

# Tweens, Teens, and Social Media- OMG!

By Kjartan D. Armann, M.D.

Each generation has had its social media crisis. I remember when it was about the TV and the telephone. Our parents would complain about the amount of time we spend on each. I'm sure the same thing was said about the radio when it first came out.

In today's market we have to deal with cell phones, computers, hand held games (like gameboy & PS3) and tablets, which gives the kids the ability to text message and FaceTime with their friends. I asked some of the tweens and teens what their favorite social media sites are. The top four are: Tumblr, Instagram, Facebook, and Utube. (Yes, that is how you spell each of those media sights) This electronic media can keep our young children engaged for countless hours of mindless dribble, which can cut into family time, homework time, and social time. We are dealing with tweens and teens that are becoming socially incompetent, due to the lack of inadequate family time.



So how do we fix this problem? Obviously the parents need to place limits on the time spent on these devices. The optimum time to start the limits is when the child first gets any social media tool. Have clear limits in place, make a contract with your child for each electronic device making sure you and they agree to the contract before even buying the product. Each family will have what they believe are realistic limits. The discussion of what limits need to be in place are a family discussion. It shouldn't be "my way or the highway". Having a say in how the devices will be used will help ensure the contract is followed. When the rules

are established prior to purchase of these devices, it makes it easier to follow them. The contract should be written out and signed by everyone involved. The same rules should apply to both adults and children in the same family. Set a good example and stick to it, this will make the process much easier.

What if your tween/teen already has these social media weapons? Can we go back and change the rules on how they will be used? The answer is yes, but it will require a strong parent or parents to accomplish this task. I see a problem with divorced parents when they don't agree on how to parent. This can lead to the child trying to pit one parent against the other, so work out your differences before engaging on the topic of electronic restrictions with your child.



There will be resistance from your tween/teen with any changes you want to make. Try using a reward system, such as getting more time on social media for good grades. Behavior, attitude, and getting chores done are sometimes a problem at this age. Let them know that improvement in these areas will generate more leisure time. Then the parent will have established an incentive for their children to be more co-operative.

Last, but not least, I believe in positive reinforcement for positive behavior. Our children do hear us, and they want us to be positive and encouraging to them. They deserve this from us.



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