

“How Do I Know What My Child Is Doing On Their Smart Phone?”

“My child would never do anything like that! I know this for a fact because I check their Facebook page almost every day!”

This is a statement we hear whenever we need to have parents come in for a meeting because of issues their child has become involved in using “Social Media”. The purpose of this paper is to help you, as parents become aware of not only how your son or daughter may be putting themselves “out there” in the world of social media but to also put you in a position to help steer your child away from situations that may cause them problems in school or in their future.

It is important to realize that communicating via a smart phone has become a way of life for many of us. The technology provided to us helps make our existence easier. We are more organized, made aware of events faster and able to access information more rapidly than ever before. Being “one of the first to know” is always important. However to a teenager, being the first to know is critical. Being “first to know” in our children’s world does not always mean to know world events first. Instead, they want to know what is happening in *their* world of friends, school and family. Not only are they actively participating in the news, so are others; some friend, some not friends.

In an attempt to be proactive and to keep everyone at Franklin Central High School focused on academic success, we have asked students about how they use “Social Media” in their personal lives. Some of the input we received was from simply asking students about their use of “Social Media” and some information gathered was the product of investigating incidents where problems that started on the “Social Media” front have spilled over to school causing a disruption to the educational environment.

Years ago, students passed notes to one another. These notes were either harmless or they were gossip notes. The contents of these notes was usually only know to two people, the writer of the note and the person the note was written. Today, such notes are written on Facebook, Twitter, Snap Chat, Kik Messenger, AskFM, Instagram and various other “apps” that today’s youth can access via their smart phones. Not only can the writer and the person the message was written see what was said, anyone with access can see the message. Anyone can view them as information, take sides, or inflame the issue. Often, people without knowledge of anything written will use their “invisibility” of being online and the use of an on-line name providing anonymity to make nasty comments that others may believe to be true. Many students are vulnerable to having a reputation built for them on-line that causes them to be ashamed, angry, embarrassed resulting in a loss of self-esteem, lower grades and withdrawal from friends and family.

A recent report indicated that parents keep their child on their family plan, paying for their cell phone use until age 32. While you wish to trust your child, it is important to realize that some of the situations students today are facing due to the use of “Social Media” result in harmful behaviors. You have a right to know what not only your child is doing on their smart phones but more importantly what others are saying about your child.

The purpose of this paper is to help you, as parents, understand how your son or daughter may be using “Social Media” and provide you with the knowledge to help your child avoid on-line situations that may become detrimental to their well-being. The following are some of the sites you should be aware of, how your child may be using them and the icon you will see on their phones if they are communicating with others via any of these apps.



As parents, you are probably most familiar with Facebook. You may even have a Facebook Account of your own. Facebook is a great way to keep in touch with family and friends.

You have probably seen the Facebook app on your child’s phone or on the family computer or iPad. Perhaps your teenager stays logged in and you have even looked at their Facebook account and have seen nothing startling.

Did you know many teenagers have two Facebook accounts? Did you know that the one you are looking at is where they post what is considered “politically correct”? Some teenagers want you to feel free to look at their first account. They are not opposed to anyone seeing what is posted as this is where the post harmless information.

Often times the second account is under a false name, perhaps a nickname your son or daughter goes by or a nickname they have made up for themselves that their friends will know. The students we have talked with have said, “Always assume there is more than one Facebook account.”



As technology constantly changes, so do the users of technology. Teenagers are migrating away from Facebook and have made Twitter their app of choice.

Using Twitter to stay connected is fun and entertaining. Using Twitter to talk derogatorily about others or to threaten them is not. Twitter can become a high school student’s worst nightmare. In a second, someone can post 140 characters about your son or daughter and possibly attach a photo.

Your teenage child may only send a message and perhaps a provocative photo to their boyfriend or girlfriend trusting that it is “for their eyes only”. As we all know, high school romances do not always last. Feelings get hurt when a break-up occurs and the next thing you know one of the trusted recipients re-tweets the message and photo and somebody’s son or daughters’ personal business is now known to everyone!

What can you do to assure your child does not get themselves in such a position of humiliation and gossip? The answer is simple: open a Twitter account and follow your child on Twitter!

Once you are following your child on Twitter, you can click on “News Feed” and see everything they have “tweeted” and anything “re-tweeted”.

If you see @ before a name on their Twitter account when you are following them, this means they are in a conversation with one or multiple people. Simply click on the @ and you will see who your son or daughter is in contact with and explore their conversation and the context of what is being said. It may not be about your child but it may be about another child. This is when you can intervene and tell your son or daughter that the comments are inappropriate and they should remember to treat others on-line as they would like to be treated on-line. This age old adage may be better understood by your child if you tell them to “Tweet about others as you would like to be Tweeted about”. By following your child on Twitter, you will be able to see who your child is “hanging out with” on-line.

