TWITTER AND YOUR CHILD, A PARENT'S GUIDE TO PRIVACY AND SAFETY

Who's watching your teen online? Discover the easiest way to make sure its you. Start your free 7 day free trial to SociallyActive today.

What is Twitter?

Twitter is one of the leading tools for connecting users with bite-sized pieces of information and status updates. Each message sent through this network is called a tweet. A tweet is composed of 140 characters or fewer, with no restrictions on verbose or topics.

Twitter is used in both business and personal lives and used by a great many screen stars who wish to feel connected to their fan base. It is a great way to quickly broadcast information and to interact with customers and friends. With Twitter, you can easily track hundreds of people and it only takes a few minutes to scan through all of their tweets.

If your teens are using Twitter, it's time to make sure they are protected from status updates about more than lunch on the corner and that their own tweets are appropriate as well.

Teens and Twitter

Odds are pretty good that your teen Twitters on a regular basis, they probably have it on their phone, as do most of their friends. They probably use in on an almost hourly basis to update their followers on what they are doing.

Twitter has no age restrictions, meaning that anyone can get an account, at any time. Signing up for a Twitter account is easy and takes only a few minutes. Unfortunately all that you need is a valid email address.

How to get a Twitter Account

Go to the Twitter website and click where it says "Join for Free", "Join the Conversation", or what ever the signup catchphrase of the day is.

1. Fill in the areas where is asks you for your name, email address and password.
2. Click the **Sign up for Twitter link**.
3. A new page opens where it asks you to select your username. This is what you will be known as in the world of tweeting. Each name is unique so it may take a few tries to find one that works for you.
4. The system will ask you to reconfirm your name, email address, password.
5. Click **Create my account and it will probably ask you to co**mplete a Captcha, so it can verify that you are, indeed, human.
6. A **confirmation email will be sent** to the address you provided, so you will need to go into that email and click the link to confirm your email address and account.

The account can now be logged into from multiple sources including, the Twitter page, a mobile phone, IM account, or a third-party Twitter client. The new Twitter account is located at twitter.com/*username*

What Parents Need to Know About Twitter

- Twitter is very public and it only takes a second for something to go outside of your network and to the public.
- Even if the account is private, the profile is still public, get your own account and look at your teen's profile. Is there anything on there that you would rather see hidden away? Then talk to you teen and work with them to adjust their profile.
- By default, all new accounts are set to public.
- Tweets made publicly will always be visible to the public, even after you have changed to private.
- Public tweets can be seen by anybody, even those without a Twitter account.
- By setting the account to private, no one can interact until they are manually approved. Only once they are approved and your child exchange tweets with that person.
- Tweets made by a protected account cannot be recycled or 'retweeted', and are not visible to anyone outside of their followers.

How to Use Twitter

If your teens are using Twitter, then it is time that you familiarize yourself with the program so that you can ensure that they are protected. You also want to ensure that they are not tweeting inappropriately. Twitter is easy to use and takes only a few minutes to learn.

Sending Messages on Twitter

Tweeting is easy and can be done directly from the Twitter website. You can also tweet remotely using a mobile phone, third-party Twitter client, or an IM account. The odds are pretty good that your teen has computer access and a cell phone, however they are more likely to tweet from their phones.

To send a tweet from the twitter page enter a message in the field at the top of the screen and click update. A message from the mobile phone is just as easy; all

they have to do is send a text message to 40404. Any messages sent will be instantly displayed to all of their followers.

Followers on Twitter

Followers are the group of fellow tweeters who can see your posts. Adding anyone to your group of followers or becoming a follower is easy.

You can do it directly from the Twitter website by simply visiting a profile and clicking 'Follow' underneath their photo. If the account is public then you will immediately see their tweets. If the account is marked as private, then they will have to approve you before you can become a follower.

To start following someone from your cell phone you send a tweet to 40404 with the command Follow /*username*/

Replies on Twitter

When you are replying to a specific person you would put @ in front of his or her user name, this tells everyone that the response is for a particular person. All of your followers can see the tweet; it is a comment direct at a particular person.

Direct Messages on Twitter

To send a private message to someone you put 'D' then a space and their *username*, so it looks like this – D *username* message.

#Hashtags on Twitter

A hash tag is a keyword or short phrase with the pound sign in front of it (#) and no spaces between words. On Twitter, hashtags are used to 'tag' a message with relevant phrases or keywords that would make it easier for someone to find. You could tag a photo of a vehicle as **#car #ford #mustang**, or simply tag it as **#fordmustang**, or any combination of the above. Once a tweet has been tagged it will appear in relevant searches by your followers, along with other tweets sharing the same tag that are accessible to their view.

Prevent Cyber Bullying

Twitter is often used as a means of bullying and harassment. Talk to your teen and let them know that they can talk to you if they find themselves a victim, but you can also help them by ensuring that they know how to block users.

Blocking an account is easy. Once logged in to the twitter account go to the profile page of the person they are going to block, then the person's icon and select "Block" from the drop-down menu. Once they are blocked they can no longer follow, view the profile, or communicate with each other via Twitter.

Twitter Safety

Keeping your children safe from danger is not always easy, but Twitter does a fair job by promoting security and providing platforms for private accounts. It is up to parents to be diligent in their interactions and supervision to make sure that their kids are tweeting and following appropriately. Twitter has done what they can; the rest is up to you.

