites to hurt others.

Sites like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat can be deceptive, in that they appear to allow the user to post information within a semi-private circle of acquaintances. Kids assume that their postings will only be visible to the people they have approved as friends or followers. Even though there are privacy controls on these sites, postings are hardly ever as “private” as you think. Experts warn that people outside your circle can usually view far more of your information than you suspect.

There is no system in place to ensure that a person’s profile corresponds to reality. A picture, name, and description may or may not accurately represent the owner of an account. Kids may think they are connecting with a new friend that shares their age and interests when in reality they are communicating with a potentially dangerous adult.

As a parent, you need to stay informed of the different social media sites and potential dangers. By staying up-to-date and involved in your child’s online activities you can reduce the risks.



## SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF-ESTEEM

One of the most profound effects of social media is one that can be difficult to see. It can affect the self-esteem of teens and young adults in a number of ways that can be negative. It often leads to social comparison, seeking validation through comments and likes, and exposure to cyberbullying. These can negatively impact their self-worth and confidence resulting in feelings of inadequacy, depression, anxiety, and loneliness.



### Financial Security Threats

Hackers are always searching for identity theft victims, and children and teens are easy targets. No matter who asks for it, your child should never give out personal information. One of the worst mistakes is to send someone else your account’s password. If a hacker can use your child’s password to log on to his or her account, they can obtain all kinds of other personal information and even impersonate your child. Impersonation is using another person’s account, usually in order to make purchases, send information, and send spam.

### Cyberbullying

Intimidation, gossip, spreading embarrassing photos or videos, and assaulting someone else with hateful language are all forms of cyberbullying. Teach your children to be courteous, considerate, kind, and truthful in their social media use. A statement originally intended as a joke can easily go much farther than intended, causing devastating humiliation to its victims. If your child has become a victim of cyberbullying, use the misuse reporting procedures of the site to bring it to authorities’ attention.

## Ways to Keep Kids Safe

### Be Involved in Your Child’s Online Activities

Don’t let your child’s social media accounts be unsupervised. Check them often to make sure that the conversations and contacts are appropriate and legal. It is very dangerous to assume that things are okay as long as your child doesn’t mention any problems – a young person who realizes they have made a serious mistake is often afraid to admit it for fear of punishment. Approach social media dangers as a team, and teach your child to notify you immediately if anything unusual is going on.



### Report Abuse Quickly

Most sites and apps have a privacy and security system in place to protect users. These systems usually depend on users anonymously reporting activity that violates the rules of the sites. They are most useful for getting users removed who post inappropriate language, photos and videos, or cyberbullying tactics. Report any inappropriate activity immediately. If you feel that any online activity violates the law, contact your local police department. Law enforcement agencies can track down individuals who use

illegal hacking techniques or who deliberately target children with harmful intent. Many predators have been apprehended and convicted due to the vigilant eyes of parents who alerted police to unusual activity.

### Limit Access

One of the best actions you can take to protect your child from social networking dangers is to install a trustworthy, comprehensive app that monitors online activity.

A good app will:

- Filter, block, and monitor websites and apps
- Set custom screen time limits

The most detailed software also records web activity so that you can review what has been happening on your home computer.

Social media sites have brought people together in new and exciting ways, but they have also opened up new threats.



**By staying involved in your child’s online interactions, you can help to keep them safe.**

