

Social Media: Friend or Foe?

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We have an enormous responsibility with the internet; it is steeped in both freedom and burden. The internet has enlightened, educated, united, and supplied support for communities and humanitarian opportunities. But the internet has no conscience. We are its conscience; therefore we must rise to the challenge of not giving into its ugliness. Risky internet use, that is, doing online what you would not do in your offline life, is on the rise. It is ubiquitous, seductive, and easy in our culture. We are all acutely aware of the obvious- pornography, hate sites, theft, excessive gaming, and internet crime. Subtle and pervasive, risky internet use is only now being discussed more candidly as the power of social media continues to grow and evolve. Let us consider some of the most challenging and less understood aspects of dangerous social media behavior:

- Bullying – posting on social media deleterious statements that would not say in person
- Gossiping – posting exaggerated comments about businesses or people that stretch the truth to get even with them
- Stalking – using the internet to look up others who do not wish to associate with you and watching them through the view of your screen
- Envy – looking at other's lives through social media to see what

they have, where they travel, etc. in jealousy

- Centering your social life within the internet – excluding meaningful and authentic relationships in the offline life
- Simple excessive use – Being online more than interacting with your spouse or children
- Internet interruption – While in face to face interaction, interrupting it for social media updates

Most can relate their own stories to the above. We are human, we are curious, we are impulsive, and the online community is ripe for this behavior. The most vulnerable are our teens, but what about us, their parents? We need to lead by example for our children and ourselves. Recognition, understanding, and admitting our vulnerability is foremost.

Other suggestions include:

- Do not go on social media everyday
- Resist feeling less than as others post seemingly idealized versions of their lives
- Take time off digital devices as we ask our children to do so
- Interact with others without our digital devices

Most importantly, pay forward our gift of human-direct, authentic interaction; it's a fine gift indeed!