

Talking With Your Child About Social Media Stress

Parents often wait to talk about social media until something goes wrong. A more useful pattern is to talk early and often, when no one is already angry. Social media stress can involve friendship conflict, exclusion, pressure to respond immediately, embarrassing posts, rumors, comparison, unwanted contact, or simply feeling unable to disconnect. Begin with curiosity rather than an investigation: “What has been stressful online lately?” or “What do you wish adults understood about social media?” The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends conversations rather than lectures and suggests choosing calm moments such as car rides, meals, or downtime—not the middle of a technology conflict.¹ The U.S. Surgeon General’s advisory recognizes both potential benefits and risks of social media and encourages families to create boundaries, model responsible use, and maintain open communication.² The American Psychological Association similarly recommends ongoing adult guidance that is responsive to the adolescent’s developmental level and individual vulnerabilities.³ If your child tells you about a problem, resist solving it before you understand it. Ask: “Do you want me to listen, help you think through options, or take action with you?” That preserves communication while still allowing the parent to step in when safety requires it. Help the child separate problems that can be handled with a platform tool from problems that need adult support. Muting, blocking, privacy settings, screenshots, reporting functions, and breaks can help with some situations. Threats, exploitation, persistent harassment, self-harm content, or fear about personal safety should not be handled alone. End with a clear return path: “You can bring this back to me even if you think I might be upset.” The goal is not to know every post. It is to remain a trusted adult when judgment and support are needed.

Did You Know?

- ✓ AAP recommends having technology conversations early and often and choosing calm moments rather than starting them during or immediately after conflict.¹
- ✓ The Surgeon General recommends open family communication, boundaries, and adult modeling as part of reducing social-media risks.²
- ✓ APA’s advisory emphasizes developmentally appropriate adult guidance and attention to individual vulnerabilities and online experiences.³

Research Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. “Conversation Starters for Families About Media.” Updated July 10, 2024.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General. “Social Media and Youth Mental Health.” 2023.
3. American Psychological Association. “Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence.” May 2023.

Ten-Minute Social Media Stress Conversation

Use this page for one calm conversation. The goal is to understand the stress first, then decide together whether listening, problem-solving, or adult action is needed.

Child's name: _____ Date: _____

Topic/platform: _____ Best time to talk: _____

1. Open Without Accusing - About 2 Minutes

Start with one neutral question and give the child room to answer.

My opening question: _____

2. Listen for the Actual Stress - About 2 Minutes

Identify what is happening without immediately deciding what it means.

The stressful part is: _____

3. Ask What Help Is Wanted - About 2 Minutes

Let the child say whether they want listening, ideas, or direct help.

☐ Just listen ☐ Help me think ☐ Take action with me ☐ I am not sure yet

4. Choose One Next Step - About 2 Minutes

Select one reasonable action, including a platform tool or trusted adult when appropriate.

Next step: _____

5. Keep the Door Open - About 2 Minutes

End with a clear statement that the child can return even if the situation changes.

What Parents Can Say: "You can bring this back to me, even if you think I may be upset."

Follow-up time: _____