

# The Grandparents (and Parents) Guide to Social Media

DEFENDING OUR KIDS IN THE DIGITAL AGE







































A CYN'S TECH TIPS EXCLUSIVE

# CYN MACKLEY





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# Keeping Kids Safe Online — Even If You’re Not a Tech Genius

Welcome to *The Grandparents (And Parents) Guide to Social Media* — a plain-language, no-shame series that helps regular folks understand how to keep kids safe on the wild ride that is the internet.

You don’t need to be a tech wizard to protect your kids or grandkids online. You just need to know the basics of how social media platforms work, what the risks are, and how to set smart boundaries. Whether you're raising a teen or just helping out now and then, this guide will walk you through the must-know details of the most popular social apps — from Facebook to TikTok, and even video games that double as social networks.

We’ll talk about:

- Which platforms kids are using (and what they do),
- How people can message your child — sometimes without your knowledge,
- Privacy settings you need to understand,
- Age requirements (and why they matter),
- And when to say, “No social media just yet.”

Let’s start with the big picture — why kids shouldn’t be left alone on social media in the first place.

# Social Media Isn't a Toy — Why Kids Need Grown-Ups Involved

*If your kid's got a phone, you need to know what's on it.*

Let's get one thing straight: social media isn't harmless fun and games. It can be fun, sure. But for kids and teens, it can also be a minefield. That's why no child or teen should be left to figure it out alone.

In fact, I'll say it loud and clear: if you're letting a kid use social media, it's your job to understand it first.

## Think of Social Media Like a Subway

Here's a simple way to think about it. Imagine putting your 13-year-old on a subway in New York City and telling them, "See you later! Hope you don't talk to any weirdos!" You wouldn't do that. So why would you let them wander around the digital version of that — full of strangers, scammers, bullies, and predators?

Social media is full of mostly decent people. But it only takes one creep or one humiliating post to hurt your child deeply — emotionally, legally, or even physically. Kids don't have fully developed brains yet. They're more likely to trust the wrong person or make a split-second decision that follows them for life.

## You Must Be Involved

Here's what I tell every parent, grandparent, or guardian:

**If you don't understand the platform, your child doesn't need to be on it. Period.**

That means:

- You know how it works.
- You know how to log in.
- You know how to check messages, posts, and settings.
- You have access to passwords.
- You know the signs of trouble.

This might sound extreme, but it's necessary. You wouldn't let your child walk into a bar full of strangers and say, "Make good choices!" So don't do it digitally.

## The Non-Negotiable Rules

Let's lay out some clear household rules for any teen using social media — and yes, these apply to grandparents helping raise kids too:

1. **You get the passwords and usernames. No exceptions.**
2. **You set up your own account on that platform.** Learn how it works.
3. **All friend or follower requests go through you.** Whether your kid is sending or receiving.
4. **Only real-life friends for young teens.** No random online buddies unless you can verify them through another parent.
5. **Your kid must friend/follow you.** You're not a spy — you're the parent.
6. **You create a written code of conduct.** Lay out what's acceptable to post, say, and share — and make sure they know sexting (even between teens) can be a crime.
7. **Privacy settings must be set to max.** No public profiles.
8. **Limit screen time.** Kids need time to be kids — offline.
9. **Spot-check their activity.** Posts, messages, friend lists. No warning. No shame.
10. **Remind them: You're their safe place.** If something scary happens online, they won't get in trouble for telling you.

## “But My Kid Will Be Mad!”

Yeah, probably. They might even call you controlling. That's okay. That's your job. And honestly, your kid's safety matters more than their mood.

Would you rather have a teenager who's annoyed with you... or one who's being blackmailed by a stranger online?

## Talk Early, Talk Often

Make this clear: you're not trying to snoop. You're trying to help them stay safe and learn how to handle the internet like a responsible adult. And if something ever happens that makes them uncomfortable — like someone asking for photos or threatening them — they should come to you immediately, no matter what.

# Facebook and Instagram — Not Just for Boomers Anymore

*Who sees your kid's selfies, and who's sliding into their DMs?*

Facebook and Instagram might seem like apps for adults sharing recipes and vacation pics, but kids and teens still use them — and so do a lot of predators. These platforms are owned by the same company (Meta), and they have similar features that let people post, message, tag, and connect.

