

# ONLINE SAFETY FACT SHEET

## For Parents and Families

### THE ISSUE

Teenagers today have unprecedented access to new digital technologies and social media platforms. Yet, while these technologies are becoming ingrained in the daily lives of our youth, the threats, risks, and drawbacks of their usage on adolescent development is a fast growing area of concern for parents. This fact sheet highlights some of the negative consequences of digital technology usage and offers advice for parents as they navigate ways to protect their children on three major social media platforms.

### Self-Esteem, Body Image & Identity

New digital technologies and social media allow teenagers to exert autonomy and cultivate personal identity. More time spent using social media however, has been correlated to decreased body satisfaction and self-esteem. Teens are also at increased risk for developing body image concerns and anxiety about weight.

### Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of bullying inflicted online through text messages and social media sites. Victims of online harassment have an increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation and are more likely to engage in maladaptive behaviors such as alcohol and drug dependency. Perpetrators often use technology to remain anonymous. Nearly 34% of teens nationwide reported being cyberbullied once in their lifetimes.

### Pornography

The advent of the Internet has allowed sexually explicit visual media to reach more people. Exposure to pornography can result in lower self-esteem, distorted views on sexuality and relationships, and lead to risky behaviors among teens.

## Facebook

### WHAT IS IT?

Facebook is a popular social networking platform for children ages 13 and up to connect with others, post and react to updates, share media, and download applications.

### CONCERNS

Recent data breaches have compromised the personal information of millions of users. Online predators seek to contact and cyberbully young users.

### STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

- Review your child's Facebook account to ensure that sensitive information such as addresses and finances are not posted.
- Adjust the privacy settings on your child's account by manually restricting who can view their profiles, posts, and media from "public" to "friends only."
- Restrict who is able to "friend" your child as Facebook's default setting allows anyone to send friend requests.
- If you have a Facebook account, add your child as a friend so you can monitor content that is posted on their profile pages.
- Remove all location markers assigned to status updates.
- Review the privacy settings on any uploaded visual media your child is tagged in. Turning on the "tag review" option in the privacy settings permits Facebook to alert your child that he or she was tagged in a photo or video prior to it going live. Your child can then choose to remove the tag if they wish.
- Educate your child on the importance of reading through privacy policies put forth by third-party apps, how to report bullying and inappropriate content, and block strangers.

## Instagram

### WHAT IS IT?

Instagram is a free file sharing app that allows users to upload photos and videos to their accounts, edit and share them with followers, and comment on posts uploaded by others.

### CONCERNS

Media posted on public profiles can be seen by anyone with an Instagram account. Inappropriate images and videos can be shared. Teens are often under pressure to maintain "perfect" profiles.

### STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

- Review your child's Instagram account to ensure that sensitive information such as addresses and finances do not appear in uploaded photos or videos.
- Educate your child on the importance of limiting the amount of personally-identifiable information that is available to the public.
- Make your child's Instagram account private so that they can only be viewed with the permission of the user. You and your child will then be able to approve any and all users who wish to follow your child's posts.
- If you have an Instagram account, follow your child so you can monitor photos and videos posted and shared on their accounts.
- Remove all location markers assigned to uploaded photos and videos. Discuss the dangers of location-sharing with your child and refrain from adding location markers to any subsequent posts.
- Assist your child in blocking any followers that send inappropriate direct messages or share graphic and adult content.
- Discuss how contemporary photos are frequently edited and regulate the amount of time your child is allowed on Instagram to relieve pressure associated with maintaining accounts.

## Snapchat

### WHAT IS IT?

Snapchat is a messaging app that connects users through photos and short videos called "snaps" that can only be viewed for a short time before they are automatically deleted.

### CONCERNS

As photos and videos shared on this platform expire quickly, adolescents can use Snapchat as a vehicle for sexting and cyberbullying.

### STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

- Check that the privacy settings on your child's Snapchat account is set to "friends" so that the account holder is able to approve who is able to contact them and view their content.
- Discuss the risks of sharing content with your child. Although Snapchat deletes photos and videos within a short period of time, it is still possible for users to screenshot images and share them online. Instruct your child not to post sensitive information (e.g. addresses, finances, medical conditions) or content that may be illegal or inappropriate to prevent this from happening.
- Assist your child in blocking any users that share graphic and adult content through the app.
- Adjust your child's location sharing options to enable "ghost mode" so that their location is hidden from all users.