

CASA Conversations



California **CASA**
Court Appointed Special Advocates
FOR CHILDREN

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Social Media

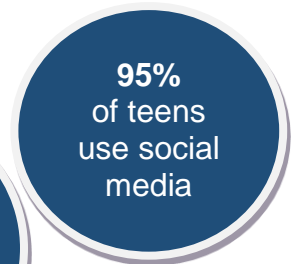
Introduction

This conversation is meant to help you understand how and why your youth is using social media, and to help him/her use it safely.

Social Media is defined as forms of electronic communication (e.g. websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).

Current popular social media platforms include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Vine, Tumblr, and Pinterest (and these are constantly changing and new ones arise to prominence – for example, Pokémon Go). Texting is the most popular form of communication for teens (either within a messaging system, such as that provided by Facebook, or on a stand-alone platform like Snapchat, iMessage, etc.). According to a recent Pew study, **over 90% of teens text daily, and average 30 texts a day.**

The Facts



Most access the internet and social media through smart phones, and most teens use more than one social media platform. The most popular social media platforms change frequently, and there are new ones being added continuously.

It is crucial to understand that using social media to connect with others is developmentally on target for teens and young adults.

Social Media

Youth have a hard wired need to belong and to be social. A key developmental activity of adolescence and young adulthood is to develop social connections, also called social capital. The definition of social capital is: "Social networks and relationships; a bonding between similar people and a bridging between diverse people; fundamentally, the value of social networks and interactions." (The Adolescent Brain- see resources for link to article)

There are three recognized dimensions of social capital: (1) the quantity of an individual's social relationships; (2) the quality of those relationships, including the nature of the interactions, shared activities, and affect; and (3) the value of the resources that partners in social relationships can potentially make available to one another (The Adolescent Brain). Young people use social media to develop all three dimensions of social capital. As a CASA, you can play a part in helping the youth you serve acquire the best social capital value they can when using social media.

Social media can also draw on teens' creativity – through applications that allow them to create videos, photos, works of digital art, and other creations.

"Don't try to do anything for 15 minutes of fame. Do something that makes you cool for being you"
- Nef

Unfortunately, while using social media can be a means for teens and young adults to invest in and build social capital, and express themselves creatively, this activity can also lead to dangerous behaviors within the unique environment created by social media.

There is real concern about strangers reaching out to youth and misrepresenting themselves to take advantage or even harm the young person. Foster youth who may be yearning to belong and be loved may be at greater risk of being taken advantage of by others.

Additional risks include social media leading to youth engaging in dangerous and/or illegal activities, recording them, and posting them online. The nature of the social media environment leads many youth to post images and messages that they would not otherwise share with the world around them.

Starting a CASA Conversation

You can begin by simply asking the youth you work with what s/he does on her/his phone. Listen to the response, and then ask nonjudgmental follow up questions.

For example, if s/he says, "I talk to my friends," you could ask *how* s/he talks to them (chances are it isn't calling them on a phone). If they use a term you don't understand, ask them to explain.

"Often youth use Facebook as a diary" - Jazzel

Social Media

You may also want to ask who their friends are, and if they find friends through the internet, or are people they know in person through school, home, etc. Most likely it will be both, people they know IRL (in real life) and people they have met online. Both can be fine, and both can be potentially dangerous.

People they know in person can bully, request sexual favors, try to take advantage of the young person, or harm them through using social media. The same is true of people they have met solely online, with the added danger that a person they only know online can misrepresent themselves as someone they aren't – for example a 40 year old man may pretend to be a 15 year old teenager.

You may want to explore with the young person the dangers they think are out there on the internet, and what they do to protect themselves. Asking their ideas serves two purposes: it lets you have a sense of what they know, and relieves you from lecturing them about dangers.

If your youth doesn't think there are any dangers, you can help them research the potential dangers of social media. It will be better for them to do their own research, ideally with you present, again, so that you are not put in the position of lecturing. It can also be a way to discover information together.

You may also wish to have your young person show you how to use the apps they use, and have them demonstrate what they do on the apps. This will give you a better idea of the content they are posting, and how they use social media.

Ongoing conversations about your youth's social media use highly recommended. Much in the way you ask, "What happened at school today?" you can also ask "What happened on social media today?" You can create an ongoing dialogue about their experiences and help them to make good choices.

As mentioned in the facts section, there are added risks for young people who are in the foster care system. They may not have close connections in their lives. They may not be in touch with their families and may have had many moves, and experienced significant loss. They also may not have had healthy relationships modeled for them. Some don't realize relationships on social media may not be real. This is a sensitive topic, and you may need to proceed with great care. We all need to belong and find ways to connect with others. All the more reason to help our foster youth to connect with family, and people who truly care about them in real life.

"I feel like I'm not popular, I'm not pretty enough. There's apps to get more followers so I took it (Instagram) off private so I could get followers" - Ariyah

"Culture has set this notion - the more followers you have, the more successful you are, the more wonderful your life must be" - Eric

Social Media

Talking about social media is a great way for CASAs to help youth to think about how they make decisions. You can talk them through possible scenarios and help them to think through potential repercussions. Possible scenarios to walk through with your young person could include:

1. If someone they have never met in person tells them they love them, how might you know if these are true feelings? Do you think you know this person well enough to love them, or for them to love you? What is being in love?
2. If someone asks you to post a naked picture, what are some possible outcomes? Would it be ok if other people saw these pictures?

There will be many likely interactions and choices your young person will be dealing with and you can be a crucial sounding board with whom s/he can make healthy, safe choices while using social media.

Pitfalls to Avoid

Do not become friends with your youth on any social media platform, unless expressly allowed by your CASA program. Most, but not all CASA programs, allow you to share your cell phone number with your youth. If this is the case, and the youth prefers to text, you may find that texting is the easiest and most reliable way to keep in contact with him/her. Using other social media is problematic, as it can open your child up to being known by your family and friends. If you think you have a compelling reason to use any social media with your youth, please check with your CASA supervisor.

It is important to not assume that any or all use of social media is dangerous or is a poor use of a young person's time

While there are real risks to look out for, this is a primary way most teens stay in touch with friends, develop and maintain relationships, and stay connected – all of which are crucial developmental steps. Youth of today just progress socially in ways that may be foreign to many of us. You may choose to limit your youth's use of social media while s/he spends time with you, and that is fine. But unless there are extenuating specific circumstances where the young person is in real danger, spending time on social media is an important part of his/her daily life.

Additional Resources

Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview, 2015:

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/09/teens-social-media-technology-2015/>

What parents need to know about Snapchat – Verizon:

<http://www.verizonwireless.com/mobile-living/home-and-family/what-parents-need-to-know-about-snapchat/>

Connect Safely:

<http://www.connectsafely.org/>
and http://www.connectsafely.org/wp-content/uploads/instagram_guide.pdf

Commonsense Media:

<https://www.common sense media.org/blog/16-apps-and-websites-kids-are-heading-to-after-facebook>

The Adolescent Brain - Jim Casey Youth Initiatives:

[http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/documents/The%20Adolescent%20Brain_prepress_proff\[1\].pdf](http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org/sites/default/files/documents/The%20Adolescent%20Brain_prepress_proff[1].pdf)

American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Life of Girls by Nancy Jo Sales available on Amazon and other bookstores