

Social Media Guide for Parents



Introduction

Thank you for taking the time for looking at this social media handbook. We know the dangers of social media are scary and sometimes we don't know how to handle all that is out there. I want this packet to be a resource for you in knowing how to handle social media for parents of teenagers.

I want to give some warnings that I mentioned in our social media summit. The first warning is that the world is constantly changing, so any guide that is dealing with the challenges of the internet landscape is not going to be comprehensive. Changes to social media platforms happen at break-neck speeds, so our awareness of the changes will be limited. We still need to push to know more.

Second, we want to protect our children, but keeping them from everything is an impossible task. There is no magic bullet to keep kids safe. Parenting takes work and in this internet age, we need to be vigilant.

When we give our children access to electronic devices connected to the World Wide Web, we give our children lots of power. And with great power comes great responsibility. Our hope is that this guide gives you some help in that effort.

The third warning I need to give is that I'm not an expert on parenting. I'm aware of social media and I'm keeping up with the trends, but I'm also not a parent of a teenager. This will be a field guide of the digital world along with suggestions with how to help your child, but ultimately, you will have to use your convictions to decide what is best for your child.

It's not too late to start talking to your teenagers about social media now. The best plant to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is now. Start the conversation and put boundaries to protect your teens.

Parenting in a Brave New World

There are four words that will guide our conversation on parenting in the social media age. They are important words and they are so important you may want to write them down on a sticky note and put it on your bathroom mirror. You could even make a phone background with these four words. Everything that is said in this packet will come out of these four words. They could even transform your life.

Are you ready? Here are the four important words that will help you in the battle of social media with your teenager.

YOU ARE THE PARENT!

Obviously, these words are said facetiously, but you would be amazed how parents can forget that they are, well, the parents. You pay the bills. You provide the housing. You cook the food. So, although it may not feel like it all the time, your teenagers are not the boss of you.

These four words are important for three reasons. First, you may dislike everything you see here in this guide. That's cool. "You are the parent." You have the freedom to parent your child however you want to. You have the right as a parent to take away all privileges or take away all boundaries. You are the decision maker and there is nothing anyone can do to stop you. I may disagree with you, but I don't pay your bills.

Second, I say "You are the parent" because I want you to realize that you are the adult in your household and your child is still the child. Developmentally, a teenager will not develop his or her brain fully until they are in their early 20s. The final part of the brain that develops is the prefrontal cortex and it finishes after they graduate high school. The prefrontal cortex is where decisions are made.

In your household are underdeveloped children. Some of you know that without me saying that. In all seriousness, your teenager is still developing in their adolescent years. One of the ways they are developing is their brain. The human brain does not fully develop until the early twenties. You know what the last part of the brain to develop is? The frontal cortex, which is involved in motor function, problem solving, spontaneity, memory, language, initiation, judgement, impulse control, and social and sexual behavior. It's an important part, so when we wonder why teenagers have trouble in these areas, it's because they haven't developed fully yet. You are the adult with experience. Your kids need you.

Finally, I say this because I want you to understand that in this world of social media, you need to have responsibility to protect them. And that may mean making sacrifices, but you have to ask yourself what am I sacrificing, my comfort or the child? A phone is a gift that you must monitor when you are a parent.

Understand that you are the adult of your home and you are given a responsibility to lead your child through this developmental period. You don't have to let your child have power over you. You are the parent.

Social Media's Impact

If you haven't been living under a rock, you understand that electronics have taken over our lives. The average person will spend four years of their lives looking at their handheld devices in their lifetime. This is a convicting stat for me. How much of this time could have been watching my kids, studying my Bible or having a real conversation with people?

But it's not just time that has been taken away by our phones. It's also our minds. The average attention span for the average adult is one second less than a goldfish. This is according to a study by Microsoft in 2015 in where adults lose concentration in about eight seconds. This number dropped from 12 seconds recorded in 2000.

This happened because we live in a digital age. Think about it. Remember the time in our lives whenever we didn't know something, we just accepted that we didn't know it? Like if I asked you a question about what was Tom Cruise's top grossing movie, we probably wouldn't know it off the top of our heads. But you have access to that information if you looked it up on Box Office Mojo. (Just so that you won't be driven insane thinking about it, adjusted for inflation, the answer is Top Gun. In actual dollars, it was War of the Worlds)

In order to start, we need to define terms. You may be completely clueless in all of this, so I want to start from zero and move up. I want to define a few terms, just to make sure we are all on the same page.

Electronic device - Any type of phone, tablet, mp3, iPod, or computer. Basically, anything with a screen that you can access the internet on.

Social media - websites and apps that enable people to create and share content (such as pictures, videos, or text), to participate in social networking, or to communicate.

#Hashtag - A way to categorize a social media post. Twitter originated the hashtag in which someone puts a hashtag somewhere in the tweet. (For example, #blessed or #ForgeFlorida) These hashtags become clickable on the post and then will show all of the posts which use that hashtag. This is a way to see similar posts without a lot of searching. If you want to see all the posts about the Tampa Bay Lightning, you would search or post with the hashtag #GoBolts

I'm going to give brief history of social media so we can understand what attracts people to the product and what are dangers we have encountered. However, before we start, I need to clarify something that happens when talking about social media. If you are not on any of these platforms, it will be nearly impossible to explain unless you spend time on the platform. If it doesn't make any sense, don't feel alone. These apps are best explained when they are experienced.

