

Helping Your Teen Navigate Social Media's Murky Waters

Can you imagine a world without social media? No Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. It's hard, right?

The reality is that while social media has profoundly shaped us as adults, it is completely reinventing what it means to come of age as a teenager.

As someone who has the privilege of teaching and mentoring students in the areas of biblical worldview, apologetics and culture, I get a front-row seat to the opportunities and challenges facing our young people.

The irony is we are a culture that longs for connection and intimacy, but we hide behind our devices because they give us the illusion of control. We are afraid of being known.

So as the social media revolution continues, we need to be ready as moms and dads to help our teenagers navigate it.

As you have conversations about the digital universe we now inhabit, here are three challenges teenagers need to be aware of and a question that will help them evaluate how to make a wiser choice:

1. Teenagers now have digital footprints that will follow them all of their lives. Unwise decisions posted online could affect future jobs, relationships and families. Here are my three golden rules of social media engagement: First, think twice before posting once. Second, never respond to criticism right away. Third, if you wouldn't say it to someone's face, don't say it online.

Key Question: Have you seen any posts made by your friends that you think they will be embarrassed about and regret a

year from now? Five years from now? Why?

2. We are a distracted culture. Social media keeps us superficially engaged and overwhelmed by data, opinions and information. We have largely lost the capacity to sit still, be quiet and reflect without having to check and see what we have missed. The fear of missing out (FOMO) is real.

Key Question: Do you find that you are more or less content after you view social media? Why do you think this is? Is this good for you?

3. Teenagers will have to fight hard to resist trying to find their identity from social approval in the form of follows, likes, shares and comments. This is an exhausting and dangerous way to live. Our identity is rooted in Christ, not social approval. When we forget that, we pursue a lot of foolish dead ends that will ultimately hurt us and lead to painful consequences and regrets.

Key Question: What is the area of your life (school, sports, dance, music, friends, etc.) in which you are most tempted to draw your identity and value from what other people think? Why? What would it look like to make some changes here?

One of the key ways we can help Christian teenagers own their faith is by helping them be wise about how they navigate social media. I think you will find these to be beneficial conversations for both you and your teenager.

This is just one of the many important conversations we need to have with our students to help them build a lasting faith. For more quick, actionable conversations you can have with your teenager to help them own their faith, check out my new book *Welcome to College: A Christ-Follower's Guide for the Journey*. It's filled with short chapters on everything from how we know God is real to why you can trust the Bible to how to think in a Christian way about dating, relationships and more.

Our students don't have to be victims of our post-Christian culture—we can help them follow Jesus with confidence into this next season of life. But it will take us having these conversations as they begin their teenage years instead of waiting until graduation day.

*Reprinted with permission from Tricia Goyer's blog. **Jonathan Morrow** is the author of several books including *Welcome to College: A Christ-Follower's Guide for the Journey* and he speaks nationally on biblical worldview, apologetics, and culture. He is adjunct professor of apologetics at Biola University and director of cultural engagement at Impact 360 Institute where he teaches high school and college students. Jonathan is passionate about seeing a new generation build a lasting faith.*