If your child or grandchild is using either one, you need to understand how it all works — especially how **strangers can contact them**, how **private information can leak out**, and what you can do to protect them.

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## How Facebook & Instagram Work

Here's a quick breakdown of what each platform is about:

- **Facebook:** Mostly used for posts, photos, and private messaging (called Messenger). Users can join groups, go live on video, and follow public pages.
- **Instagram:** All about images and videos. It includes posts, Stories (which disappear in 24 hours), Reels (short TikTok-style videos), and DMs (direct messages).

Both platforms allow:

- Friend or follow requests
- Comments and likes from strangers (if accounts are public)
- Group chats and private messaging
- Tagging your child in photos and videos — even by people they don't know

**Bottom line:** If your child is on Facebook or Instagram, they can be found — and messaged — by anyone unless you take steps to lock things down.

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## How Messaging Works


Facebook:

- Every Facebook account has **Messenger**, even for kids.

- People don't have to be "friends" to message your child. They can show up in a "Message Request" folder.
- There's also a "**message anyone in a group**" feature — which means strangers from online groups can sneak in.

## Instagram:

- Anyone can send a message if your child's account is public.
- Even if it's private, strangers can still send message requests.
- Instagram also has **Vanish Mode**, which makes messages disappear after they're read — a predator's dream feature.

 **Big red flag:** These apps don't always notify you when someone's messaging your kid.

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## Who Can See What?

That depends on the **account settings** — and the default setting is public unless changed.

- **Public account:** Anyone on the platform can see what your child posts, who they follow, who follows them, and who comments.
- **Private account:** Only approved followers can see posts and stories. Still, people can search for the account and send follow requests.
- **Stories and Reels:** Can be shared beyond followers if the account isn't locked down.
- **Tagged posts:** Your kid's name (or username) can show up on someone else's post, even if their own account is private.

 **Set their account to private.** Always. No exceptions.

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## What You MUST Do If Your Kid Uses These Apps

Here's your safety checklist for Facebook and Instagram:

### 1. Set the account to Private

- On **Facebook:** Use "Friends only" for posts, friend list, and messages.
- On **Instagram:** Set the entire account to private in settings.

## 2. Turn off location sharing

- Instagram and Facebook both let users tag their location. Shut that off.

## 3. Block unknown messages

- Both apps allow you to **restrict** or **block** users from sending messages.
- Adjust settings so **only friends or followers** can message.

## 4. Disable tagging or approve tags manually

- Make sure your kid has to **approve any tag** in a photo or post before it appears.

## 5. Turn off “Activity Status”

- That’s the little green dot showing your child is online — you don’t want strangers knowing that.

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## What’s the Minimum Age?

- Both Facebook and Instagram require users to be **13 years old**.
- But age is easy to fake, and many kids lie to get on early — or parents help them do it.

 **Just because 13 is the minimum doesn’t mean your kid is ready.**

Would you let your 13-year-old get a tattoo because it’s legal? Probably not. Social media is forever too — and it’s easier to get into trouble than you think.

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## The Risks

Even with privacy settings on, here’s what you need to be aware of:

- **Creeps messaging your kid** pretending to be a teenager
- **Cyberbullying** from other kids — especially in group chats
- **Over-sharing** of personal info (like where they go to school)
- **Peer pressure to post inappropriate stuff**
- **Scams** — from fake giveaways to phishing links

- **Sextortion attempts**
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## What You Should Be Doing

If you've decided your child is old enough for Facebook or Instagram:

- **Get your own account** and follow them.
- **Talk to them often** about what they're posting, who they're talking to, and what to do if someone makes them uncomfortable.
- **Spot-check their account and messages** regularly.
- **Keep all login info.** That's not negotiable.
- **Remind them** that nothing online ever really disappears.

And if they're not okay with that? That's your answer — they're not ready.

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# Snapchat — The Disappearing Message App That Doesn't Really Disappear

*Kids love it. Creeps love it more. Here's why you need to understand it.*

Snapchat is the app teens are often the most protective of — and the one parents are the most confused by. If you've never used it, it probably seems harmless: people send photos and videos that “disappear” after a few seconds. So what's the big deal?

A lot, actually.

Snapchat isn't just a fun way to send goofy selfies. It's a powerful communication tool that includes:

- Disappearing messages
- Private chat
- Public stories
- Location sharing
- Group messaging
- And a ton of potential for trouble

Let's break it all down in plain English.