Facebook

Facebook was started in the early 2000s by Harvard dropout Mark Zuckerberg as an easier way for college students to connect with each other through the internet. It expanded later in the decade to let high schoolers in the network as well as older adults.

Facebook has been a moving target in what it has been, but it had basic beginnings. It was a place where people could easily share photos, share statuses of their thoughts and experiences and post notes on other people's walls. I always thought of it as personalized bulletin boards on the world-wide web. You build a network of friends and you can send messages and share content. For the most part, that has been the central identity of Facebook, even as they try to adapt.

But we won't spend much time here, because your kids are not using Facebook anymore. Once parents and grandparents started to use it, it flooded the feed with content we didn't want. Remember the weird forwarded emails that you would get 10 years ago? That moved to Facebook. So naturally, kids didn't want to be apart of it.

So where did they go? Where there's a few places they could have gone and there is not enough time to go over everything, but the next step was Twitter.

Twitter

Twitter is still one of the major social media platforms, because it's a news feed of thoughts from everyone. Whereas Facebook's mission is to bring people together, Twitter can be done with little interaction with other people. Twitter's aim is "microblogging" and it is used to give a newswire of what is going on in the lives of the users.

Twitter's appeal is that it has become the news reel of the future. Twitter is not a place for the connection of people, but the connection of ideas. Twitter is where you can find news breaking and instant opinions on the news that broke.

We saw how this played out following the death of Osama bin Laden. His death was called "The Story That Twitter Broke" because it was a story that spawned reactions from around the world. People were able to see opinions and news updates in real time as they happened. Twitter's ease and speed of sharing opinions in a media-hungry world has kept this medium alive.

Instagram

Instagram works like Twitter, except with pictures. Instagram's appeal is that users try to post the best pictures, rather than the best opinions. You are not going to see a lot of political or controversial content on Instagram and that makes for a more fun platform. Instagram, like Facebook, now has private messages. They also have an Instagram story feature now where you can post a picture that will only be visible for 24 hours.

Instagram is actually finding an audience with the tech-savvy boomers because it can do one thing really well: post pictures of grandchildren. Instagram found a niche and did it really well. They have had to adapt their structure to compete, but Instagram is probably still the cool kid favorite in its wide appeal.

Snapchat

If you want to know how teenagers are communicating, look no further than Snapchat. Snapchat was developed as a way to keep conversations more private and it has become the standard of Gen Z communication. Whereas Facebook and Twitter are all about shouting the

loudest, Snapchat rose as the social media platform to whisper. Snapchat's appeal is its disappearing messages and time-sensitive stories.

This was created for people to be able to send "disappearing" pictures to each other in private. You can edit pictures and videos directly in the app to share with your friends. Snapchat started the story feature where you could post pics that would be visible to your followers for only 24 hours. Snapchat also has a timer for the pictures that you send. You can choose for the picture to be visible for 1 second to 10 seconds.

Snapchat has replaced the phone call and the text for many teenagers. If you are looking to connect, you ask for their "snap."

As a youth pastor and as a parent, I do not see any value in Snapchat for a Christian teenager. This is a discussion that is split among youth pastors I have spoken to, but if there is a dangerous medium, we can prevent our children from using it. Snapchat's appeal is to keep things secret so that something doesn't linger in cyberspace. However, it creates an illusion of privacy and not actual privacy. This means there is little accountability and as a parent, you are not able to watch most of the things your child posts on the platform. Parents ought to have their teen's social media passwords so they can keep an eye on their teenager's activity, but having a password would not help in seeing messages sent to others if they can disappear in a short period of time. This is my personal opinion and you as the parent can make that call whether you want your child on social media, but I would not recommend it.

TikTok

Although Snapchat still reigns as the teenager destination to communicate with each other, TikTok is the new app of Generation Z. On their about us page, TikTok describes itself as "a destination for short-form mobile videos. Our mission is to capture and present the world's creativity, knowledge, and precious life moments, directly from the mobile phone. TikTok enables everyone to be a creator, and encourages users to share their passion and creative expression through their videos."

With Vine going out of business, TikTok came in to be the video social media platform and acts more like a social media platform rather than another YouTube. Users are able to make responses to videos and collaborate with other users around the world.

The app got its start in China and allowed users to shoot short videos with special effects, musical clips and filters. In June of 2018, TikTok reached 500 million monthly active users and built its own internet celebrities.

A student minister (not me) put it this way. If you want to know what Generation Z is like, spend a few hours on TikTok. Tik Tok found its demographic and skews younger than even Snapchat.

What is great about TikTok is the ease in which a user can create interesting and creative content. Users must keep videos under one minute long. Considering we have short attention spans, this is a great app to consume a lot of different videos in a small amount of time.

In addition to its brevity, TikTok videos follow templates in their creation. This shows the popularity of meme culture.¹ This has broadened the creativity of young people and helps people learn the language and jokes quickly.

For me, it's easier to post devotionals and sermon recaps on TikTok, because it's a quicker platform than YouTube. TikTok's content is also more engaging than other social media platforms are. Users are encouraged to "duet" videos, which means recording a video that is played alongside an original video.

