



SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE

WHAT IS THE RIGHT AGE FOR MY CHILD?



FOREWORD

As parents, social media can be a new and overwhelming ground. We are aware that the potential connections offered by social media are the very source of its problems – tying a child’s self-confidence to the number of ‘likes’ they receive or distracting them from schoolwork and their offline lives.

The question of when to let your child use social media has thus been a hotly debated issue across countless homes in Singapore and around the world.

This guide helps you answer this question by giving you the information and know-how you need, through seven broad questions and tips that you can reflect on, to make your own choices and raise considerate, compassionate, and confident digital users.

Mr Lock Wai Han
Chairman, Media Literacy Council



AT WHAT AGE SHOULD I LET MY CHILD USE SOCIAL MEDIA?



If you are wondering if your child is old enough to use Facebook, the short answer is that, nowadays, teens don’t use Facebook – they use Instagram, or Snapchat, or other trendy social media apps that you may not even be aware of. What these apps have in common is that they allow your child to share their information in a very public way and create connections far beyond the people they actually know, things that were inconceivable even a decade ago.

So, at what age should you let your child use social media? The truth of the matter is that there is no right age. Instead, there might be a right (or at least better) time to let your child explore these new virtual spaces. It is important to know that many apps, even WhatsApp, already have their own age limits in place, usually 13. However, these limits are often ignored by parents and educators, making it more important to consider other questions when making your choice.

IS MY CHILD **READY** FOR A SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT?

A child's age is not the best way to judge if they are ready for social media. Instead, you must assess whether your child understands the concepts associated with social media and whether they will be able to explore these new spaces in safe and responsible ways. To guide you in making this assessment, consider these questions:



DOES MY CHILD UNDERSTAND CONCEPTS LIKE RELATIONSHIPS AND REPUTATIONS?

Your child should be able to tell apart a real friend from someone who 'follows' them online. Otherwise, they may be pressured into making choices like cyber-bullying or sexting (i.e., when people send or receive sexually explicit content, like photos or texts, of themselves or someone else) to fit in with their friends.

IS MY CHILD ABLE TO MANAGE THEIR TIME?

Even adults let social media take up a lot of their time on a daily basis. Make sure that your child shows good time-management skills before letting them use social media.



DO THEY OBEY THE RULES YOU SET FOR THEIR OFFLINE LIVES?

If your child often breaks your rules that relate to their chores, homework, or bedtime, they might not be ready for rules on how to behave in a much more complicated online space.



IS MY CHILD CONFIDENT?

Social media can be hard on anyone's self-esteem, so make sure your child shows self-confidence before letting them use it. One easy way to test this is to ask them to say three good things about themselves.



How mature a child is can vary hugely, even between siblings. The important thing is that your child should be mentally and emotionally ready to tackle the potential struggles of social media.

DO I KNOW THE **POPULAR APPS?**

Some social media apps are more 'social' than others. Social media apps such as WhatsApp are often used as modern-day messaging services, particularly for its group texting functions that make it convenient to hold group discussions.

It is helpful for you to know more about the social media apps your child wants to use. Only then will you understand what they're talking about when they say they were up all night watching videos on Musical.ly or if they insist on taking their phones out to keep their Snapstreaks going.

Your child might also make friends online. While you may not appreciate or agree that their virtual friends are as important as their offline friends, they might be equally important to your child. Just as you would want to know how your child met their friends, such as school or tuition classes, it is good to know on which app or online platform they met too, and what each app does.

Some examples of popular apps

AGE LIMIT: 13 YEARS OLD & ABOVE



Instagram

Photo-sharing app that lets people send direct messages, and upload short videos or photos that can be seen for 24 hours.



Tellonym

Social networking site where people can create profiles and anonymously send 'Tells' to others and answer questions on their profile.



Snapchat

Messaging app which lets pictures and videos be seen for a short time before being 'deleted' (they are actually very easy to save). Also has 'Stories', showing 24-hour content, 'Discover', for brands to show their ads, and 'Snap Map', to share your location to friends.



Musical.ly

Video app that lets users create 15-second to 1 minute videos, at different speeds, and choose sound tracks to follow it.



Tumblr

Microblogging site where users can make public blogs, follow others' blogs, and access content through common hashtags. Tumblr generally does not restrict content and it encourages collaborative blogging.



Ask.FM

Social networking site where users can register to create a profile and send anonymous questions to others. It is possible to change privacy settings to not allow anonymous questions.



YouTube

Video-sharing website that lets users upload, view, rate, share, and comment on videos, and subscribe to other users. YouTube also has restricted content that is only for 18+ year old users.