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## What Is Snapchat and How Does It Work?

- Users take a photo or video (called a **Snap**) and send it to a friend or a group.
- That Snap disappears after it's viewed — **unless the recipient screenshots it** (which they can).
- Users can also post **Stories**, which last 24 hours and are visible to all their friends (or the public).
- There's a **chat feature**, just like texting, but those messages disappear too — unless saved manually.
- **Snap Map** shows where your child is on a map, in real time (yes, really).
- There are also **subscriptions**, public profiles, and influencer-style content — not all of it appropriate.

Snapchat was designed to encourage fast, casual, unfiltered communication — which is exactly what makes it so risky for kids.

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## How Messaging Works

- Messages and snaps disappear automatically — but kids (and predators) know how to save them.
- **Vanish Mode** can be turned on in chat, which deletes everything as soon as the chat closes.
- **Friends** can send texts, photos, videos, or links — and anyone can become a “friend” if the account isn’t locked down.


 **There is no inbox you can scroll through like Instagram or Facebook.** Messages are easy to miss, ignore, or hide — even from parents checking the phone.

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## What Is Snap Map and Why Is It a Problem?

Snap Map allows users to share their **live location** with friends (or, if the settings are wrong, with strangers).

- If your kid has location sharing turned on, people can literally see **where they are right now** — right down to the street.
- That includes their school, your house, their friend’s house — **everywhere**.

 **Turn on “Ghost Mode”** in Snap Map settings so your kid’s location stays private.

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## Why “Disappearing” Isn’t the Same as “Safe”

Kids love Snapchat because it feels temporary — like nothing counts. But here’s the truth:

- Snaps and chats **can be screenshotted**.
- Some people use **other phones or apps** to secretly record Snaps.
- Snapchats can also be **saved by the sender** and **resent later**.
- The app will try to notify your child if someone screenshots a Snap — but that won’t stop the damage.

**Once it’s sent, it’s out there. Period.**

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## ▶ Why Predators and Bullies Love Snapchat

- It's fast, easy to use, and **feels private**.
- It encourages impulsive behavior (sending risky photos, inappropriate jokes, etc.).
- **Disappearing chats** make it hard for adults to keep track.
- The app is popular for **sextortion scams**, which often start as casual messages.
- **Group chats** can turn into bullying sessions — and parents may never see a trace of it.

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## What's the Minimum Age?

- Snapchat says users must be **13 or older**.
- But there's no real age verification, so younger kids can sign up by lying.

 This app is not designed for kids. And honestly? **Most 13-year-olds aren't ready for it either.**

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## What You MUST Do If Your Kid Is on Snapchat

If you decide to allow it, here's your **safety checklist**:

### 1. Create your own Snapchat account.

- Use it to understand how Snaps, Stories, and chats work.
- Add your kid as a friend and monitor their activity.

### 2. Turn on “Ghost Mode” in Snap Map.

- This keeps their real-time location private.

### 3. Limit their friend list.

- Only allow real-life friends they know — no strangers or “friends of friends.”

4. Disable Quick Add.

- This is like “suggested friends” — and often leads to random people adding your child.

5. Review their settings with them.

- Check privacy settings for who can contact them, see their stories, and see their location.

6. Talk about the risks of disappearing messages.

- Make sure they understand that anything they send — especially inappropriate photos — can come back to haunt them.

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 What You Should Be Doing

- **Spot-check their phone** — yes, even Snapchat. Look for red flags like high streak counts, late-night use, or contacts with no name or emoji-only names.
- **Watch for mood swings, secretiveness, or deleting the app and reinstalling it.**
- **Talk regularly** about what’s going on in their digital life.
- **Set screen time limits** — Snapchat is addictive and encourages obsessive use.

And again: if they won’t give you access or agree to basic safety rules, they’re not ready for the app.

# TikTok — Dance Routines, Creepy DMs, and the Danger of Oversharing

*What's trending today could haunt your kid tomorrow.*

TikTok is one of the biggest social media platforms in the world — and if you've got a kid or teen, chances are they're on it (or begging to be). It looks like harmless fun: short videos, goofy dances, funny skits, cooking hacks, and lip-syncs. But under the surface, it's also a digital playground with:

- Strangers messaging your child
- Creepy content hiding in plain sight
- Dangerous trends and viral challenges
- And a never-ending feed that's nearly impossible to walk away from

Let's break down what TikTok is, how it works, and what every parent and grandparent *must* understand before letting kids dive in.