TikTok's ability to spread videos quickly is also one of its biggest concerns. Whereas Facebook and Instagram limit user feeds to the choices of the individual, TikTok uses algorithms to curate content from around the world to put in your feed what you would most likely enjoy. This feed is called the "For You Page" and is at the home page of the app.

The problem with that you don't really control what is on your feed like you can with another social media site. So, when you begin to use it, you are most likely going to see inappropriate content. Although TikTok does have a usage policy that prevents users from posting pornography, violence, hate speech and other types of obscene posts, it still would be rated PG-13 if it was a movie.

Whether you should let your child use TikTok is up to you and I don't have a conviction like I do Snapchat. Although the "For You Page" can be something you are concerned about, it can be manipulated by the user to create more user-friendly content. Whatever the case is, Tik Tok is now the reality of Generation Z and it doesn't look like it's going away any time soon.

¹ Memes (pronounced "Meems") are repeated jokes that are cycled on the internet. They are jokes where the punchline is set by the structure of the joke, but the content and context gets the laugh. In Tik Tok, a line from a popular song will be a meme in that creators would put a different joke on top of it.

Is It Worth It?

Social media is scary and has adults, we may have to ask ourselves, is all of this worth it?

It would not be out of the question to opt out from social media. Plenty of people function in this world without a Facebook account

I would argue that technology is like a knife. Knives are very useful, but if used improperly, they can be harmful. There are a lot of positive things that social media has that we should take advantage of, but we also need to be aware about the negative aspects. As the GI Joe cartoon said, "Knowing is half the battle."

Let's look at the pros and cons that social media provides.

What are some good things that come with technology and social media?

Education - We now live in an era where knowledge is at our fingertips and knowledge is power. Classes can be taught online and people can learn from wherever they are located. High schools and higher learning institutions are taking advantage of this and offering more classes online to broaden their reach.

Connectivity - You know what is going on at church, school, sports, etc. with social media. The best way for a church to communicate with other church members is through social media because they are already on it.

News - You can instantly see what is happening right now, anywhere in the world with the broad scope of social media. This news-breaking potential was first realized at a worldwide level when Osama bin Laden was finally killed by Seal Team Six. This was known as the story that broke on Twitter because Twitter only talked about the event nonstop. Social media is the fastest way for information to travel. This is why news outlets, businesses and churches must utilize it for success.

Weather Alerts - Television weather teams are still a big factor in the weather game, but the social media rise has created a new outlet for people to find out what is going on with the weather, what events are cancelled and what to do to get help. If a tornado is coming, you know about it from an app on your phone or a post on a social media feed.

Task Management - Technology has allowed us to become more productive in our work and education. There are apps that allow us to check off to-do boxes and let other people know what our progress is on those projects. Apps like Evernote, OneNote, ToDoist, etc., are used to keep people productive and focused on projects.

What are some bad things that come from technology and social media?

Inappropriate Images/Videos - The great experiment called social media had an unintended consequence. When you allow everyone in the world to post whatever they want to on social media, they can post, quite literally, anything they want.

The most thankless job in the world is the guy that looks through the stuff you report. People that have worked in that spot have needed to get therapy because they are taking down violent crime, murder, child pornography and hate speech before you see it.

Although these websites have restrictions on what to post, it is not perfect. If someone wants to publish something graphic or disturbing on social media, they have the ability to. Doing so would result in the post getting removed or a suspension, but the social media police can only take action after the fact and not prevent the bad stuff in the first place.²

Cyberbullying - Bullying has been around since teenagers made fun of Elisha for being bald.³ It's nothing new because people like being mean to other people. However, what has changed in the social media age of cyberbullying is the constant reminder of the mean things people say. In fact, people say even more hurtful things through social media than they would in person. Have you looked at a Facebook argument or a Twitter war? It's disgusting how people will act from behind a screen.

The culture of bullying has changed from when parents were in school. I remember getting bullied, but the stuff kids have to endure now is over the top. For adults, bullying used to happen at school. Now it happens away from school because teachers can't stop it. It also is done more frequently, because the illusion of the screen has kept us from seeing the people we were talking about or to.

And with the remarks in writing, it can be even more upsetting to a victim. Have you ever read a bad email? Those things tend to make you more upset than a mean verbal comment.

Fake Images - Most of us, me included, only post about the good things in our lives. Human nature takes over and we see other people's posts and compare them to our lives. That creates discontentment and jealousy.

One of the most overlooked negative things about social media is something we do without realizing it. What we post on social media is not an accurate depiction of ourselves. Few of us actually post the negative things that are going on and we don't share the skeletons in our closets. We just share happy things. This leads to a comparison trap where we may feel that we aren't as happy as other people based on the posts that we see.

Addiction - So many people are addicted to their device or social media. What do you do when you are waiting for food at a restaurant or you are waiting at the doctor's office? Walk into any public place where people are waiting and you are sure to see someone breaking the high score on Candy Crush.

Humanity has always looked for ways to distract, but technology has opened up a Pandora's box on that search. Dopamine, the same chemical that activates the brain whenever someone

² Sexting doesn't have a filter, so inappropriate images can be sent between friends. It can also be a legal matter too if the offense is big enough. Sexting isn't just a moral issue, but can turn into a legal issue in child pornography.

