

Making Good Choices When Using Social Media

A topic requested from recent feedback was teenage engagement with Facebook and other social media. There's lots to think about on this topic particularly because it's an area that is new to parenting - our parents did not model to us how to manage this phenome-non.

Humans have always looked for ways to connect with others through shared interests and experiences, and social media are relatively new tools to use to do this. Both face to face and social media interactions contain opportunities for pro social communication such as giving compliments, exchanging information, having fun and playful talks as well as anti social interactions such as spreading rumours, teasing, threatening or bullying. The major differences with social media interactions are that there is a greater potential for contact with people parents do not know, the interactions happen during more hours of the day and there is less likelihood parents are aware of what is being said (posted) as supervision may be difficult to achieve.

Let's look at aspects we need to be mindful of when helping our teens to make good choices using social media:

- social media make it very easy to impulsively share private information and once it has been posted, even when deleted, it is traceable. It may have far reaching effects for the individual or family
- negative interactions can be hard to escape and most teens won't be able to turn off the mobile phone or not check the website, even if when receiving text messages that are upsetting or even harassing in some way
- time spent on social media may mean our teens spend less time engaged in their studies, with family and face to face with friends and may mean they have less sleep including interrupted sleep
- social media sites can be a huge distraction - whilst studying or finishing homework, students will be interrupted and less focussed when messages and posts are streaming in that the student cannot ignore
- information can be spread extremely quickly and is damaging if what is being spread is negative in its content such as rumours and negative comments or an in-appropriate photo or video clip

There are a number of positive outcomes too of course and these include the potential to interact with more thought, as time can be spent composing messages, social media provides a forum for messages and images to reach a group of people in a variety of places all at once. Social media can enhance the teen's ability to connect with others and form positive relationships with peers. Keep posted as next time we will look at what parents can do.

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