AGE LIMIT: 16 YEARS OLD & ABOVE



Sarahah

Photo-sharing app that lets people send direct messages, and upload short videos or photos that can be seen for 24 hours.



Bigo Live

Live-streaming and chatting app with a currency called 'diamonds' (\$1 gets 42 diamonds) which can be used to buy items to 'gift' streamers. These items are converted into 'beans' which streamers can cash out for real money (280 beans for \$1).



Vine

App on which users could upload 6-second looping video clips. It was shut down by Twitter, but the videos are archived and can still be watched.

DO I HAVE AN ACCOUNT ON THESE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS?

Before you let your child join a particular social media site or app, it might be helpful to get an account yourself. This has two benefits:

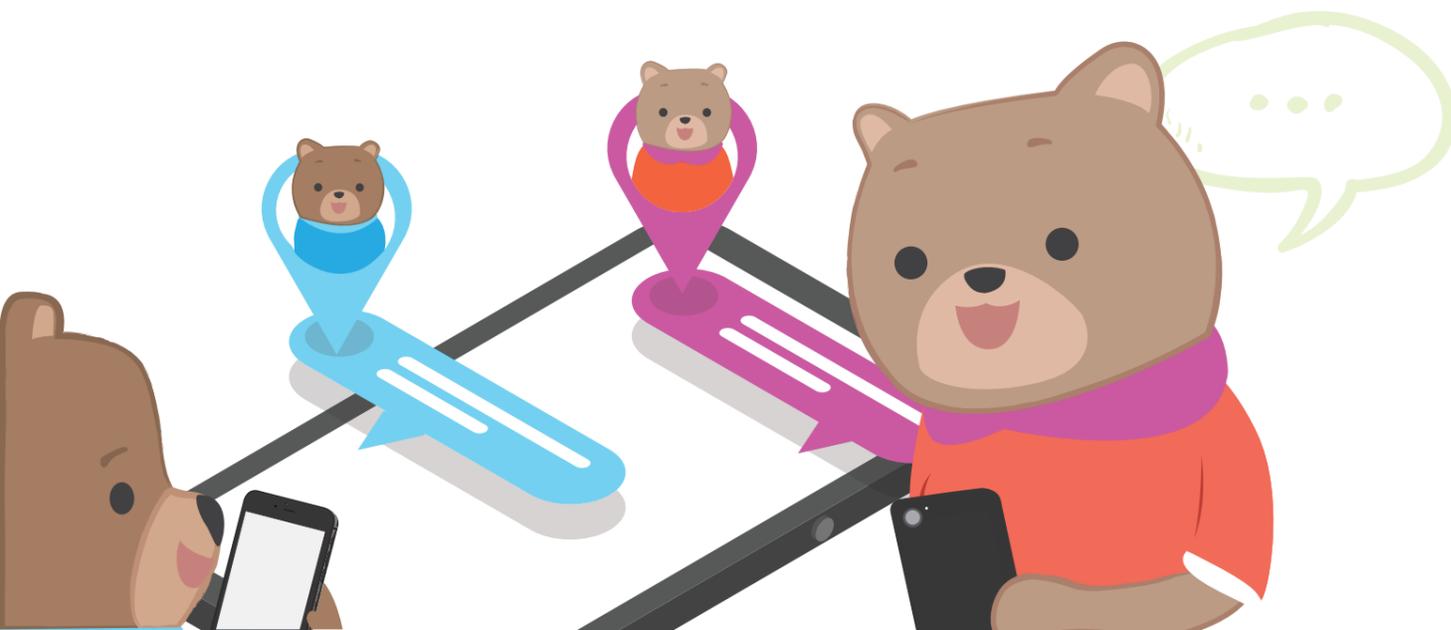


1 Learning first-hand is the easiest way to learn more about the app, its functions, and privacy settings. Once you understand these functions, it is easier to guide your child through the app. When your child is first creating their account, you can show them how to adjust their settings to private to keep their information safe online.

2 Having an account is an easy way to be involved in your child's life on social media. Some parents secretly monitor their children's accounts, but this can potentially cause more harm than good. After all, how badly would they have to behave online for you to reveal your monitoring?

