

MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

WHEN ARE CHILDREN READY FOR SOCIAL MEDIA?

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
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Children crave contact with their friends and peers, and social media has become an important way for them to interact. For children who are isolated, it can be a lifeline. But it also has the potential to become addictive, to get them into trouble, and to harm fragile self-esteem. It can be a big job for parents to keep up with monitoring what they are accessing — games, music, videos, photos, and websites. But for many parents, the biggest challenge is when to let their children have access to social media. And how much access?

Experts agree that parental oversight is crucial when children are starting to use social media.

Children often start pushing for access to social media in late elementary and early middle school, and parents feel pressured to allow it because they do not want their children to feel left out. However, delaying social media involvement may help them be more mature about what they post, more able to resist its addictive appeal, and less vulnerable to emotional harm.

A parent movement called [Wait Until 8th](#) advocates for delaying exposure to social media until children are in eighth grade. Research shows that 10 -to 14-year-old girls are hit hardest by the potential negative effects of social media.

Choosing the right time

The best timing for each child depends not just on their age but their maturity, and children develop at different rates. When a child is ready will depend on things like their ability to read social cues, their impulse control, and their vulnerability to criticism or rejection. If a tween has a hard time disengaging from activities like video games, they may have a hard time stepping away from social media.

Monitoring your child on social media

Experts agree that parental oversight is crucial when children are starting to use social media. Talk to your child beforehand and discuss what you consider acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Go on an app together and look at what their friends are posting. Start with one social media platform at a time and monitor what your child is posting.

Rules for social media access

Families vary about what they want their children to be allowed to do on social media. Parents can make it clear that access is dependent on your child following the rules. Some parents set rules limiting who their children can interact with, some on what kinds of things they can post.

Parental Control

Major social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat have parent control settings. They also added a family pairing setting. Once parents link their account to their child's, they can control all privacy settings on their child's account. If parents are not comfortable with their child having their own account, they can create a joint account and engage in the content with them. There are parental control tools such as Bark, that monitors a child's activity on social networks, YouTube, email, and text messages. Screen Time is a tool that allows parents to set time limits on daily screentime.

Children who are vulnerable

While most children are not necessarily harmed by what they see on social media. It is not always clear to parents if a child is depressed or anxious. Experts recommend careful monitoring and use of guardrails. The reality is that for children who are struggling with emotional issues, using social media can be a risk factor.