Social Media is an easy way that we can connect with our friends and family online. There are many social networks out there, but the most commonly used ones are:

The Social Networks:

Facebook: The biggest social network out there. A site to share status updates, photos, messages, links and play games, live chats with friends. PG-13

Twitter: A close second to Facebook. Status updates, and photos, links PG-13

Instagram: Owned by Facebook and still growing in popularity. You need to have access to a mobile device to use it. It's an app-based social network designed to share and edit photos. PG-13

Google +: This is Google's answer to both Facebook and Twitter. While not as popular as either, most have an account there and don't even know it, as it comes automatically with a G-Mail account (school accounts are different). Status messages, "hangouts" or video chats, photos and links. PG-13

YouTube: While it's there to watch videos posted by others, you can share videos and comment on them with a YouTube or Google account. Again, if you have a g-mail account, chances are you have a YouTube account too. PG-13

Tumblr: This is the wild wild west of social networking. You can do everything here. Primarily a place to blog, post images, links. Mostly PG-13 with the chance to be "R" without warning.

So why is 13 the age kids are allowed on social media?

There are government guidelines set by the **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act**. It basically says that 13 is the age that a person's information can be collected online. **So 13 is the age a person can sign up for email, and social networking.**

There are set protections in place, particularly on Facebook, for kids between the ages of 13 and 18.

"We have created special privacy protections for minors on Facebook, including minimizing who can contact them on Facebook and ensuring that they do not have public search listings created for them. Additionally, we've designed the "Everyone" privacy setting to work differently for minors than it does for adults, so a minor's information will never be shared with everyone on Facebook."

So how does Facebook protect kids under the age of 18?

TIP: They have a well-designed site that breaks down and explains everything that you might want to know about minors on Facebook and protecting their privacy. All parents should review Facebook's **Family Safety Center**:

https://www.Facebook.com/help/safety

If **you** have a Facebook page, you can "like" this section and get updates from them.

-**What is Public?** Depending on their settings, minors may receive messages from people who are **friends of friends** on Facebook, which may include adults they don't know. Facebook says that while a minor might see the word "public" when they choose their options, that only goes as far as friends of friends. *Once they turn 18, then public really does become public.*

Minors and privacy: https://www.Facebook.com/help/473865172623776/

When adults post something, they have the option to post to the "public." Kids are limited to only allow "friends of their friends." This includes tagging. Tagging is where a picture can have names attached to it, either by the person posting it, or others users who see it. **Minors can only be tagged by friends of friends.** Depending on their settings, any of their friends' friends can tag them. Ideally their settings should always be set to **friends only** for better protection and safety.

-**Tag Review** is turned on by default for minors, meaning they need to approve any tags before they appear on their page. If they turn this off anyone, including friend of friends can tag them automatically, and they will just appear on their page. Even when off, Facebook tries to limit the friends of friends tags. So they try to build in a protection that minors have to approve the tags done by a friend of friend.

-**Location services / check in:** Kids also default to having their locations turned off, but they do have the option of having that turned on. **If turned on**, it means that whenever they make a status update or post an image, it will show their location at the end of the post (town and state).

-**Private Messages** are designed to be like email within Facebook. They are a direct and private message between the two people messaging back and forth. Facebook also has an app for messaging. In fact, any and all users have a specific Facebook email. This email address is usually the default address that is shown if your email is set to public on your profile page. With minors, only "friends of friends" can send a private message to minors. This could include adults. Basically if you and your child are friends on Facebook, then any of your adult friends could see your child and send them a private message. If they are neither a friend of friend or an actual friend, then they cannot send a minor a private message.

What about if a minor lies about their age, can they be protected?

-No, if a child is not honest about their age when they register on Facebook, the settings designed to protect kids won't work properly. Meaning if a minor says they are 18 or older, they won't work at all. If they say they're 15 when they are really 13, those protections will end sooner. It also means that you void the terms of use set up by Facebook. **This could become a factor if there is ever a case where you need to report something to Facebook.**

-Facebook is also getting deeper into ads and what they call "sponsored stories". As of December 4th, they are no longer supposed to be able to use minors in their "sponsored stories", however I've seen instances where they still are. Basically these look like endorsements and they often look like you or someone has "Liked" a business or a group or a deal. It takes information based on your Facebook activity and puts you in a commercial without your permission. There is a lawsuit and possible settlement to stop this and strengthen your user controls, but again, it's important that a person is honest about their age.

-The more traditional ads are the ones that pop up in the lower right hand side of the screen. **In the account settings there is an area where you can control this version of ads. This area explains a little about how ads work on Facebook, and how they might use your photos and information. These are separate from the "sponsored" like postings. They have a section explaining this too:**

https://www.Facebook.com/about/ads

-**Facebook makes their money from Games and Apps.** Most of the games and apps on Facebook are pretty harmless, but there are some where you could spend real money. It's important to monitor what games and apps are being played/installed into your child's account. Apps and games collect your Facebook information. You can control what information they collect and at times they will also post on your behalf. You can always change these apps and game settings in your account settings. Uninstall any game that you're uncomfortable with that takes too much personal information.