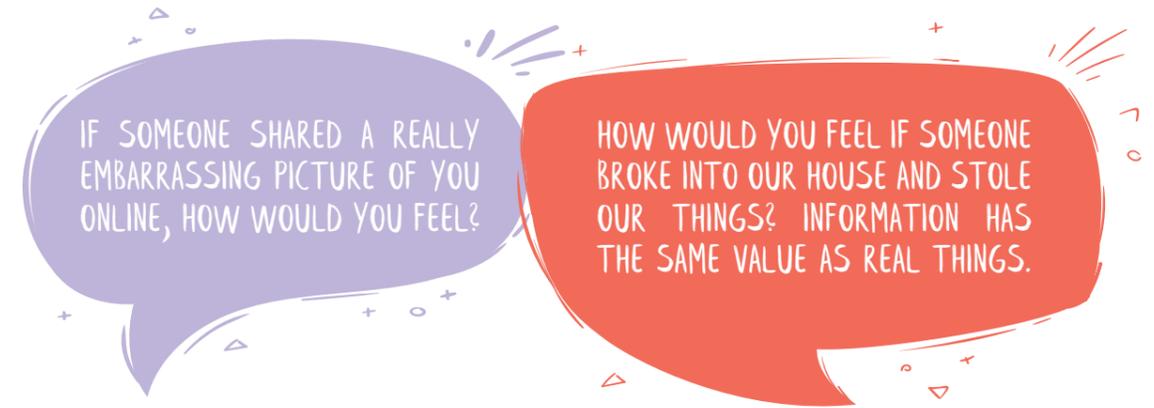


Instead, make it clear from the start that you will be monitoring their account. Tell them that you will be friends with them or follow them for that initial time period, saying, "I will be checking your messages for now, and these are the things I'm going to be looking out for – nothing else." It might be foul language, cyber-bullying, inappropriate photos, or all of the above. Just as we had rules on behaviour when our kids entered a playground, it is important to establish rules of engagement for their first time entering the digital playground. Explain the purpose behind your monitoring and stress that supervision is for safety.



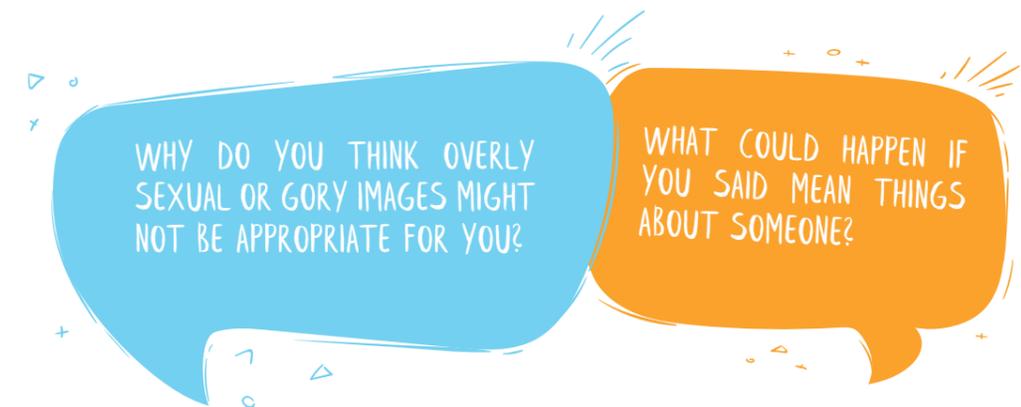
HAVE I BEEN HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH MY CHILD?

It is important to match monitoring efforts with active mentoring. This involves talking to your child - the more talks, the better. Have conversations about online safety and security, and discuss why privacy is important with questions like:



Point out to them that turning on their geo-location, even to check-in on photos on Instagram or for their Snap Map, can allow strangers to collect information about them. These are aspects of privacy that your child may not have considered.

During your discussions, also make sure to include talks about 'taboo' topics. Your child needs to understand that they might come across inappropriate images, mean comments, and people asking them intrusive questions. Decide on what types of content are appropriate for your child based on your family's values and preferences. Then, ask them questions like:



Another issue to consider is the effect of social media on your child's emotions. Do they feel better when they see all the cool things their friends are doing without them? If your child is impulsive, do photos of expensive clothes mean extra costs for your wallets? Social media sites can also make mental health issues, like eating disorders or self-harm, worse through 'guides' or 'how-tos', making it even more important for you to speak honestly and openly with your child.

HAVE I SET UP SOME FAMILY RULES?



Given the many potential problems your child might face on social media, it is helpful to have some ground rules to guide you and your child in this new part of their lives. Sit down and talk to your child, then let the rules follow from these conversations.

These rules are useful because they guide not just your child's actions, but your own. Think about what you do – if you text your child while they are in school, they might think it's appropriate to use their phone during school-time. Similarly, if you set limits on how long they can use social media, try to keep to them too! You might be surprised by how difficult it is.