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## What Is TikTok?

TikTok is a social media platform for creating and watching **short videos** — usually 15 seconds to 3 minutes long, though they can now go up to 10 minutes.

Users can:

- Record and edit videos with music, filters, and effects
- Like, comment on, and share videos
- Follow creators
- Send **private messages**
- Go **live** (if over 16)
- **Stitch** or **Duet** other people's videos
- Scroll endlessly through a personalized feed called the **For You Page (FYP)**


That “For You Page” is where users spend most of their time — it's a never-ending stream of videos the app thinks you'll like. It's addictive by design, and kids can burn hours a day on it without even realizing it.

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## Who Can See What?

TikTok accounts can be either **Public** or **Private** — but even private accounts don't mean total privacy.


- **Public Account:** Anyone can see your child's videos, follow them, comment, and send messages.
- **Private Account:** Only approved followers can view and comment. However, profile pictures, bios, and usernames are still public.
- TikTok also allows **live comments** during streams, and those can come from total strangers.

 Unless locked down properly, **your child could be exposed to adult content, strangers, bullying, or grooming — even if they never post a single video.**

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## How Messaging Works

- Anyone over 16 can send and receive **Direct Messages (DMs)**.
- But unless your child adjusts their privacy settings, **anyone who follows them can message them.**
- Some people will follow just to message inappropriate things or try to strike up a conversation.

 **You can turn off messaging entirely** in the settings — and you probably should.

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## Dangerous Trends and Oversharing

TikTok's viral nature makes it easy for harmful trends to explode overnight. Some are just dumb. Others are dangerous, illegal, or humiliating.

Examples of concerning trends:

- **“Devious Licks”** – encouraged kids to vandalize schools and steal.
- **Benadryl Challenge** – encouraged taking large amounts of medication to hallucinate.
- **“Slap a Teacher”** – yes, that was a real thing.

Then there's oversharing:

- Kids often share **personal stories**, mental health struggles, or embarrassing confessions.
- It might feel like “venting,” but strangers can (and do) use that info to manipulate them.

📺 A video that seems cute or funny to a kid might later be used for bullying — or worse, show up on websites they never intended.

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## What's the Minimum Age?

- TikTok requires users to be **13 or older**.
- Users under 18 are technically blocked from certain features — like going live or sending messages — but these rules are easy to get around with a fake birthdate.

🔴 TikTok is *not* made for kids. And despite the name, **TikTok Kids doesn't exist** — there's no special version for younger users.

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## What You MUST Do If Your Kid Uses TikTok

If you're letting your teen use TikTok, here's your **must-do checklist**:

### 1. Set the account to Private

- Go to Settings > Privacy > Toggle “Private account” ON

### 2. Turn off direct messaging

- Settings > Privacy > Direct Messages > “No one”

### 3. Restrict who can comment, duet, or stitch

- Turn these features off or limit them to “Friends only”

### 4. Use Family Pairing

- TikTok allows you to link your account with your child's to manage settings like screen time and content restrictions

## 5. Monitor the For You Page

- This is where your child sees new content. Watch a few minutes of it regularly to see what kinds of videos TikTok is feeding them
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## What You Should Be Doing

- **Make your own TikTok account.** Learn the app inside and out.
- **Talk to your kid** about what they post, who they follow, and what they see.
- **Discuss online safety, inappropriate content, and peer pressure.**
- **Set a screen time limit** — TikTok is designed to keep them watching.

And remember: **if they won't let you see what's going on, they're not ready to be there.**

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## TikTok and Sextortion

TikTok has been used by predators to **find, follow, and contact kids**, even without messaging. They can use videos to gather personal info, contact the child on another app, and lure them into scams or sextortion schemes.

Make sure your child knows:

- Never give out personal info.
- Never respond to flirty messages or requests for photos.
- To come to you **immediately** if anything online makes them feel weird or unsafe.

