

# 5 Things You Should Do Before Your Kids Join Social Media Sites

*by: Lindsay Hutton*

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Facebook, Twitter, Instagram — in today's 24/7 digital world, social media sites have become a part of your child's everyday life. Educate yourself on each [popular social media site and app](#) so that you can stay in the know about what your child is doing online, teach him about the importance of privacy, and open the lines of communication to make sure he stays safe from online predators — and so your child can navigate this tricky new frontier.

# Do Your Research

According to Consumer Reports, more than one-third of the 20 million minors who use Facebook are under the required age of 13. Additionally, about 41 percent of teens claim their parents don't know what they are doing online.

Get to know the social media sites that your kids are using. Set up an account, cruise around the site, and educate yourself on what each offers and how kids are using it. Be familiar with sites' age restrictions and know that kids can easily get around them. If you have a child under the age of 13, check the browser history on your computer. If you see Facebook listed, assume your child has created an account. Talk to her about why the age requirement exists and how it might be a good idea to hold off on joining.

**[Next: Communicate with Your Child »](#)**



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## Communicate with Your Child

Keep the lines of communication open with your child. Talk to him about his friends, school, and hobbies. Having an open dialogue will make your child more likely to come to you if he is being cyberbullied or harassed online. Talk to him about some of the mistakes you made or obstacles you faced and how you got through it. Give some perspective on what it was like to grown up without the exposing and immediate nature of the Internet today.

**Next: Set Rules and Limits »**

## Set Rules and Limits

Sit down with your child and determine which sites are appropriate to visit, including social media and gaming sites, and set limits on what can be communicated and shared on each one. This includes photos, posts, comments, and anything else that exposes your child's identity.

Consider having access to any accounts your child has set up in her name. Or, set up an account and insist your child become your "friend" or a part of your network. This will allow you to be aware of any inappropriate behavior that might be going on, and it will also act as a reminder to your child of the transparency of this virtual world. Print this [parent/child online agreement form](#) so you can both agree to the rules and know what is expected ahead of time.

The Kaiser Family Foundation recommends children between the ages of 8-18 should not use technology (computers, television, smart phones) for more than three hours a day. Set time limits to avoid [technology overload](#), and to ensure your child isn't neglecting other areas of his life (like homework). Also, limit technology use to common areas of your house.

[Next: Beware of Overshare »](#)



## Beware of Overshare

Anything that is posted on the Internet can be copied, altered, and shared without the author's knowledge or permission. This includes photos, written messages, and texts sent on smart phones.

Remind your child that once something goes on the Internet, it can stay there forever. Common Sense Media offers a good tip: if it's something you wouldn't want posted on the hallways at school, don't post it online or send it in a text. This includes anything involving drugs, alcohol, nudity, and **sexting**.

Also, talk to him about how his online behavior can affect him down the line. Colleges, and even some employers, often surf social media sites when researching candidates, so warn him against posting anything that could potentially be embarrassing or harmful. As we all know, kids can't always foresee the kinds of behaviors they'll regret down the line.

**Next: Set the Privacy Settings Together »**



## Set the Privacy Settings Together

Without proper privacy settings in place, millions of people have access to any photos and information your child posts. For example, if your child has an unrestricted Twitter or Facebook account, friends of friends (of friends... of friends... you get the idea) can see all photos, status updates, tweets, Instagram photos, and more, that she posts. Additionally, some sites (like Facebook) allow a user's location to be posted. Since many Facebook users have hundreds (even thousands) of friends, the number of people who can find information on your child's account can be staggering.

Set your child's privacy settings so that only trusted friends and family can see any activity. Don't allow your child's location to be posted, and warn her about the **safety implications** that posting (or "checking in") where she is might pose.

[Next: Do Your Research »](#)