³ The story is in 2 Kings 2:23-25 and God dealt with the problem with bears. Remember kids, respect your elders or you could become a she-bear's dinner.

drinks, gambles, smokes or has sex is the same chemical that is released in our brains whenever there is a like on an Instagram post, a text message received or a notification.⁴

This is prevalent in social media behavior with teens, especially in Instagram where likes are like currency. Teenagers are not conservative with their likes and will like each post they see. It's almost a "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine" mentality. Likes aren't always endorsements when it comes to social media. It's more of a habit.

What is especially dangerous about the addictiveness of social media is the control we have over it with the lack of substance behind it. Pornography is bad, not just because it's immoral, but also because it seeks to fulfill a desire, but there is emptiness on the other side. Facebook and social media can be the same way where we perceive we have relationships with people, but it is only surface level.

This is a study on screen time broken down by ages and it shows how addictive that screens and phones can be for teenagers:

0-2: 42 minutes
2-4: 2 hrs. 29 min.
5-8: 2 hrs. 56 min.
9-12: 4 hrs. 36 min.
13-18: 6 hrs. 40 min.⁵

(However, before we get too high and mighty when it comes to how our kids misuse screens, we need to take a look in the mirror. In 2017, they also did research on the parents of these kids. Their findings were that Parents of Tweens/Teens averaged 9 hrs. 22 min of screen time. Personal Use (not work-related): 7 hrs. 43 min. We can be addicted as well to our screens)

Stranger Danger - There are dangerous people out there that connect with people all the time. That is why you should never meet someone in person that you meet on the internet. You never know if the person on the other end is who they say they are. Catfishing is when someone pretends to be someone they aren't to lure another person into a relationship.

While we are on the topic of strangers on the internet, I want to cut through the mess. News reports and social media articles can scare us about the awful things that can happen to our kids. Although there are people that seek to trick kids into abductions, we need to be smart about these types of incidents.

First of all, I want to clarify and say that there are bad people in a fallen world. Chris Hansen's show "To Catch A Predator" showed us that there are people in the world that do want to

⁴ Side note: If you are dealing with social media addiction yourself and don't want to be tempted to pull your phone out, then you can set your iPhone to "grayscale." With a black and white display, you won't be enticed by the colors and you will be less likely to look at your phone.

⁵ Source: Common Sense Media
0-8 Study October 19, 2017
Teen/Tween Study November 3, 2015

steal, kill and destroy. It is a potential danger for students, especially when they are left to their own devices.

HOWEVER, the number of “unwanted sexual solicitations” has declined in recent years. In a 2010 study, only nine percent of kids who used the internet received a unwanted sexual solicitation. When news outlets share about a “new platform for predators” it almost always makes it seem more common so that it makes a more interesting story. In a University of New Hampshire study on this matter, kids are more likely to receive pressure for internet sexual content from other kids instead of adults they don’t know.

To summarize the data, sexual advances are more likely to come from people that kids know. The vast majority of sexual assaults happen from trusted family members and friends over random encounters with strangers. Although internet predators exist, they are not as common as we may think.

I want to illustrate this point using the rock albums of the 70s and 80s. There was a fear around this time of rock bands sending Satanic messages in their music when the record was played backwards. These were done intentionally for effect and caused a stir when they were discovered and parents started to fear what their kids were listening to.

However, the fear was focused on the wrong thing. Why were parents concerned with what the record said going backwards when the music being played normally wasn’t wholesome content in the first place? The lyrics going forward were just as bad as the lyrics going backward, but the lyrics going forward were in plain sight.

When it comes to being fearful of some of the internet pollution, it is statistically more likely to be exposed to pornography and illicit content than a stranger looking to steal your child. If we are to protect our children in their internet use, we need to put more effort the issues that they are more likely to encounter. My advice for dealing with internet predators is simple: When we deal with the big issues like porn, cyberbullying, addiction, and illicit content, we already have a framework that can keep bad guys out of our kids’ lives.

Does this mean that all social media is bad and we shouldn’t let our children use it at all? Well, you are the parent and you get to decide that, but we do see that a moderate amount of social media is helpful to a degree. What we need to do is learn how to use it responsibly. But just telling you to use it responsibly probably isn’t helpful.

HOW THEN SHOULD WE USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

Let me share the three tips I shared with the teenagers during a Wednesday night talk. What I shared was strictly about how they posted, but please understand you need to be watching about what they share in addition to what they consume. Here are the three questions everyone should ask before they post something.

Is it true?

If we serve a God who is the author of truth, we ought to speak truth. What I told our kids is that gossip on social media or cyberbullying is wrong. But for us, that means that we don’t need to share photoshopped images of politicians saving kittens or giving Nazi salutes. We must be advocates for truth because Jesus is truth.

Before you share something, double check its accuracy. Check to see if another source has reported the same story. Check the date on the story. Read past the headline. Check a fact-checking site. Just because you agree with the message of a post does not make the post itself legitimate. In fact, sharing false information to promote your message does more harm than good to your message.

Is it kind?

One of our students said “Tweet others the way you want to be tweeted.” Everyone who posts on the internet is a person created in the image of God. If we are being hateful to people we know or even people we don’t know, we are not fulfilling the royal law. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Sometimes, we justify our tweets and posts with the argument “But I’m right!” Maybe we are, but if our social media feeds do not demonstrate a 1 Corinthians 13 type of love for our neighbor, then how right we are doesn’t matter.

