

Saleema
Noon growing up
game plan

*Preteens &
Social Media*

A GAME PLAN FOR PARENTS

Don't be a Negative Nelly.

Acknowledge positive aspects of social media (feelings of connection, creativity, entertainment, self-expression, community-building, stress release, keeping up to date on current events, a new wave of self-love and acceptance) to your preteen so they know you're looking at the issue with an open mind. The goal is to keep all the good stuff about social media in their life and get the bad stuff out.

Find ways to say "yes". Explore positive handles with your preteen, suggest some for them to follow. Share funny memes. Watch YouTube videos with them and laugh even if you don't think they're funny. Say "yes" to apps you can get your head around.

Find some common ground. Be clear that your intention is not to ban them from social media or make it inaccessible to them. You're looking for some common ground, a sweet spot. And it's probably going to be more time spent on it than you'd like.

Connection before correction*. This is key. If we don't connect in a positive way with our kids around social media, any opposition will be met responses like, "You just hate social media." "Just because it's not important to you, doesn't mean I can't have it in my life."

Take a calm approach to every conversation. Resist judging or criticizing your preteen's use of social media.

**This nugget of wisdom courtesy of
Casey O'Roarty, www.joyfulcourage.com*

- I know that social media is great in lots of ways. What do you like/love about it?
- I agree with you that being on TikTok can be a lot of fun and a great way for people to express their creativity and connect with others.



- I want social media to be a fun experience for you. I don't mind you being on Instagram if we have an agreement on how that will look.



- I want social media to be a fun, healthy part of your life. It's my job as your parent to do my best to make sure it stays that way.



- I trust you to make smart decisions and use good judgement on social media. And I'm here to support you if you run into trouble.



- I know social media is really important to you and your friends and that you try not to be on it too much. I notice that.
- I've noticed that you've been on social media a bit more than usual lately. Do you think you can pull back a bit? Or can we talk about why?



Make it a family thing.



Start early. If your preteen isn't really into social media yet, great. Set reasonable boundaries and limits early around devices/screen time to avoid battles in the teen years.

Let them have a say. Involve your preteen in the creation of a family agreement. Have regular check-ins about how things are going.

Make balance the focus. FOMO and FOBO are real, valid and human so we have to take them into account. We also want to prioritize real life experiences and connections.

Leave space for emotions. Your preteen may not be happy about the boundaries placed on them, even if they helped to create them. Give them time to make mistakes and adjust. Acknowledge their frustration.

Set them up for success.

- Let's take our emotional temperature before going on social media. Running a fever? Let's stay away. Let's check in with ourselves, connect with a friend in real life, talk to someone about what's bothering us, do something that excites us. If we feel good, let's set an intention to have a positive experience online.
- If we get a negative comment, let's take time to reflect on it. If it's true, let's express gratitude to the person for bringing it to our attention. If it's not true, let's forgive and move on.
- Let's spread love and good vibes every time we go on social media. Give meaningful compliments. Encourage others.
- Let's only follow people who are positive in our life: who lift us up, who are inspiring, who make us laugh, who we look up to. Let's mute or unfollow people whose posts make us feel bad.
- Let's T-H-I-N-K before we post. Is the post True, Honest, Interesting, Necessary and Kind?
- What about ourselves do we want the world to see on social media?
- Let's inspire others to be authentic by having the courage to share both our ups *and* our downs.

- Do you think kids your age spend lots of time on social media? Too much time?
- When the time comes, what do you think would be some fair guidelines around screens to put in place for our family? For us? For your siblings?
- If and when you want to be on social media, let's talk about it. There are ways we can go about it so that all of our needs are met.

- How much time on social media each day/week do you think is reasonable for someone your age?
- Let's come up with some guidelines so that we both feel good about it.

- I know it's easy to get caught in that trap of not wanting to miss out on anything, even for adults. I find myself there sometimes! How can we come to terms with that? Do you think your friends experience the same feelings?
- I find that spending time with my friends in person makes what's happening online less important.
- Let's stop the mindless scrolling. Let's use the screen time feature in settings to track how much time we're spending on social media. If it's more than we'd like, let's not beat ourselves up, but set some goals to bring it down.
- Social media is awesome. What's also awesome, even for adults, is to do a check in with ourselves one in a while to make sure it hasn't become the boss of us. Sometimes it's a good idea to take a step back and do some thinking about the role we want social media (and devices) to play in our lives.



Have the talks (but keep them easy-breezy).

- Get personal.
- Make it about you, too.
- Hold yourself accountable.
- Talk about the good habits you're trying to practice and how it's going.
- What have you noticed?
- What's been difficult?
- This sends a powerful message to your preteen that balance is important at every age. And that you're not perfect.

- Full disclosure: I caught myself scrolling Instagram mindlessly while I was waiting for your brother the other day. I'm going to make a conscious effort not to do that anymore.
- So I saw a photo on Instagram of some friends of mine out for dinner. My first thought was, 'Why wasn't I invited?'. Then I reminded myself that no one's invited everywhere. I shouldn't take it personally.

- Do many people your age...? Does this sound right?
- I read an article on how gender stereotypes are acted out on social media. Do you think boys and girls post differently? Why?
- I came across a study in my feed saying that likes and comments become connected over time to how people feel about themselves. Do you think this is true for young people?

- Make them the expert.
- Ask questions.
- Ask for their insight.
- Listen to their views.

- Make a concerted effort to show interest in your preteen's offline life.
- Invite them to join you in activities.
- Even if they say no, keep trying (while respecting boundaries).

- Let's always remember that having fun, real life experiences is most important. Let's make an effort to do more things together.

- I've noticed you've been spending more time than usual on social media...is everything OK? Is there anything you want to talk about? I'm here if you need me.

But be careful not to blame your preteen's struggles on too much social media use. Dig deeper. What's really going on for them? Again, connection before correction.

- Be real.
- Be proactive.
- Acknowledge the potential negative impact of social media.

- It's hard not to compare ourselves to others on social media...at any age. This can be unhealthy and harmful if what other people post makes us feel less interesting, less fun or less cool.
- Let's do reality checks to beat the comparison game. 'Does what a person is posting really represent their life?' 'Is the post staged?' 'Are they using filters?'
- Let's be curious about the stories our inner voice tells us (i.e. you weren't invited to be in that photo because you aren't cool enough, your life is boring and uninspiring, everyone's doing fun stuff and you're not) and if it's helpful to believe them.



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RESOURCES

www.mediasmarts.ca

www.common sense media.org

www.amaze.org

www.mediagirls.org

www.safeonline.ca