Twitter has a feature where a user can block another user from seeing their account. If you try to follow your son or daughter and are blocked, you will see the following: * Sorry, you cannot follow (your child’s name) because they have blocked you.” If you see this, you will know that your child does not want you to see what they are tweeting. Be aware, any user can DM (direct message) another person thereby hiding what is being tweeted.

If you want to find out about conversations others may be having about your child, Twitter comes with a search engine. Type in a key word or a friends name and you will be able to see all conversations. Twinator is another site you can go to on your computer to use any key word or name to see the conversations taking place on Twitter.



How can sharing photos be a bad thing? Normally it is not, however the remarks about the photos can cause hurt feelings and a loss of self-esteem.

Instagram allows anyone signed in to not only post pictures but also anyone can comment on the photos. We have all been captured in photos at random with a funny look on our face or

appearing silly. Unfortunately, teenagers can be cruel! Comments made on Instagram can be rude and cause others to comment and gossip. This can be very demeaning for a young person.

Another reality we must face is that Instagram can be used to post photos from other sites. Remember the above comment about trusting someone with a provocative picture? These can be transferred from Twitter to Instagram thereby increasing the “viewing audience” and opening the door for additional detrimental comments.

Instagram can also be used (as well as Twitter) for what is known as “sexting”. Sexting is sending provocative photos, often taken by the sender of themselves either nude or partially nude. Again, innocent teenagers will get talked in to this by others and before long their reputation is ruined. It is important to discuss this with your son or daughter and to look at what they are up to on Instagram.

Snapchat

This app will be found only on iPhones or Android Phones.

This app probably causes more disruptions at Franklin Central than all others combined. Since you are more than likely paying for your child’s cell phone, my advice would be for you to have them delete this app in front of you. Even if your child pays for their own cell phone, I would have them delete this site if you notice it on their phone’s screen.

Snapchat is for picture sharing however it has taken on a life of its own as a vehicle for “sexting”. The reason for this is that the sender can allocate an amount of time the person being sent the photo can see it. If a teenager is tempted by another to send a nude photo of themselves to a “friend” they may think they can set it so that the person receiving the photo will only see the picture for 5 seconds or however long it is set to be seen, before the photo self-deletes. Some young people may find safety in **thinking** the photo will never be seen by others. What they do not consider is that all Smart Phone allow the user to take a screen shot of the photo, thereby saving it to their phone. They can then share that picture with whomever they wish.

This is where students are surprised to find the picture they thought was meant only for one person’s eyes is now on almost everyone’s cell phone. Arguments ensue, hurt feelings arise, other students take sides and now the educational environment at school takes a back seat to the “Social Media” drama.



I am sure the designer of this site intended it to be used to find out more about others. However, this site is anonymous meaning anyone can ask a question to another person without them knowing who is asking the question. Once a person responds, their comments and the comments of others can be followed by anyone.

This site is viewed by many young people as a site to be intentionally mean to others. The questions are often vicious statements. Others like to add more insulting comments. Still other young people just like to follow the comments as a means of entertainment. They talk about what is being said on ask.fm and this turns in to a “he said, she said” situation causing disruptions to the true mission of school. This is another site that if seen, you may wish to consider having your child delete it.

Texting

The written word can be interpreted in different ways by different readers. Due to not being face to face and hearing how things are said and not being able to see facial expressions, a reader may interpret something innocent as something derogatory. Simple texting of messages often causes disruption in school and hurt feeling because of interpretation of the message.

It is wise to check your child’s texting history. See what messages have been sent. If you see derogatory or inflammatory comments in the messaging history, talk to your son or daughter in order to help them cope with what is being said and to not be part of negative comments being made.

The students we have asked to tell us about Social Media and its use amongst teenagers will be the first to admit they do not always want their parents to see what they are texting. Parents will review their monthly bills and see very few text messages, mainly from their child to them. The parents will assume their child does not text. Our students tell us that is because students will text their friends by using sites such as: “Text Free”, “Kik” or “Haywire”. These apps allow a person to text without any texting charges.

As you can see, the world of Social Media has evolved rapidly. It allows us to be in touch constantly and be the first to “know” when news happens. It is a powerful tool that can enrich our lives. However, with power comes responsibility. We must all be responsible for our actions. With young people, this is a learning process.

As parents, we must work with our children to teach them to be responsible in all aspects of their lives, especially in the use of Social Media. The “Golden Rule” applies to Social Media as it

applies to all aspects of our lives: “Treat others as you would want to be treated.” Hopefully the information provided above will assist you in helping your son or daughter develop proper habits for using the power of Social Media for good and also keep you aware of how some choose to use the power of Social Media for negative purpose.