As Christians, our media is also our ministry. If we are using social media, we ought to be using it for the promotion of the Gospel. I heard a story about a pastor who monitored the social media feeds of his staff members and he said “If you aren’t sharing Christ, then why am I paying your phone bill?” I think we need to ask the same question. God provides us with the social media platforms, so shouldn’t we use it for His glory alone.

Is it necessary?

Hear me out, I think we need to stand for truth and speak out, but there are sometimes that it is better to sit and listen than to stand and shout. Typically, my default option when a big story breaks is to read as much as I can from as many different perspectives as I can before I post. More likely than not, I realize that I don’t have anything to post because everything has been said. If you are speaking, you aren’t listening. Sometimes, it’s okay to not have an opinion. The world doesn’t necessarily have to have your opinion on things, but the world does need us to listen.

This is also applicable to posts that seek to glorify ourselves rather than the God we serve. Social media’s biggest temptation is to paint a picture of us that makes us look better, but if our first desire on social media is to help everybody see how good we look, then we are making social media and our image an idol.

This is a rule that we should all remember. *Not every post needs to be responded to. Not every response has to be on social media. You never have to apologize for something you didn’t say.*

With social media, less is more. If you are angry and you feel like you have to respond to someone’s post on social media, ask yourself if there is a better way to communicate with that person. If someone says something you disagree with, ask yourself if a private message or a phone call would be more beneficial. Have a Romans 12:18 mindset and be a peacemaker. Scripture tells us that we are to be held accountable for every careless word we say. That goes for our Facebook pages as well. When we model that well, our kids can learn from our behavior.

The Action Plan

Now, here's the big stuff you came to see. What's my action plan? Knowing is half the battle, so what's the other half?

Set the Standard Now

In parenting, if you do not let your kids know what is expected, they are going to have issues whenever you swoop in to fix their mistakes.

I've included a phone contract in your packet for you to look and go over. The phone should be seen as a privilege and it is your responsibility to make sure there are proper guidelines of use.

Why do I suggest you use a contract? Because contracts and technology go hand-in-hand. You signed a contract for your phone and you have to abide by those rules. It teaches your students about the importance of legal documents in the world of social media. When you go to Starbucks and plug in the Wifi, there are terms you must agree to before connection. If you don't, there can be consequences.⁶

Limit the impact

The problem with phones and technology isn't the phones themselves. It's the accessibility and the overloading of the stimulation. It can be very harmful to the adolescent brain to be exposed to a screen for prolonged periods of time.

Your kids do not need to go to bed with their phone. It harms sleeping patterns and gives them access to the internet when their minds need to be winding down. Phones should be in the living room when they go to bed. Take the phones away at dinner time. You can take phones away on vacation too. And this is just me, but I would prefer when you send your kids to camp or a mission trip, that you would keep your kids phone at home.⁷

Privacy isn't protected

We want to protect our kids and we also want to respect their privacy, but when it comes to internet usage, privacy is actually a myth.

Our internet usage is known by the social media accounts we use and sold to third-parties so that ads can be sold to us. If you think that what you do on social media is limited to just you and your friends, you're wrong. In order to keep these services free, the information the companies receive goes to business that want to sell you products. Facebook is free, but it isn't cheap.

⁶ Speaking of contracts, Instagram requires users to be at least 13 years old. If you let your 12-year-old use Instagram, that is what we call a lie. It's one of the ten commandments, so don't break it.

⁷ This one has lately become an issue where parents can become enablers without realizing it. When we go to church camp or a retreat, we are trying to get rid of distractions so that students can get in tune with God in their spiritual walk. Giving a phone to "make sure they call," does more harm than good. They need to disconnect in these trips. And so do you.

In addition to this, we know that our internet access can be government monitored. If something is suspicious, a search warrant can be put on your internet activity and used as evidence against you. You leave a technology footprint and you can't hide.

When I was growing up, my parents used this strategy. My mom would act as the district attorney and my dad would be the police officer that would be allowed access to my emails and social media accounts. If this sounds like it's too restrictive or overbearing, understand a couple of things. First, it wasn't as if my parents read my social media activity before they went to bed. It was keeping an eye out for anything that went wrong. Secondly, I made bad decisions, and they were able to allow me to make the bad choices and teach me correction afterward. We don't want to investigate everything that is going on, but you should know what your kid's passwords are so you can see what they are doing online.

Social media is like a gun. There are benefits to gun ownership. They are fun to shoot, they can provide security in our homes and they can be fun to collect. However, guns can be dangerous. If you don't lock up your gun properly and leave it unsupervised, someone that doesn't know how to operate it can cause a lot of damage.

In the same way, a phone can be used to do damage. A child can use it to send inappropriate pictures, see inappropriate things and say inappropriate words. It can set off a chain of consequences they may not know how to handle. Therefore, we want to teach phone etiquette constantly.

Factor in internet capability in decision making

This is a new addition to the list from last year based on conversation with students and parents. It's amazing to me how we forget the capabilities of the technology that we have and we don't compensate for them. This generation is connected 24-7 to the internet, whether it be through phones or other technology. The internet is no longer a luxury in this day and age. It's a utility. Students don't escape from the social media.

This means that when you take your phone away from your child, you probably have removed one entry point from the internet, but you have not removed every entry point. Phones can be borrowed and shared by friends. Friends can log on to school computers and other spots.

