





Social media is here to stay. Let's face it, as much as we might want to keep our kids away from it forever, that's probably not realistic. The good news is that social media isn't all bad (or all good) for children's mental health.

Social media helps tweens and teens make connections with others who may have similar interests. This can allow them to learn about forming relationships and how they feel about themselves. And building connections and self-esteem are good for mental health. Depending on the child, social media use can also increase anxiety and depression, disrupt healthy brain development, and potentially encourage kids to share too much, exposing them to danger, hurtful speech, or bullying.

Review the table below to learn about other risks and benefits of social media use in youth.

RISKS	BENEFITS
 <p>Longevity of posts Digital content never really goes away, even if deleted. That can mean posts can have a much longer impact.</p> <p>Preoccupation with appearance Kids may focus too much on looks and the feedback that certain styles get, resulting in low self-esteem.</p> <p>Advertising messages Ads may not be age appropriate or can create a misunderstanding of lifestyles.</p> <p>Fears of missing out (FOMO) Seeing friends at a party or sharing fun that they aren't part of can create dissatisfaction.</p>	 <p>Building relationships Connecting digitally can strengthen in-person friendships and self-esteem.</p> <p>Exploring identity Exploring things they like or value to determine their unique self-expression can bolster mental wellness.</p> <p>Discovering creativity Learning more about their interests and honing abilities like video editing or a new language can be beneficial.</p> <p>Finding a group Interacting with others who look like them or share similarities provides important peer support.</p>

Social media can affect some children's mental health more than others. If you have a child with a mental health diagnosis, you may want to be even more cautious as you introduce social media to them. Check out [this blog post](#) from to learn more about on this topic.

Starting a conversation about social media

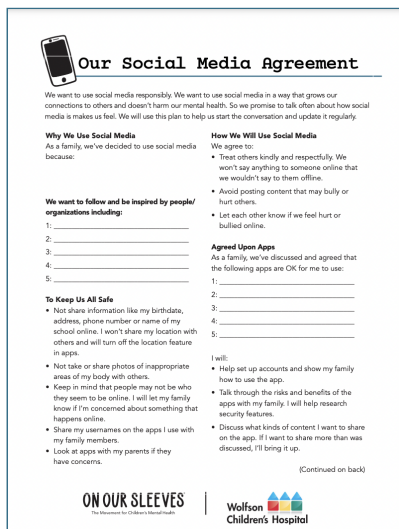
Now that you know the risks and benefits of social media, you're ready to talk with your child about using social media responsibly. If they're already on social media, ask to sit and watch them as they interact with their favorite app. If they're not on social media yet, you can still talk about it by discussing some of the apps you use and asking about what they've seen their friends doing.

Try asking things like:

- What's your favorite thing about this app?
- How do you feel when you're doing this?
- What have you seen that's made you feel uncomfortable?

Make a plan

You'll want to plan about how you can respond in a neutral way to your child's answers, even if they're concerning. Whether your child has started exploring social media or not, your family can work together to come up with a plan that everyone agrees on.



Our Social Media Agreement

We want to use social media responsibly. We want to use social media in a way that grows our connections to others and doesn't harm our mental health. So we promise to talk other about how social media makes us feel. We will use this plan to help us start the conversation and update it regularly.

Why We Use Social Media
As a family, we've decided to use social media because:

We want to follow and be inspired by people/ organizations including:
1: _____
2: _____
3: _____
4: _____
5: _____

To Keep Us All Safe

- Not share information like my birthdate, address, phone number or name of my school online. I won't share my location with others and will turn off the location feature in apps.
- Not take or share photos of inappropriate areas of my body with others.
- Keep in mind that people may not be who they seem to be online. I will let my family know if I'm concerned about something that happens online.
- Share my usernames on the apps I use with my family members.
- Lock at apps with my parents if they have concerns.

How We Will Use Social Media
We agree to:

- Treat others kindly and respectfully. We won't say anything to someone online that we wouldn't say to them offline.
- Avoid posting content that may bully or hurt others.
- Let each other know if we feel hurt or bullied online.

Agreed Upon Apps
As a family, we've discussed and agreed that the following apps are OK for me to use:

1: _____
2: _____
3: _____
4: _____
5: _____

I will:

- Help set up accounts and show my family how to use the app.
- Talk through the risks and benefits of the apps with my family. I will help research security features.
- Discuss what kinds of content I want to share on the app. If I want to share more than was discussed, I'll bring it up.

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ON OUR SLEEVES
The Resource for Children's Mental Health

Wolfson Children's Hospital

Need help getting started? We have a **social media agreement** (available in **English** and **Spanish**) that you can talk through and fill out together.

By knowing the risks and benefits, talking to your child, and working on a social media plan together, you're building a supportive relationship. That openness and trust will help your child to reach out to you if they do see or experience something upsetting on social media.

Don't forget to share how you're using *On Our Sleeves* resources. Hit the **reply button** to tell us

your *On Our Sleeves* story.

Sincerely,
Wolfson Children's Hospital

The mission of *On Our Sleeves* is to provide every community in America access to free, evidence-informed educational resources necessary for breaking stigmas about child mental health and educating families and advocates. **For more information, visit OnOurSleeves.org.**

To access educational resources and revisit the mission of *On Our Sleeves*®, visit WolfsonChildrens.com/OnOurSleeves. Wolfson Children's *On Our Sleeves* is made possible by Robert and Margaret Hill.



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