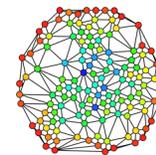


Best Practices for Teaching Teens to Become Safer, Smarter Social Media Users



1. Teach Teens about Risk-Benefit Analysis

Social media use can provide teens with a range of social, emotional, and cognitive benefits. Instead of dismissing all social media as frivolous and dangerous, teach teens to consider the possible benefits and harms of their actions before posting online.

2. Build on Strong Adult-Teen Relationships

Teens respond best to lessons and advice from adults they trust, especially when dealing with sensitive issues such as online privacy and safety. Adults who want to teach teens about online safety but lack trusted relationships can collaborate with trusted teachers, librarians, and others for more effective teaching.

3. Offer Hand-Ons Labs and Live Demonstrations

Online safety lessons in schools are often delivered in the form of stock videos about the potential harms of the Internet. Most students say that they find hands-on interactive online sessions more engaging, more compelling, and more effective than video-based instruction.

4. Avoid Scare Tactics; Frame Lessons in Positive Terms

Students dislike lessons framed in negative terms, or those suggesting that nearly all social media use is dangerous or aggressive. Framing lessons in positive terms sends a message of concern for teens' well-being and genuine interest in teaching teens to become well-educated users.

5. Use Personal Stories and Testimonials

Teens find personal testimonials, especially stories from fellow students or trusted adults who have had risky encounters online, highly effective for teaching about the potential dangers of careless online behaviors. Schools and libraries can poll teens and staff for volunteers with meaningful personal stories to share.

6. Take Advantage of Teachable Moments

Taking advantage of teachable moments and incidents impresses upon teens the real-life implications of online safety lessons. Teachers and librarians can turn teens' negative social media experiences into valuable teaching opportunities and avenues for promoting community-based healing.

7. Be a Social Media Advocate

Many schools and libraries restrict teens' social media use, yet teachers and library staff circumvent restrictions for their own use, sending a confusing mixed message. Parents, teachers, and librarians can work with school and library administrators to develop policies that support teens' positive use of social media in libraries, at school, and elsewhere.

8. Favor Education over Restriction

Banning teens from social media might seem like a good way to keep them safe, but it deprives them from participating in online youth culture, and many will find ways around restrictions. It is more beneficial and realistic to teach best practices and help teens become good digital citizens.

"Best Practices for Teaching Teens to Become Safer, Smarter Social Media Users" was written by Denise Agosto, Ph.D. (Drexel University), and June Abbas, Ph.D. (University of Oklahoma), based on research funded by a 2014 OCLC/ALISE Library and Information Science Research Grant. It draws on research conducted with 98 high school seniors in two U.S. high schools. For more information, see: <https://onlineprivacysafetyteens.wordpress.com/>.