What does this mean? It means that taking the phone does not eliminate the social media connection. You must be on watch in monitoring your child, even when they don't have their phones. A student can borrow a phone from someone at school or church to get what they want. Some internet filters can be bypassed. Again, there is no magic bullet to social media management.

Know how you will respond when lines are crossed

Your child will mess up when it comes to handling their phone in an appropriate way. We know this because they are humans with a sinful nature like we are that still chose to sin. We also know this because they are young people that are learning how to navigate this world.

So, when your teenager messes up, how will you respond?

When you are talking to a teenager “Freak out on the inside. Stay calm on the outside.” As adults, we need to be the calm in the storm in a teen’s life. They need you to appear strong, even when you feel like you can’t handle this.

One of the issues that you may encounter with your student in technology troubles is pornography. Statistics show that its almost not a matter of if students are looking at porn, but when. The average exposure age of porn to children is 11 and 95 percent of teenage boys have seen porn before the age of 18. Just under 70 percent of girls have seen porn before 18. The issue of pornography is no longer a question of “if”, but “when.”

What makes this sin especially difficult is the attached shame that goes along with it. Whereas some sins are out in the open, pornography happens in secret. Once someone gives into temptation, there is guilt and shame attached to the action. Sin thrives in silence, and the fear from being treated differently for looking at porn keeps people from sharing with others and seeking help.

Tim Chester wrote a book on combatting porn called “Closing the Window” and he gives a five-step process to addressing someone that is trying to break free of porn addiction. This method can be used for any type of parenting when it comes to showing grace to your child when they have not used their technology in an appropriate manner.

1. *ADORATION of God* - It is Christ’s love and our love for Him that needs to compel us in this battle. Otherwise, we are just trying behavior modification, and it won’t get us very far.
2. *ABHORRENCE of sin*. - We need to allow a hatred to build up toward this sin and the effects it’s having on us and the world.
3. *ASSURANCE of grace*. - We have to trust the forgiveness in Christ’s redemptive work of God to bring us out of our struggle.
4. *AVOIDANCE of temptation*. - We need to identify where we are most susceptible to consuming pornographic material and get it out.
5. *ACCOUNTABILITY to others* - We have to surround ourselves and open up to those if/when we are being tempted or falling into temptation.

As the parent, you can play coach and encourage through the first three steps with your child. You can speak these truths to them, but they have to own the truths for themselves. Heart change is something we can pray for and encourage, but at the end of the day, teenagers have to make a choice. You can really step into action on the last two steps and provide help.

Conclusion

This all may seem overwhelming, but you don't have to do this alone. This is why Christ gave us the church; so that we can team together with like-minded believers for a support system to strive toward holiness and reach a lost world. Feel free to reach out whenever you need help in this area.

But also understand that even though we have a great responsibility, it's a great calling. God has given us task and he empowers us to show grace, guidance and growth for the people we shepherd. It may be a great challenge, but there is a greater reward when we see our students grow up to be strong in the Lord.

Below are some resources that can help you stay up to date when it comes to parenting Generation Z and social media management.

Resources to Help

Every Parent's Guide to Navigating our Digital World – Kara Powell

Commonsensemedia.com

Growingleaders.com/blog

Fulleryouthinstitute.org

**A PARENT'S
GUIDE TO**

Teen Slang

axis

DAVID  COOK™

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Teen Slang

Welcome to the World of Teen Slang

Lost? Confused? Unable to understand your teens? Don't worry; you're in good company. Keeping up with teen slang is nearly impossible. New words are constantly being introduced, thanks to the influence of music, the internet, apps, and celebrities (not to mention regional vernacular!). You may feel overwhelmed and lost when listening to your children/grandchildren speaking, and it'll only get worse when reading social media posts and hashtags. Use this guide as a reference for what's widely popular right now in order to translate what teens are saying.

Fun, Harmless, Silly

Adulting = To do things a bona fide adult would do. "Adulting is no fun. Why do I have to give all my money to the government?!"

Aesthetic = The new "vibe." "I don't like this artist because I don't get her aesthetic." "I love the aesthetic of this Instagram account I just found."

Bae = Before Anyone Else; also a synonym for "babe" or "baby."

Basic = A way to describe someone who lacks originality and enjoys the most mainstream and predictable things.

Dead/dying = When something is so funny, you can't handle it. Variation: TD (to die); "That jacket is TD. Buy it!"

Done = To be completely over a task, person, emotion, or situation.

Extra = Over the top, excessive, dramatic. "I aspire to be this level of extra at my graduation."

Fam = Family, to denote one's actual family or one's closest friends.

Finesse = To perfect or smooth things out (either physically or emotionally). "I need to finesse my shoe collection." Can also be used to refer to a person's style.

Fire = Cool, awesome. "This party is fire!" Also denoted by the fire emoji.

FR = For Real.

GOAT = Greatest Of All Time.

Gucci = Good, cool.

Hundo P = One Hundred Percent.

IRL = In Real Life.

Keep it 100 = Be true to yourself and stick to your values (short for "Keep it 100 percent real"). Made mainstream recently by The Bachelorette's Rachel Lindsay. Synonym: Trill (combo of "true" and "real").

