

## Social Media Tools Parents Need to Know About Now

1. [Twitter](#) is a microblogging site that allows users to post brief, 140-character messages -- called "tweets" -- and follow other users' activities.

### **Why it's popular**

Teens like using it to share quick tidbits about their lives with friends. It's also great for keeping up with what's going on in the world -- breaking news, celebrity gossip, etc.

### **What parents need to know**

- **Public tweets are the norm for teens.** Though you can choose to keep your tweets private, most teens report having public accounts ([Pew Internet & American Life Project](#), 2013). Talk to your kids about what they post and how a post can spread far and fast.
- **Updates appear immediately.** Even though you can remove tweets, your followers can still read what you wrote until it's gone. This can get kids in trouble if they say something in the heat of the moment.
- **It's a promotional tool for celebs.** Twitter reels teens in with behind-the-scenes access to celebrities' lives, adding a whole new dimension to celebrity worship. You may want to point out how much marketing strategy goes into the tweets of those they admire.

2. [Instagram](#) is a platform that lets users snap, edit, and share photos and 15-second videos -- either publicly or with a network of followers.

### **Why it's popular**

Instagram unites the most popular features of social media sites: sharing, seeing, and commenting on photos. Instagram also lets you apply fun filters and effects to your photos, making them look high quality and artistic.

### **What parents need to know**

- **Teens are on the lookout for "Likes."** Similar to Facebook, teens may measure the "success" of their photos -- even their self-worth -- by the number of likes or comments they receive. Posting a photo or video can be problematic if teens post it to validate their popularity.

- **Public photos are the default.** Photos and videos shared on Instagram are public and may have location information unless privacy settings are adjusted. Hashtags can make photos even more visible to communities beyond a teen's followers.
- **Mature content can slip in.** The terms of service specify that users should be at least 13 years old and shouldn't post partially nude or sexually suggestive photos -- but they don't address violence, swear words, or drugs.

3. [Snapchat](#) is a messaging app that lets users put a time limit on the pictures and videos they send before they disappear.

#### Why it's popular

Snapchat's creators intended the app's fleeting images to be a way for teens to share fun, light moments without the risk of having them go public. And that's what most teens use it for: sending goofy or embarrassing photos to one another. Snapchats also seem to send and load much "faster" than email or text.

#### What parents need to know

- **Many schools have yet to block it**, which is one reason why teens like it so much ([Pew Internet & American Life Project](#), 2013).
- **It's a myth that Snapchats go away forever.** Data is data: Whenever an image is sent, it never truly goes away. (For example, the person on the receiving end can take a screenshot of the image before it disappears.) Snapchats can even be recovered.
- **It can make sexting seem OK.** The seemingly risk-free messaging might encourage users to share pictures containing inappropriate content.

4. [Google+](#) is Google's social network, which is now open to teens. It has attempted to improve on [Facebook's friend concept](#) -- using "circles" that give users more control about what they share with whom.

#### Why it's popular

Teens aren't wild about Google+ yet. But many feel that their parents are more accepting of it because they associate it with schoolwork. One popular aspect of Google+ is the addition of real-time [video chats in Hangouts](#) (virtual gatherings with approved friends).

#### What parents need to know

- **Teens can limit who sees certain posts by using "circles."** Friends, acquaintances, and the general public can all be placed in different circles. If you're friends with your kid on Google+, know that you may be in a different "circle" than their friends (and therefore seeing different information).
- **Google+ takes teens' safety seriously.** Google+ created age-appropriate privacy default settings for any users whose registration information shows them to be teens. It also automatically reminds them about who may be seeing their posts (if they're posting on public or extended circles).
- **Data tracking and targeting are concerns.** Google+ activity (what you post and search for and who you connect with) is shared across Google services including Gmail and YouTube. This information is used for targeting ads to the user. Users can't opt out of this type of sharing across Google services.
- **6. [Vine](#)** is a social media app that lets users post and watch looping six-second video clips. This Twitter-owned service has developed a unique community of people who post videos that are often creative and funny -- and sometimes thought-provoking.

### Why it's popular

Videos run the gamut from stop-motion clips of puzzles doing and undoing themselves to six-second skits showing how a teen wakes up on a school day vs. a day during summer. Teens usually use Vine to create and share silly videos of themselves and/or their friends and family.

### What parents need to know

- **It's full of inappropriate videos.** In three minutes of random searching, we came across a clip full of full-frontal male nudity, a woman in a fishnet shirt with her breasts exposed, and people blowing marijuana smoke into each other's mouths. There's a lot of funny, clever expression on Vine, but much of it isn't appropriate for kids.
- **There are significant privacy concerns.** The videos you post, the accounts you follow, and the comments you make on videos are all public by default. But you *can* adjust your settings to protect your posts; only followers will see them, and you have to approve new followers.
- **Parents can be star performers (without knowing).** If your teens film you being goofy or silly, you may want to talk about whether they plan to share it.
- able online.)

5. [Ask.fm](#) is a social site that lets kids ask questions and answer those posted by other users -- sometimes anonymously.

### **Why it's popular**

Although there are some friendly interactions on Ask.fm -- Q&As about favorite foods or crushes, for example -- there are lots of mean comments and some creepy sexual posts. This iffy content is part of the site's appeal for teens.

### **What parents need to know**

- **Bullying is a major concern.** [The British news website MailOnline reported that the site has been linked to the suicides of several teens. Talk to your teens about cyberbullying](#) and how anonymity can encourage mean behavior.
- **Anonymous answers are optional.** Users can decide whether to allow anonymous posts and can remove their answers from streaming to decrease their profile's visibility. If your teens do use the site, they'd be best turning off anonymous answers and keeping themselves out of the live stream.
- **Q&As can appear on Facebook.** Syncing with Facebook means that a much wider audience can see those Q&As.