# Discord, Gaming Chats & Messaging in the Middle of Minecraft

*When “just playing games” opens the door to total strangers.*

Let’s say your grandkid is playing Minecraft or Fortnite. Seems innocent enough, right? They’re building castles or collecting loot with their friends. But here’s the truth many adults don’t realize:

👉 **Most modern video games are also social media platforms** — and they often include **unfiltered chat features** where strangers can talk to your child in real time. Even if your kid never touches Facebook or TikTok, they might still be having long conversations with strangers while playing Roblox on a tablet or chatting on a gaming headset.

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## Gaming Is Social Now — And That’s Not Always Good

Games aren’t just games anymore. They’re digital playgrounds with built-in messaging features, voice chat, and even video capabilities.

Here are a few popular platforms and how kids socialize on them:

- **Roblox** – One of the most popular games for younger kids. Has text chat, friend requests, and in-game messaging.
- **Minecraft** – Players can chat while building or exploring, especially on shared servers.
- **Fortnite** – Includes live voice chat, friend invites, and direct messaging.
- **Call of Duty** – Real-time voice chat with anyone in the match. Known for aggressive, adult language.
- **Among Us, Apex Legends, Valorant**, and many more – All include text or voice-based chatting with strangers.

And then there’s **Discord**...

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## What Is Discord?

**Discord** is a free chat app originally made for gamers — but now used for everything from school clubs to fandoms. It’s kind of like a mix of a group text, Facebook group, and Zoom call... all in one.

Here's how it works:

- Users join **servers** (like chatrooms) based on topics or games
- Each server has **channels** for different conversations (text, voice, or video)
- People can **message directly** or join group calls
- Kids can get invites through games, Reddit, YouTube, and TikTok

🚨 Discord has little to no oversight unless you manually turn on restrictions. It's where a lot of **predators, scammers, and bullies go when they don't want adults watching.**

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## How Strangers Contact Kids Through Games

It often starts small:

- A stranger joins a public game.
- They strike up a conversation: “Wanna trade skins?” “You're really good at this!” “Wanna play again sometime?”
- Then comes the friend request — and a request to join them on **Discord, Snapchat, or Instagram.**
- From there, they can chat privately, send links or photos, and build trust.

● This is the exact pattern predators and scammers use to groom kids.

Even if your child thinks they're just talking to another kid... they're not always right.

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## Don't Forget the Phone

Many games are played on tablets and smartphones — and that means **game chat often overlaps with social apps.** Kids might say:

- “It's just a game!” (But it includes private messaging)
- “I only talk to people from school.” (But you have no way to verify that)
- “It's safe — we're just in a group.” (But anyone can join the group)

**Games + messaging = a wide open door for strangers.**

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## ⊗ What Are the Risks?

- **Predators posing as kids** to build trust and request photos or videos
  - **Cyberbullying** and harassment in group chats or game lobbies
  - **Exposure to adult language and behavior**
  - **Scams** — from fake “free V-Bucks” to phishing links
  - **Peer pressure** to talk or act older than they are
- 

## 🔒 What You MUST Do If Your Child Plays Online Games or Uses Discord

Whether your kid is gaming on a phone, console, tablet, or PC — here’s your safety checklist:

### 1. Learn the game or app yourself

- Create your own Roblox, Discord, or Minecraft account and explore what they’re doing

### 2. Check the chat settings

- **Turn off in-game chat** if possible
- Use “friends only” messaging wherever available
- Block or report suspicious users

### 3. Turn on parental controls

- Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo, and even mobile games have parental control options — use them
- Set age limits and require approval for friend requests

### 4. Talk about “stranger danger” in gaming

- Help your child understand that not everyone is who they say they are
- If someone they don’t know starts chatting, they need to tell you right away

## 5. Check their friends list and messages

- Yes, even in games. Especially Discord — it's often where the most private conversations happen.
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## What You Should Be Doing

- Ask your child who they're playing with — and **don't settle for vague answers** like "just some friends"
- Keep the gaming setup in a **shared space**, not their bedroom
- Set **limits on gaming time** and use it as an opportunity to build trust
- Have **frequent conversations** about what they're seeing and hearing

**Rule of thumb:** If they're not allowed to hang out with a stranger in real life, they shouldn't be chatting with one in a game either.

# YouTube, YouTube Kids, and Livestream Dangers

*It's not just cat videos — and “Safe Mode” isn't that safe.*

If you think YouTube is just funny animal clips and old music videos, think again. For many kids, YouTube is their favorite social media platform — even though it doesn't look like one. They don't just watch videos. They **comment, follow creators, livestream, and interact with strangers.**

Even **YouTube Kids**, which is designed to be more age-appropriate, has had its share of scary content slipping through the cracks.

