

Balancing Safety and Privacy: Parental Access to Children's Social Media Accounts

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As younger children and teens create accounts on social media, many parents are becoming more concerned about their children and their safety. Even though social media can be entertaining and a fun way for teens to communicate with friends and family, many parents are constantly concerned about whether their children are being exposed to explicit images and messages. Many parents and guardians have a family rule that the parent must have access to the child's phone. However, giving parents access to their children's phones and social media accounts come with benefits and potential problems.

Giving a parent access to their child's phone/social media accounts helps allay concerns about a child's safety. Parents worried about their children being exposed to explicit content will be able to see the child's "for you page" or search history. It can also be comforting because sometimes a parent will ask, "Have you gotten any weird images or texts on your phone recently?" However, teens might not think much of this question and quickly say "no" while walking away. This can leave parents doubtful about their child's response, making them unsure despite having asked. If a parent has access to the phone or social media accounts, the parent can look for themselves to be sure the child is not viewing any explicit content. If needed, the parent can also enable parental controls, in which the feed is filtered through so the child is never shown any explicit content.

However, giving a parent access to a child's phone/social media accounts can also have a negative effect on the child. If the child is not fully comfortable with their parents knowing every fact about them, their mental health can deteriorate and arguments between the child and parents can begin. For example, sometimes teens prefer to keep their "for you page" and specific information private. This can often be because of the child's mental health. Sometimes the child can be insecure about their social life, personality, or body image. This can be reflected in their search history, conversations with friends, or social media feed. When a parent views this private information, the child's insecurities might worsen. This can later lead to more issues that involve self harm, suicide, depression, etc. In some cases, a child may be at risk if their parents learn certain information about them. Some people argue that honest and open conversations between parents and children can have a more positive impact on children than monitoring their phones.

Discussion Questions

1. Is it ethically permissible for a parent to view their child's social media accounts or phone histories without their consent?
2. In a world where social media is everywhere, how should kids learn to make decisions about how to interact in a healthy way?
3. If the parent doesn't trust a child to be responsible on social media, should the child

even have access to social media?