

Online Privacy and Your Teen

Most US adolescents use the Internet for homework, entertainment, and to connect with friends. A popular Internet pastime is social media, which is usually described as media that allow interaction among users. Popular forms of social media are social networking sites such as Facebook. Other types include microblogging sites, such as Twitter, and video sharing sites such as YouTube.

Facebook is the most popular social media site among teens; it is important that parents understand recent changes to its privacy rules that affect teens. Many parents know Facebook allows users to create an online profile that includes personal information. Most social media allow users to choose how much information they want to share publicly with the World Wide Web through privacy settings.

Privacy settings are important to protect teens from having their personal information viewed by unwanted audiences such as adult strangers or marketing companies. On Facebook, marketers are allowed to use a profile owner's content for their advertisements and use a profile owner's information for their research purposes. These actions happen without asking the profile owner for permission.

Recently, Facebook changed its privacy policies for teen users. In the past, teens' privacy settings were automatically set to only allow access to information for friends and friends of friends. Facebook now allows teens to show their profiles or selected posts to the entire online public. Marketers can now access large amounts of data based on teens' profiles, what links they click on, and what they "like" on Facebook. Furthermore, teens may not always understand the short- and long-term consequences of posting personal information in a public way online.

It is important to know that many other popular social media sites, such as Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube, are sites that emphasize public access and have limited, if any, privacy settings. On many of these sites, any information your teen posts is available publicly.

What Parents Can Do

The privacy changes mean it is even more important for parents to learn and talk about online privacy settings with their teens. Parents do not have to be experts in social media. They can sit with their teen and allow the teen to show them how the site works and what their profile looks like. Parents can then discuss privacy settings and why it is important to protect one's personal information online.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and other child advocacy groups objected to Facebook's privacy changes. In September 2013, a coalition of 20 groups, including the AAP, raised concerns about the potential for negative effects in a letter to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The letter asked the FTC to take a close look at this and other proposed Facebook changes. You can voice your opinion to your state representative or the FTC. And talk



to your pediatrician about making a family media plan, which may include setting boundaries about time spent online, limiting information your teen displays online, and other media concerns.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Academy of Pediatrics:
<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx>

+ To find this and other JAMA Pediatrics Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on the *JAMA Pediatrics* website at jamapediatrics.com.

Author: Megan A. Moreno, MD, MEd, MPH

Resource: American Academy of Pediatrics

The JAMA Pediatrics Patient Page is a public service of *JAMA Pediatrics*. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your child's medical condition, *JAMA Pediatrics* suggests that you consult your child's physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. To purchase bulk reprints, call 312/464-0776.