This isn't about fearmongering. It's about understanding **what your kid might be seeing, sharing, or being exposed to** — so you can keep them safe and help them make smarter choices online.

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## How YouTube Works

YouTube is the world's largest video-sharing platform. Users can:

- Watch and upload videos
- Subscribe to creators and channels
- Comment on videos
- Give thumbs up/down
- Get recommendations based on what they watch
- Livestream or chat with streamers (if over 13)

There's also:

- **YouTube Shorts** – TikTok-style quick videos
- **YouTube Live** – lets users broadcast and chat in real time
- **YouTube Kids** – a filtered-down version for younger users

Most adults use YouTube to watch how-to videos or music. Kids? They're watching **influencers, gamers, challenges, skits, pranks, toy unboxings**, and often stuff that's a lot less innocent.

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## What's the Difference Between YouTube and YouTube Kids?

Feature	YouTube	YouTube Kids
Age Requirement	13+	Meant for under 13
Content Filter	None (unless you set it up)	Filtered by bots (not humans)
Comments	On (unless disabled)	Usually off
Ads	Yes	Yes (often aimed at kids)
Live Chat	Available	Not available

**The catch?** Kids under 13 regularly use regular YouTube — often without your knowledge — and YouTube Kids **doesn't always catch the bad stuff.**

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### The Dangers You Should Know About

#### 1. Inappropriate Content

- Violent or scary videos disguised as kid-friendly
- Sexual content, swearing, or offensive jokes
- “Slime,” “ASMR,” or cartoon videos that start normal and take a dark turn
- Eating disorders, self-harm, and disturbing “body image” content in disguise

#### 2. The Comment Section

- YouTube comments are wide open unless turned off
- Predators leave flirty or creepy comments on videos made by kids
- Kids may also read **toxic, bullying, or adult conversations** on videos they watch

#### 3. Livestream Chat

- If your child is watching a livestream, they can **chat with strangers in real time**
- These chats are rarely moderated and often get inappropriate fast

#### 4. Parasocial Relationships

- Kids feel like they “know” their favorite YouTubers

- They might start **trusting advice, imitating risky behavior**, or even **trying to contact them privately**
- Some influencers have abused that trust — emotionally or even sexually

## 5. Endless Autoplay

- One video leads to another... and another...
  - YouTube's algorithm can guide kids from innocent videos to weird or harmful stuff within a few clicks
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## Can Strangers Contact My Kid?

Yes — in multiple ways:

- **Commenting on their videos**
- **Commenting on other videos where your kid is also active**
- If your child posts videos, **people can subscribe and message them**
- **Through links in the comments** or video descriptions (some lead to sketchy sites)

Even if your child isn't uploading anything, the comments they leave on other channels can attract attention.

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## What You MUST Do If Your Child Uses YouTube

Here's your **safety checklist** for both YouTube and YouTube Kids:

### 1. Supervise usage

- Kids under 13 should not be on regular YouTube
- Watch together whenever possible, or check their history regularly

### 2. Turn on Restricted Mode

- Go to Settings > General > Restricted Mode (on each device and browser)
- It's not foolproof, but it helps filter adult content

### ☑ 3. Create a supervised Google account

- Let your child use **YouTube through a family-managed Google account**
- You can monitor what they see and control search settings

### ☑ 4. Disable comments on your child's videos

- If your child posts anything, make sure comments are off

### ☑ 5. Limit autoplay and screen time

- Turn off autoplay so the algorithm doesn't drag them into the internet's weird back alleys
- Use a timer, app control, or set screen-time rules

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## What You Should Be Doing

- **Make your own YouTube account** and follow what they're watching
- Talk regularly about **what they see**, how it makes them feel, and **what's real vs. fake**
- Make sure your child knows: **not everything online is true or healthy**
- **Spot-check** their YouTube history and subscriptions
- Use this golden rule: **If you wouldn't want them watching it in your living room, they shouldn't be watching it alone in their room.**

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## What About YouTube Kids?

