

Social Media and Kids: How to Help
Part 2

What can parents do to help kids build a safe and reasonable relationship with social media before they're out on their own? Dr. Donna Wick says keeping teens from falling into the social media trap is more complicated than it sounds. "It's not about taking the phone away or having a single conversation." She says, "Parents need to be diligent about making sure kids are getting a dose of reality and need to model healthy behaviors."

- **Take social media seriously.** Don't underestimate the role social media plays in the lives of teenagers, warns Dr. Wick. "The power of a visual image is so strong. It's disorienting." Many kids never knew a world where social media didn't exist, and for them the things that happen online—slights, break-ups, likes, or negative comments—are very real. When you talk about social media, make sure you're really listening and be careful not to dismiss or minimize your child's experiences.
- **Encourage them to think outside the (crop) box.** When you talk to your child about social media, encourage exploration of it in a more critical way. A great way to start is to try asking what may have been cropped or edited out of friends' "perfect" pictures and why. That can lead to larger questions. Do you think your friends are really the people they appear to be online? Are you? What's the purpose of posting a photo? What is it about getting "likes" that feels good? Does looking at social media affect your mood?
- **Model a healthy response to failure.** "Kids *have* to get the message that it is okay to fail," says Dr. Wick. "And not only that it's okay to fail, but that showing it is okay, too." If parents hide their own failures, kids are less likely to be okay with anything less than success. "Let kids know that failure is part of how we learn to succeed, that it's nothing to be ashamed of, and let them see you pick yourself up and try again."
- **Praise (and show) effort.** "Effort is something to be proud of," says Dr. Wick. "It can't be said enough." Parents should let kids know that showing their work is something to be praised, not hidden. When your child has worked hard on something, praise those efforts no matter what the outcome.
- **Go on a "social holiday."** If you're worried that your child is getting too wrapped up in social media, try taking a social holiday. "This means *everyone*," says Dr. Wick. If you're asking your child to take a break, practice what you preach and pledge to stay off media as well. It can be every bit as hard for parents to unplug as kids."
- **Trust people, not pictures.** Finally, don't rely on social media to let you know how your children are *really* doing. They may post smiling selfies all day long, but if they seem unhappy or sound unhappy on the phone, don't let it go. Make it safe to talk to you by encouraging them to share their feelings and being supportive. Reassure your child that you're not disappointed, and that you are proud for reaching out. In the end, as a parent you want your child to be happy and successful. Making sure your children know you love them and are proud of them as they are—unfiltered, unedited, imperfect—will help them build the confidence they need to accept themselves and stay safe and healthy when they are out on their own.