If you are not sure where to start, flip to the back of this handbook to see what typical family rules would look like.



DO I KNOW HOW TO CONTROL MY CHILD'S SOCIAL MEDIA USE?

If you have concerns that signing a contract is not enough, there are technical measures you can consider to make sure the rules are followed. These include the countless parental control apps that you can set up on your child's phone and sync with your own, which let you track how much time your child spends on each app, remotely restrict their access to any app, or to mobile connectivity at all. Apps such as Qustodio, Screen Time, or Tittle for Parents, give you control while navigating these new spaces of the online world.

Download a few of the apps on both your phones to choose one that works best for your needs, comfort levels, and budget. Websites such as [digitaltrends.com](https://www.digitaltrends.com) or [pcmag.com](https://www.pcmag.com) also provide helpful comparisons of different parental control software so you can identify the relevant differences at a glance.

It is important to explain to your child why you are using these technical measures as it can seem quite restrictive to them. As they show you their ability to follow the rules you have both agreed on, you can consider loosening the reins, or even deleting the parental control apps altogether.



AM I OPEN WITH MY CHILD?

Social media is constantly changing, with new apps popping up every few months, and your children are also growing and maturing quickly in their teenage years. Thus, an important aspect to the question of ‘when to give your child access to social media’ is what you do after they’re on it. Any rules you put in place should not be static; they should be changing as your child matures. You might allow your 10-year-old to use Musical.ly and only connect with people that you both know, and then a year later expand that to people he knows in person. Alternatively, when the next popular music app comes out, it might have features that differ in small but significant ways that mean you need to change the way your child uses the app. As parents, try your best to keep up with the new apps and trends.

This makes it important to keep the doorway to conversation wide open. Let them know they can talk to you about how they’re feeling or if something that has happened to them, or a friend, online. Social media is like a personal diary for many young people so, to encourage them to open up, share your own experiences and struggles with them – about how you, perhaps, fell into the trappings of social media and are afraid they will too. In having such an open relationship, you are best equipped to guide them through the entire social media journey.

For more information and parent resources, please visit the Media Literacy Council’s website at betterinternet.sg.



TAKING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

SAMPLE CONTRACT

Our family rules for using social media are:

I, _____ [child] understand that using social media is a privilege and not a right. I understand that this privilege may be taken away by my parents for bad behaviour, if my school grades fall, and if I do not follow the following rules.

- ✓ I agree to keep my settings at ‘private’ at all times.
- ✓ I agree not to share personal information such as _____ [e.g., full name, home address, phone numbers] without checking with _____ [parent].
- ✓ I agree not to let strangers add, follow, or friend me.
- ✓ I agree not to view or send inappropriate content _____ [e.g., violent or sexual content].
- ✓ I understand how harmful and hurtful it is to use social media to bully, harass, threaten, or gossip about someone, and agree never to do so.
- ✓ If someone bullies or threatens me online, I agree to tell _____ [parent] immediately.
- ✓ I understand that everything I put online stays online, even if it can be deleted or hidden afterwards.
- ✓ I agree to give _____ [parent] access to my account to check how I’ve behaved online.
- ✓ I agree to be honest and own up if I break any of the rules of the contract.

Child’s signature

Parent’s signature

Date

ABOUT MEDIA LITERACY COUNCIL

The Media Literacy Council works in partnership with industry, community and government to champion and develop public education and awareness programmes relating to media literacy and cyber wellness. In an increasingly interactive and participatory media landscape, the Media Literacy Council seeks to cultivate and encourage the public to become discerning media consumers with the ability to evaluate media content effectively, and use, create and share content safely and responsibly. It also advises the government on how to respond to emerging issues relating to internet and media content.

Find out more at www.betterinternet.sg.

We wish to thank the following members of Media Literacy Council for their contribution to this guide.

- Mr Chong Ee Jay (TOUCH Family Services)
- Dr Jiow Hee Jhee (Singapore Institute of Technology)

ABOUT FAMILIES FOR LIFE

Families for Life is a people-sector Council, comprising of 13 volunteers from the people and private sectors. The Council is headed by Mr Ching Wei Hong, Chief Operating Officer, OCBC Bank.

Families for Life Council's vision is to build strong and resilient families because that makes for stronger communities and better individual well-being.

We Listen. We listen to the issues that Singaporean families are facing.

We Explore and Promote. We bring people and organisations together to create platforms for family bonding and to engage Singaporeans in conversations about families.

We Voice. We voice out concerns that people have on family issues and continue this conversation with our partners and the community.

Find out more at www.familiesforlife.sg.