Like recent = Using one social media platform to tell one's followers to like his/her most recent post on another social media platform. Often seen as desperate. Synonyms: LB (like back), FB (follow back).

Lit = Cool, awesome. "This party is lit!" Can also mean to be drunk or high: "Let's get lit and jump off the roof!" (Not as cool of a word as "fire" these days.)

Live/living = When something is so incredible, it's finally making you "live." Could also be said to be giving you "life."

Narrative = Something you would not like to take part in. "I would v much like to be excluded from this narrative." [Popularized by Taylor Swift](#) in response to Kanye West and Kim Kardashian.

Neglext = To intentionally or unintentionally abandon someone in the middle of text message conversation for a prolonged period of time. "I totally fell asleep last night. I didn't mean to neglext you!"

NMH = Nodding My Head, i.e., expressing agreement or approval.

P = Pretty. "That new Netflix show is p cool."

RN = Right now.

RT = Retweet. Also used to show agreement (because typically people don't retweet things they disagree with). "Do you like Taylor Swift's new hair?" "Yessss, RT RT RT."

Savage = To be hardcore, fierce, bada**. Can refer to arguments, takedowns, and a general disregard for consequences.

Ship = Short for “relationship.” Used to endorse/support a romantic coupling, even one that’s not reality. “I ship Ron and Hermione.” “I see a ship developing!”
Synonym: OTP (One True Pairing).

Shook = To be so completely surprised, scared, or caught off guard that your body is shaking.

SMH = Shaking My Head, i.e.. expressing disagreement or disapproval.

Snatched = Another slang term for looking good. E.g., “Your outfit is snatched.” Older, less-used synonyms: On fleek, on point.

Squad = Friend group. Often used as #squadgoals, meaning, “I hope my friends can someday be this cool!” Newer, cooler synonym: Tribe.

Straight Fire = Hot or trendy. “That outfit is straight fire!”

Suh = [A greeting](#); a combination of “sup” and “huh.”

Take the L = Take the loss. Can be used in any situation where one comes out behind. Antonym: W (pronounced “dub”); “That’s a W!”

TBH = To Be Honest.

TFW = That Feeling When. “TFW you accidentally spill your Venti Frap all over your car.”

Turnt = Short for “turned up,” which means either really excited (“It’s New Year’s Eve, so of course I’m turnt!”) or drunk (“It was rough to go to brunch today because I was so turnt last night.”).

V = Very. “I’m v excited to binge Stranger Things 2 this weekend!”

Weak = Used to mean “That was funny!” Originates from that weak feeling you get when you laugh really hard.

Be Aware Of

AF = As F***. Used to emphasize something: “It’s hot af in here.”

Cancel = To delete someone or something out of your life. “I cancelled that guy from Tinder. It wasn’t working out.”

Curve = To reject someone romantically or sexually.

FOMO = Fear Of Missing Out. Many teens feel this because of social media’s ability

to highlight everyone else’s activities. Antonym: JOMO (Joy Of Missing Out, i.e., finding joy in one’s ability to commit to and enjoy one thing at a time.)

Gatsbying = Intentionally posting something to social media to attract one’s romantic interest’s attention. So named after the elaborate parties Gatsby threw to get Daisy’s attention in *The Great Gatsby*.

Ghost = To stop responding to one’s texts, messages, posts, etc., effectively disappearing from their digital world.

Haunt = To occasionally view, comment on, or like posts from someone with whom you were once romantically involved, as if to intentionally remind them, “Hey, I’m still here!” Typically the other person will feel creeped out.

HBIC = Head B**** In Charge.

Hunty = Combination of “honey” and “c***.” It originated in the drag queen community as a slight insult, but it’s starting to be used among groups of girls as a term of endearment.

Igging = Ignoring (made most famous by the song “Tunnel Vision” by Kodak Black).

Jocking = Copying someone else’s style. From Bruno Mars’ song “24K Magic.”

Low Key = A warning that someone doesn’t want everyone to know what they’re saying. “Keep this low key.” Antonym: High Key (i.e., not trying to hide it; straight up proclaiming it to the world).

Mooning = Using the “Do Not Disturb” mode (denoted by a tiny moon on iPhones), which turns off notifications, on a specific conversation so as to mute/ignore them.

Murk = To kill, dominate, etc. Often used in reference to video games.

Salty = To be bitter/angry/upset. “She was salty because she lost.”

Sip Tea = Mind one’s own business. Usually means you don’t want to get involved in the drama, but you have no problem watching it from the sidelines while comfortably sipping tea.

Skurt = To leave.

Stan = Abbreviation of “stalker” and “fan”; refers to an overly obsessed, maniacal fan of a celebrity. (Also originates from the main character of Eminem’s song “Stan.”)

“Those Taylor Swift stans are creeping me out.”

Sus = Short for “suspect.” “My bank card got declined. That’s sus.”

Throw Shade = Give someone a dirty look or say/post something mean about them.

Trash = When something or someone comes off as classless or tasteless. “Did you see the trash everyone is saying about Beyoncé?”

Vaguebooking = Intentionally posting vague Facebook status updates, either for attention or as a cry for help. E.g., “Wondering if there’s a point to anything.”

Woke = To be fully aware of current events; living in a state of awareness that is above expectations. “Stay woke, son!”

Red Flags

9 = Parent watching!