The Facebook Parental Contract:

https://www.Facebook.com/Wiggin.Teens/posts/537789369579696

I know of a lot of parents who do "contracts" with their kids like this. It basically sets the tone for how they are being allowed to use Facebook by their parents, for example you, as the parent, will always have the password.

I've seen variations of this, but at the core this is one of the best ones I've ever seen. I know of many parents who don't have a Facebook account of their own, they simply spend that time they would use their own and log on and check on their child's account. I know of a pair of parents who each have the iPhone app for Facebook, but it's their son's account they have logged onto each of their phones. They both check in on it throughout the day and see what's going on.

If you are also on Facebook:

-Monitor your actions as much as you would monitor your child's. Your actions online matter as much as your actions do in the real world. So be sure to set the tone with your online actions the same as you would in any other situation with your kids.

-To increase both of your privacy, set your settings to friends only and not friends of friends. This will go further in limiting how many strangers can see or tag both of you

-Again Facebook has a family safety center that has a wealth of resources for parents to use. It's written in an easy to understand fashion:

https://www.Facebook.com/help/safety

Twitter:

-Twitter is where you can post a status update no longer than 140 characters. Twitter uses the @ symbol when addressing another user and the number sign or # for hashtags. Hashtags are used when you want to participate in a global conversation on Twitter like say #GoldenGlobes. Many people also use the hashtag to express a funny thought or emotion. It's not always for the global conversation. Remember: @Username, #Hashtag

Twitter privacy:

-When you set up your twitter account you have a choice, public or protected? Twitter is a public social network by design. The idea is to be able to speak with anyone around the world who is also on Twitter. There is an option to keep your tweets protected and this allows for you to approve the people who sign up to see your tweets. If you choose public, anyone (including people not even on Twitter) can see your tweets.

-Even if you are public or protected, there is an easy block or report button. We encourage people to use it if they have any worries.

-A user can follow anyone who is public. A user can also block any user who follows them. A user can try to follow a private, or protected account, but the account holder need to approve them.

-Spam/hacking: There are robo-tweeters out there designed to gain access to your account. They often will try to tweet you something like "**Hey did you see what someone posted about you**" and then a link. Most of the time this is a scam. You click the link, you get hacked and then your account is tweeting that same link out to the people you follow or follow you. If it happens, switch your password right away.

-Twitter does not offer the same protections that Facebook does, however they have a well-laid-out and easy to understand section for teens and parents:

https://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-abuse-or-policy-violations/topics/166-safety-center/articles/20169990-safety-tips-for-teens#blockignore

-Twitter parental contract –same as Facebook contract. Parent always has the password…

* *TIP*: Before your child signs up for any of these social networks, take the time to read over the privacy policies, terms of use etc. Most have a section for parents and teens. These days they've removed the confusing legal chatter and replaced it with easy to read/understandable documents.

Instagram

*Instagram's policies are very similar to Twitter: public or private. You can link your Instagram account to post to both Twitter and Facebook on your behalf.

-Once an image is posted as public, anyone can see it, anyone can take it.

Instagram is now owned by Facebook and advertisements will be coming to the program. There is no solid outlook right now about what those advertisements will entail. They had announced a new policy, but saw so much backlash, they reverted back to their old one. They made clear that an advertisement policy was on the horizon, but that they would find one that worked for everyone.

Google + (Google Plus)

-The biggest perk to Google + is their "**hangout**" feature. This is a video chat that can take place between any user of Google + and can invite as many people as you like into a hangout. You can also record the hangout and post it to YouTube. There are protections for minors in a hangout. If someone the minor doesn't know joins the hangout, they are immediately pulled out of the hangout. They are given the option to go back in, but are also warned about the new person being someone they don't know.

-In 2012, Google changed their terms of use. Instead of having a different policy for every service they offer, they now simply have one policy for all of their Google products. The new terms also mean, once you sign up for one Google service, you have an account in **all** Google services. This means if you've signed up for Gmail, you also have a Google + and YouTube account, and you may not even know it.

-Like Facebook, Google also has live chat. This also works when you're signed into Gmail. By default you are always on. The Google chat allows you to chat with other Google users that you are connected through via email or Google +.

-Where Facebook has you add friends, Google + allows you to add people to your circle. It's a lot like a list. Google will warn minors that when they post to public or "extended circles" that it goes out to people they may not know. It will not filter it like Facebook does if the minor decides to go forward with the post.

-They do, by default, limit who can see their posts and comment on them. These are settings that a minor can change to be more public. Unlike Facebook, they do give them the option to enter the bigger more public world, but not by default. These settings are also not as easy to change unless you've become more comfortable with Google +.

-Most everything posted on Google + is limited to be seen only by the people the minor adds to their circle, whereas with adults, by default, everything is public.

-Every post on Google + has a place where a user (of any age) can flag something as inappropriate or abuse.