YouTube Kids is better than regular YouTube for younger kids, but it's **not perfect**. Problems include:

- Ads for sugary snacks, toys, and questionable products
- Strange or disturbing videos that "slip through the cracks"
- Lack of human moderation — it's all automated filtering

### Still want to use it?

- ☑ Create a **kid profile**
- ☑ Turn off search
- ☑ Use **approved content mode**, where *you* pick what they can see

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## When Is a Kid Ready for Social Media? (And Is “Never” a Valid Answer?)

*Just because they can doesn't mean they should.*

This is the part where a lot of adults start to feel unsure — because social media is so normal now, it feels like saying no is weird, mean, or impossible.

So let's answer the question honestly:

**When is a kid really ready for social media?**

Short answer:

- ✓ Not before 13 (that's the legal minimum for most platforms).
- ✓ And maybe not even then.

Let's dig deeper.

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### The Brain Isn't Ready

Science backs this up:

Kids' brains, especially the parts that control **impulse, judgment, and long-term thinking**, don't finish developing until their mid-20s. That means they:

- Don't always think about consequences
- Might overshare or react emotionally
- Are highly sensitive to peer pressure and social comparison

In other words, exactly the kind of people social media loves — and can chew up.

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### The Subway Test

Here's the test I always give:

**Would you trust your kid to get on a subway in a big city and ride across town alone?**

Would they know how to:

- Avoid sketchy people?
- Ignore the loudmouths?
- Get off if something felt wrong?
- Ask for help if they needed it?

If the answer is no, then they're probably not ready for the digital version of that either.

Social media is just like a subway: mostly fine people... and a few people you *really* need to steer clear of.

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## A Readiness Checklist

Before you let your kid (or grandkid) on social media, ask yourself:

Can they...

- Respect and follow rules they don't like?
- Handle criticism or being excluded without falling apart?
- Tell the difference between a real friend and a stranger pretending to be one?
- Avoid gossip, drama, and bullying — and not become part of it?
- Come to you right away if someone says or does something creepy or threatening?
- Understand that nothing online is ever *really* deleted?

If you can't confidently say "yes" to all of the above, **it might not be time yet.**

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## What's the Rush?

Many kids get on social media **just to keep up** — not because they really want to post. They want to:

- See what others are doing
- Avoid feeling left out
- Fit in

That doesn't mean it's good for them.

Social media can add unnecessary pressure to look cool, be "liked," and chase attention — all things that can damage a kid's mental health, confidence, and focus.

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## Reasons to Wait

Choosing to delay social media isn't weird or mean. It's smart parenting. Some benefits of waiting:

- Kids develop real-world social skills before navigating online ones
- They learn to handle boredom without endless scrolling
- Less exposure to inappropriate content, predators, and scams
- Fewer distractions from school, hobbies, and family time
- Better mental health and sleep

And bonus? **No social media = no fights about social media rules.** (Yet.)

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## “But What About the Benefits?”

Sure, there *can* be positives:

- Staying in touch with family or distant friends
- Expressing creativity (videos, photos, writing)
- Discovering hobbies, activism, or support groups
- Building confidence when used wisely

But here's the trick — those benefits **only come when kids are mature enough** to filter out the bad stuff and set boundaries.

That's not a guarantee at 13. Or even at 16.

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## Alternatives to Social Media

Just because they can't have Instagram doesn't mean they have to live under a rock. You can offer alternatives like:

- Group text chats (that you can monitor)
- Email pen pals with family or trusted friends
- Private family photo sharing (via Google Photos or shared albums)
- Making videos or photo projects — without posting them publicly
- Online classes, games, or coding apps that aren't social media

If your kid just wants to **feel connected**, there are safer ways.

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## What If They're Already On?

If the horse is already out of the barn, it's not too late. You can:

- **Revisit the rules** (see Part 1)
- **Set limits** on when, where, and how it's used
- **Delete apps** that are too risky (like Snapchat or Discord, if they're not ready)
- **Talk openly and often** about what's happening on their screen

You're not a failure if you need to hit pause and reassess. That's good parenting.

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## So... Is "Never" a Valid Answer?

You bet it is.

There's no rule that says every kid must have social media. If it doesn't fit your family's values or your child's maturity level, **you are 100% allowed to say "not now" or even "not ever."**

That decision doesn't mean you're out of touch — it means you're tuned in to *your* kid.

