Help young people be responsible social media users

Source: Rachel N. Guidugli, extension specialist for 4-H youth development

Social media can be frustrating, especially for parents, but it is an activity in which youth love to participate. As a result, parents need to be familiar with it. According to a 2018 Pew Internet and American Life Project survey, 95% of teens have access to a smartphone and 45% claim to be online “almost constantly.”

While social media can have benefits for young people, they come with their own set of risks. With apps constantly changing in popularity amongst youth, social media can become what seems like a frustrating black hole for adults.

As parents, it is important to monitor your youth’s social media accounts and educate them on how to use these apps safely. Whether in the virtual or real world, it is important for parents to know who your young person is talking to, where they are and what they are doing.

Most social media apps require youth to be at least 13 years old to have an account, so theoretically, no one under this age should have an account. For those of you that have older youth, probably the easiest way to monitor their social media account is to establish your own account and require them to friend you.

Before allowing them to open a social media account, set clear usage expectations. Talk to your young person about appropriate posts. Encourage them not to post personally identifiable information, such as full names, addresses, birth date, credit card numbers and when and where they are traveling. You may even want to set a time limit for how long they can be on social sites each day.

Remind them their posts should be kind and considerate of others. Cyberbullying is a real issue among young people. It is important for youth to understand just because someone is not your social media “friend” that doesn’t mean that they won’t see or hear about a hurtful post. It is also important to note that social media posts just don’t go away and could be found down the road by college admissions officers or potential employers.

Encourage them not to friend anyone they don’t personally know. Predators of all kinds lurk on social media and disguise themselves as someone else while they look for victims.

Constant social media use is not a good thing, no matter a person’s age. Here are some signs, your young person may be spending too much time on social media:

* Constantly tired
* Sleeps with the phone beside their bed
* Poor academic performance
* Behavioral changes
* Changes in eating habits
* Depression

Remember to be a role model on social media. Set time limits for yourself. Don’t post potential offensive or hurtful things, including potentially embarrassing photos or stories about your young person.

For more information on helping young people safely use social media, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

-30-