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## 'Let's chat about Snapchat'

In my house, we have a "tween-ager". [Youths ages 8-12 who are "between" childhood and teenage years]. They emulate teen styles, attitudes and behaviors but aren't developmentally prepared for the teenage world yet.

Although tweens switch temperaments faster than snap chat pictures "disappear", research shows they want our input and guidance [they'll just never admit it].

Navigating social media with tweens creates a predicament. Kids connect to information via the internet earlier and earlier but they don't have the maturity or developmental aptitude to completely understand it and its implications. We need to be aware of what they're exposed to. Setting and enforcing rules regarding the internet and social media provides predictability and structure, as well as a way to combat peer pressure. Without boundaries, kids are unprepared to avoid doing whatever it takes to be accepted by their peers.

So how do we react when our 8-12 year olds say, "When can I get a smartphone?", "Why can't I have a snapchat account?" or "I'm the only one in my class without Facebook!?" It's hard, but don't feel pressured into allowing it. In researching what websites or apps are appropriate for tweens, most social media requires kids to be at least 13 to sign up. Using that "excuse" takes parents immediately off the hook. However, if you're still considering the pros and cons, here are some suggestions:

Check sites like Common Sense Media, a non-profit organization promoting safe technology and media for children.

Use privacy settings. They are helpful, but not foolproof. Learn the privacy settings on your kids' favorite sites and apps. Teach kids to control information they make public or private.

Think before posting. Remind them everything can be

seen by a vast, invisible audience beyond their actual friends. Teach them, "What goes online, stays online". Explain that apps promoting "disappearing messages" can still be screenshot, saved and sent on.

Be a friend and follower. Have access to their pages. Be sure what's being posted is appropriate. If you friend or follow them, stay in the background. Don't comment or "like" their posts. Address anything important face to face, not on their pages.

Keep private information private. Teach them not to share sensitive information online.

Be respectful of others. Using social media to act out helps kids feel anonymous. Help them understand their actions are not consequence-free.

Before allowing social media too early, consider the emotional implications. Tweens are concerned about popularity, but it takes on a whole new di-

mension when they can measure their status in "likes," "shares" and "comments."

Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook can make people feel "outcast." They provide an instant glimpse of what "everybody" is doing. Adults can feel discouraged when comparing their "everyday lives" to what others are posting on Facebook. Kids experience the same thing without the emotional maturity to handle it. A common scenario I see in my practice is someone being left out of an "event" or "gathering." While the fun is happening, it's broadcast all over social media. Seeing what's being missed is much worse than not knowing. We all know how that feels... but tweens don't have the emotional coping skills for that kind of rejection.

Many parents are frustrated and confused about what's best regarding kids and technology. Perhaps talking more with each other about the impact that cellphones, apps, and games have can create "a vil-

lage" of support for those times tweens say things like, "I'm the only one," or "No other parent...." Rally other parents to have similar restrictions for

their kids. Who knows, we may see their interaction with us go up when the phone goes down!