# The Rules of the House — Setting Boundaries, Monitoring Use, and Having The Talk

*Yes, you need rules. No, you're not being "extra."*

Let's be real: giving a kid access to social media without rules is like giving them the keys to a car and saying, "Figure it out!"

Just like with driving, social media comes with risks, responsibilities, and a learning curve. That's why it's not only okay to set firm boundaries — **it's necessary**.

This final part of our series is all about:

- Creating your family's social media ground rules
- How to check in without being a spy
- What to do when your child breaks the rules
- And how to keep the lines of communication wide open

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## Start With a Written Agreement


No, it doesn't have to be fancy. Just something written down that says: **Here are the rules. We all agree to them. No surprises later.**

Here's a sample list you can adapt:

### House Rules for Social Media

1. **All passwords and usernames must be shared with a parent/guardian.**
  - No secret accounts. No fake names.
2. **Parent or guardian must be allowed to follow/friend the account.**
  - No blocking or hiding posts/stories.
3. **Friend/follow requests must be approved.**
  - No connecting with strangers.
4. **Privacy settings must always be on maximum.**
  - Public accounts are a hard no.
5. **No location sharing.**
  - No tagging where we live, go to school, or hang out.
6. **No posting photos or videos of others without their permission.**
  - Especially not anything embarrassing or inappropriate.
7. **No inappropriate content.**

- This includes language, images, memes, and comments.
8. **No sexting. Period.**
    - Even if it's between teens. It can be illegal and life-altering.
  9. **Screen time limits apply.**
    - No scrolling past bedtime or ignoring homework for TikTok.
  10. **Devices can be spot-checked at any time.**
    - Not because we don't trust you — but because we care about you.

 **Have your child sign it.** Then sign it yourself. Put it on the fridge or somewhere you both see it regularly.

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## Monitoring vs. Spying

Let's be clear: **monitoring isn't spying.** It's parenting.

### Ways to Monitor Effectively:

- **Follow or friend your child** on the platform
- **Set up alerts** for their name or posts
- **Use built-in tools** like Family Pairing (on TikTok) or supervised accounts on YouTube
- **Check their messages**, post history, and friend lists regularly
- **Ask questions:** “What are your favorite accounts right now?” “Seen anything weird lately?”

Pro Tip: Make it clear you'll be checking in occasionally — don't make it a sneak attack.

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## What to Do If They Break the Rules

Every kid will push the limits. That doesn't mean they're bad — it means they're learning. But there should still be **real consequences**.

### Example Consequences:

- Take away the app or device for a set time
- Require them to re-earn trust with a “clean” digital check-in
- Remove access to messaging features or public posting
- Reset passwords and start over

🚨 If your child posts or sends anything illegal or dangerous — like sexually explicit images — it's time to have a serious, judgment-free talk and possibly involve a counselor or law enforcement.

The goal isn't to shame them — it's to protect them and help them move forward safely.

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## Keep the Conversation Going

Social media isn't a one-time talk — it's **an ongoing relationship**. The internet changes fast. The apps evolve. The risks shift.

So should your conversations.

### Talk About:

- How they feel when they use social media (anxious, left out, confident, excited?)
- Who they follow and why
- What they do if they see something disturbing
- What's funny, inspiring, or helpful — and what's just junk

Make it clear: **they can come to you about anything**. Even if they messed up. Even if they think they're in trouble. You are their safe place.

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## Helpful Tools and Tips

Here are a few tools that can help keep things manageable:

- **Apple Screen Time / Android Digital Wellbeing** – Track app usage, set limits
- **Bark / Qustodio / Net Nanny** – Parental control apps that monitor texts, searches, and more
- **Google Family Link** – Helps manage Google accounts and YouTube access for kids
- **Built-in platform tools** – Like TikTok's Family Pairing or Instagram's supervision tools

These tools don't replace parenting — they support it.

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## Final Thoughts

This whole series comes down to one simple truth:

**You don't have to be a tech expert — you just have to be present.**

Kids don't need perfect parents or grandparents. They need adults who care enough to:

- Learn how things work
- Set reasonable rules
- Stay involved
- And keep talking — even when it's awkward

Social media isn't going away. But with your guidance, kids can learn how to use it wisely, safely, and in ways that make them stronger, not smaller.

Thanks for taking the time to read *The Grandparents (And Parents) Guide to Social Media*. Now go check your grandkid's privacy settings. 😊