

## Beware the down side of social media

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By Shannan Costello

Social media can be important for networking both personally and professionally. It's a great tool for keeping up with old friends, connecting with people in your field and communicating long distance. But even with strong privacy settings, you can't be sure who can find out information about you.

When not used wisely, social media can have damaging consequences. There have been lost jobs, college rejections, suspensions, expulsions, even deaths resulting from Facebook and Twitter posts. High school students should be aware that college admissions officers and potential employers really do check their social media presence. Once something is online it never really goes away.

It is not a bad idea for parents and other family members to "friend" their children online. Knowing their posts can be viewed by the adults in their life may encourage teens to think a little more about what is being posted, what they are tagged in, or whether to even allow friends to post on their wall or tweet at them. Being "friends" gives parents oversight, a way to make sure their kids are safe and appropriate online. But don't constantly "stalk" their pages or your teens might not want to be friends/followers anymore.

Here are some basic rules of thumb to share with your children:

**Don't post anything illegal.** Even if it's trivial, or implies illegal activity rather than explicitly showing it, don't put it on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or anything associated with you online. When I was in high school a group of girls were suspended for having pictures with red cups on their Facebook profiles. Are red cups illegal? Of course not, but people can tell the difference between a Solo cup being used at a family birthday party and a red cup being used in an underage drinking situation. Things that are on the fence between acceptable and inappropriate are better left offline.

**Posting negative things about teachers or other students looks bad.** There's no way to know if it will get back to that person, and there's no way of knowing how it will affect them. Posting negative comments about others is not a good way to represent yourself. The same goes for jobs. Tweeting "I hate this place" or "This job sucks" can only do harm. There are other people who would gladly take the place of a high school student flipping burgers; don't give the company any reason to replace you with them.

**Don't use profanity online.** As in conversation, it's unnecessary. It's another one of those things that may or may not end up hurting you, but it certainly won't help you so it just isn't worth it.

**Don't have too many friends or followers.** The fewer people you are connected with online, the less likely you are to be associated with a negative reputation. You could also be connected with someone who is connected with influential people who you

might not want to have access to your profiles. Even if you don't make your privacy settings "public" or "friends of friends," if they have mutual connections they might be able to see it in a variety of ways.

Your child can also be vulnerable to physical dangers if he/she isn't smart about social media. "Checking in" somewhere on Facebook or adding an Instagram photo to your photo map can give out very specific information as to where you are at any moment. Sharing your exact location to the entire online universe is never a good idea. By the time they are in high school, most teens know not to share personal information online. However, they don't always consider that sharing their location falls into this category. Make sure your child knows to turn off their location settings and considers the dangers that publicizing a location could pose.

Remind them not to post their phone number on their Facebook page. My cell phone automatically downloaded all of my Facebook friends' contact information. Most of the time that just meant an email but some accounts included peoples' phone numbers. What if your child has a lot of Facebook friends and their number somehow fell into the wrong hands?

All this being said, it is good to have an online presence, as long as it is positive, friendly and safe. A smart social media presence can make students look better to colleges and potential employers than no social media presence at all!

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### [Top 10 Social Media Do's and Don'ts](#)

### [Social media dos and don'ts for college applicants](#) [Social Media Do's and Don'ts When Applying to College](#) [12 Things Students Should Never Do on Social Media](#)

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