Breadcrumbing = Sending out flirtatious, but noncommittal text messages to members of the opposite sex in order to lure a sexual partner without expending much effort.

Break Green = To share marijuana with others.

Catfish = Someone who pretends to be someone they’re not on social media, either for dating or sexual purposes.

CU46 = See You For Sex.

D = Short for d***. “She just wants the D.”

Down in the DM = Using private messages (DM=Direct Message) on social media to ask for nude photos and/or to filter through people to find a casual hookup.

GNOC = Get Naked On Camera.

Hooking up = Has various levels of meaning. Could refer to anything from making out to having sex.

Netflix and chill = A euphemism for hooking up. Someone uses the pretense of watching Netflix as a reason to hang out or “chill,” but really has no intention of actually watching anything.

NIFOC = Naked In Front Of Computer.

NP4NP = Naked Pic For Naked Pic.

NSFW = Not Safe For Work. Used to mark something as sexually inappropriate or explicit.

POS = Parent Over Shoulder.

Scarfig = Intentionally strangling oneself (with a scarf or other material) during sex or masturbation to decrease blood flow to the head and therefore increase pleasure during climax. Many young men have accidentally committed suicide while scarfig.

Smash = To have casual sex.

Stealthig = Secretly removing one’s condom during sex.

Thirsty = Desperate, eager for something; often refers to one’s sexual appetite or desire to gain attention on social media.

A Final Thought

As you can see, there’s a lot to keep track of! We hope knowing these terms helps you discern when your teens are just engaged in harmless fun and when they’re in need of intervention. One caveat: teens are all about authenticity. They can smell inauthenticity a mile away. So carefully consider the choice to add these words to your vocabulary. Your teens may think it’s cool or funny that you’re using them ... or they may find it totally uncool and therefore be embarrassed by your use of them.

The Teen Cell Phone Agreement

Dear Caring Adult,

This contract is designed to create an open line of communication between you and your kid regarding their cell phone. The goal is to help your kid become a well rounded person who can coexist with technology, NOT be ruled by it.

You probably find yourself in one of two situations:

They already have a cell phone and you haven't had clear rules in place.

Expect the conversation to be a bit tougher here. They will feel you are setting the ground rules after the game has begun.

Admit that you made a mistake (we all do) and that because you care about them (which you do), that's why we are doing this.

OR

You're about to give them a cell phone.

GOOD NEWS! There is no better time to get people to agree to what you want than when you're handing them a shiny new toy.

"I just need you to review and sign this understanding about your cell phone -- then it's all yours!"

Edit the contract on the next page as needed to make it your own.

Encourage your kid to ask questions, and don't be afraid to have a few laughs along the way.

Cheers,

Josh Shipp!

Dear _____,

CONGRATS! You've proven yourself mature and responsible enough for your own cell phone. Given that you have a new cell phone in your hands, we obviously trust you to make good decisions—so why are we making you sign this lame thing that's loaded with stuff that you probably already know?

Well, let me get to the point.

A cell phone is more than a piece of technology. If used wrongly, it can be a weapon that puts your safety at risk. You've always been a great kid, and we want to make sure that you continue making smart choices.

The goal of this agreement is to make sure that you're always safe and happy—and that we always maintain a direct and open line of communication. I'm asking you to always use your phone for good and to ask for help from me or a trusted adult when a situation leaves you feeling scared or unsure.

Please review this contract, and be sure to ask me any questions that you may have.

With love,

Family Cell Phone Agreement

1. I understand that the rules below are for my safety and that my parents love me more than anything in the world. I understand that my parents want to give me freedom, while also giving me enough security to make smart choices. **Initial here:** _____

2. I promise that my parents will always know my phone passwords. I understand that my parents have a right to look at my phone whenever there's a need for them to do so, even without my permission. **Initial here:** _____

3. I will hand the phone to one of my parents promptly at _____ pm every school night and every weekend night at _____ pm. I will get it back at _____ am. **Initial here:** _____

4. I will not send or receive naked photos. Ever. I understand that there could be serious legal consequences that could put mine and my parents' future at-risk. **Initial here:** _____

5. I will never search for porn or anything else that I wouldn't want my grandma finding. **Initial here:** _____

6. I understand that my behavior on my phone can impact my future reputation—even in ways that I am not able to predict or see. **Initial here:** _____

7. I promise I will tell my parents when I receive suspicious or alarming phone calls or text messages from people I don't know. I will also tell my parents if I am being harassed by someone via my cell phone. **Initial here:** _____

8. When I am old enough, I won't text and drive. I understand it's very dangerous and pretty stupid. **Initial here:** _____

9. I will make an effort to learn phone and internet etiquette. I understand this is an extension of normal manners. I will turn off, silence, and put my phone away in public—especially in a restaurant, at the movies, or while speaking with another human being. I am not a rude person. I will not allow the phone to change this important part of who I am. **Initial here:** _____

10. I will NEVER use my phone or social media to bully or tease anyone, even if my friends think it's funny. **Initial here:** _____

11. I will not lie about where I have been or how I am using the phone. I promise to answer questions openly, honestly, and directly. **Initial here:** _____

I understand that this is NOT my phone and that it was paid for by my parents. Having this phone is not a right—it is a privilege that can be taken away. As such, I have read the following document and agree to the above rules. I understand that if I have any questions, I should talk to my parents face-to-face.

Sign here