Consider using a privacy-monitoring tool such as SociallyActive to make sure you are always up to date with your teens social network usage.

How will I know if my teen is using Twitter?

Hopefully they will tell you. If you are uncertain then try doing a name search of Twitter accounts. To do so, go to the **Discover** tab and then click **Find Friends**. If you are lucky, then you won't find them, if you do find them listed under their real name then you want to talk to your teen and discuss their use of social media.

You may not find your teen because they will be using a screen name or pseudonym. Screen names are used to hide the true identity of the user. If your child is on Twitter, then you want them using a screen name rather than their real names.

Secure Your Teen on Twitter

Twitter has a policy stating that users must be at least 13 to have an account, but you don't provide a birth date at sign up. There are some very basic steps that need to be taken in order to ensure that your child's tweets remain private and protected.

- Ensure that the account is set to protected so that only approved people can view and send tweets with your teen.
- Look at the account preferences to ensure they are set to *Always use HTTPS, this ensures that all tweets are going out over a secure Internet connection. Unlike tweeting over a computer the applications for phones and iPads automatically tweets over a secure connection.*
- Through Twitter, your child can search for and choose to follow a wide variety of people and companies. Many they want to follow will be stars or trendy companies, just be sure to set some basic ground rules about what they can and cannot say over the Internet before they start connecting with the world at large.
- Talk with your child, start a conversation with your teen about the advantages and disadvantages of protecting their tweets. As with any social media, following their Twitter account or having random access to it is always a good idea.

Protect Your Child's Future

Converse with your kids about appropriate sharing on any social networking site, and make them realize what an impact their tweets can have on their future.

Protecting your teen's online reputation is more important than ever. Employers, credit companies and even colleges will look at the Internet to aid in their final

decisions. College admissions officers weighing which students to accept will regularly uses information found on social networking sites, to make decisions.

A study of 500 competitive colleges found that 10% of admissions officers said they look at applicants' social networking profiles to evaluate their suitability for admission. Out of the colleges that used this information, 38% said that what they found *negatively affected* how they saw applicants.

Posting derogatory, defamatory or provocative material can drastically affect your teen's future. The Internet is forever. Even if something is removed, it is still stored on a server somewhere and may come back to haunt them.

Help Your Teen Protect Themselves on Twitter

Your teen needs to understand the consequences of sharing information like their full name, phone number, and address with others online. Show them how easy it may be to draw up their information with a white pages search or a reverse phone number trace.

Every piece of personal information your teen shares online will make it easier to find even more information about them. It's like a bread trail, each crumb leading to another. In fact, some people enjoy "doxing" others online, which means revealing their personally identifiable information publicly, as a kind of juvenile prank. Which could easily lead to identify theft.

Have your teen use a screen name instead of their real name. In an ideal world they would have a different screen name for each website, but that makes things difficult. Your teen also needs secure passwords consisting of a series of numbers and letters. Having different passwords for each site prevents them from losing control of everything in the event of a hack.

Stay aware of the photos your teen posts online because you never know where the photos might end up. An innocent photo taken at a beach party could end on bikinibabes.com, and no one wants people ogling their child.

Reverse image search engines like TinEye.com can find out if a picture has been posted on different sites, which can make it easier to track down your teen, along with any private or embarrassing information they posted along with that image.

You should regularly run a search for your teen on websites like pipl.com, a search engine that lets you find detailed information on people for free. You should look yourself up while you are at it!

If your teen understands how easy it can be to find people online, they may be less tempted to post more than they need to.

Give Your Child the Right Tools

The best thing you can do is to provide your teen the tools to be safe on social networks. Teach them Internet safety to protect their future.

- Pseudonyms - Work with your teen to come up with a good screen name. Pick one that can be identifiable as them and is as unique as they are. Ensure that it's not a screen name that will haunt their future; many of us still use the same screen names we created twenty years ago, and those names have become as identifiable with us as our given names. They don't need to put their real information out there or even hint at it. The widening galaxy of the Internet is seeing cyberspace become a smaller world. You can easily run into someone more than once.
- Privacy Settings - Ensure that your teen's tweets aren't out there for everyone to look at. If their profile isn't on private then switch it over. This will ensure that only approved friends will see their texts
- Profile - Remove all personal information from the profile and uncheck the box that allows people to find them by email address. Don't let them use a photo of themselves, find something representative of them or their screen name instead.
- Geo-tagging - Turn off the "Tweet Location" feature in your child's Twitter profile. Keep all connections of that screen name as far away from your teen's real name and location as possible.
- Accepting Followers - If they don't know who the person is in real life, then they probably shouldn't accept them as a follower (note, this is only applicable to accounts that are set to private).
- Avoid Portraits - Try to discourage your child from posting photos of themselves or their friends. It there aren't photos out there, then they can't slip out.
- Communicate - Continue to talk to your children about what they are posting and what they are allowed to post. Encourage them to talk to their friends about appropriate posting and their own privacy settings. Your teen may do everything correctly, but all it takes is a careless friend and that beach photo could end up public.
- Monitoring - Talk to them and make them aware of the dangers while still allowing them freedom. Insist that your teen grants you periodic access to their account so you can check their postings and what their friends are posting. Join Twitter and become their follower so that you are aware of their processes and terms and follow your teen so that you have a remote way of checking what is accessible on their accounts and you can see what others have access to.

SociallyActive provides an easy way to help you keep track of your teen on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Instagram eBook

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