Google safety center: https://www.google.com/intl/en/+/safety/

While we're on the subject of Google, there are a few other links to be aware of to watch over the information they collect about you:

Google dashboard:
https://www.google.com/dashboard/?hl=en

Google ads manager:
https://www.google.com/settings/ads/onweb/

How Google uses your data:
http://www.google.com/goodtoknow/

Google Family Safety Center:
http://www.google.com/intl/en/goodtoknow/familysafety/

Tumblr:

-Tumblr is a social network for lengthy blogs. It's more like a real website. Where Twitter and Facebook are similar to what is considered "micro-blogs," Tumblr doesn't have a posting limit. You can also still post videos, images and links.

-Tumblr is still the new, wild west of social networking. While most of the material on Tumblr is very innocent, there are no walls of protection. Everything is public, and users (of any age) can post or view whatever they want, including things many people might find inappropriate. It's also much harder to report abuse or inappropriate materials. You can however click "ignore" to ignore a person, or a post.

-It's really popular because of what is called "gifs" – short bursts of animation or images looped in time.

Examples: http://www.tumblr.com/tagged/doctor+who+gifs

-The service is also used for actual website building. So clicking any link can take you out of the social networking side of Tumblr to an actual website of any kind.

-Where Facebook has share, comments, and likes, Tumblr has re-blogging, notes, like, and ignore. Re-blogging shares it on your Tumblr blog, notes shows you who liked the post, and who re-blogged it. You can click on any user's name from the notes and be launched over to their Tumblr site. Like Twitter you can follow someone, instead of "friend-ing" them.

-While Tumblr can be very innocent, it would be the one social site I would encourage parents to be more actively involved with. It's a very different world from the other social networks- almost a combination of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. It can go from PG-13 to R (or above) with any click.

-To report a Tumblr account you need to email Tumblr, but you can always go to this link to ignore a site:

http://www.tumblr.com/ignore

Snapchat:

Snapchat is another app-based social network. It also requires it's user be at least 13 years old to use it. The idea behind Snapchat is that you can text an image that only last on the other users screen for a few seconds. Once you snap the image, you can add text or draw on it. Then send it off. The other recipient must be a Snapchat user.

Cyberbullying:

-Know your school's policy on cyberbullying. (cms.sau16.org - scroll down)

-Ask your child if they understand what cyberbullying is.

CMS & SAU 16 define bullying as "a single significant incident or a pattern of incidents involving a written, verbal, or electronic communication, or physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at another pupil which:

1. Physically harms a pupil or damages the pupil's property;
2. Causes emotional distress to a pupil;
3. Interferes with a pupil's educational opportunities;
4. Creates a hostile educational environment; or
5. Substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the school.

"Cyberbullying is defined as any conduct defined as "bullying" in this policy that is undertaken through the use of electronic devices… Electronic devices include, but are not limited to, telephones, cellular phones, computers, pagers, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging, and websites."

-Be very involved with your child's social networking. Look at every private message and know their privacy and account settings.

-Stress to your child they should only "friend" people they know in real life. (Ideally you've met these people in real life too.)

-Every situation is different. If your child gets a message from someone who is unknown, and it's cyberbullying, contact the school, or Officer Mike. Get all the details: was this the first message, is it a real person, do you feel this person needs to be reported or blocked?

Questions:
-Although I trust my child, I'm concerned about other kids posting inappropriate pictures and having them land on his Facebook page. How can this be avoided?

- Their news feed (what a user sees when logged in) is open to whatever their friends are posting as their own statuses. Any one of their friends can post whatever they want and that will show up in your child's feed. The friend can share something with your child, but it won't mean it ends up on his/her page (what other users/the public sees). Other friends or friends of friends might see it though. Make sure the tagging option stays to the default setting so no one can "tag" them in a post. Other then that, check your child's feed often, log on as their account and see what their friends are posting.

-I trust my child wholeheartedly; however, I am concerned to some degree what might be sent/shared such as inappropriate pictures, foul language, negative comments about teachers, etc… How can I go about staying tuned in to his Facebook page? Will I need a Facebook page, too?

-My advice is to check his page everyday. Have the password, and be on it. If you see something you don't like, ask him/her. If you use their page with great regularity, you don't really need your own, unless you want one.

-Colleges/employment will most likely be viewing my child's Facebook in the near future…suggestions on controlling what they see/view?

-If he is honest about his age, then they can't see anything until he is 18, & then it's only the items he marks "public". If they friend him, then they can see anything he posts (though I would dissuade allowing your student to friend a potential employer or college). So, with that in mind, make sure the things that are posted as "public" are the ones you really want the world to see.

-Suggestions on encouraging my child to have only the friends he really wants to correspond with… how can he do away with the several hundred others without interfering with those he wants to keep?

-Sit down and go through every single friend with him. You need to know who your child is friends with on Facebook. If you don't know them, give them the boot and un-friend them. Explain your reasoning to your child.

-How does "unfriend-ing" someone assure that no harm will come later?

-There is no guarantee, however if your child has been honest with their age then that's a good start. Also take the time to go over the privacy and account settings on your child's account. Un-friending has become a bit of a social faux pas. It's harder for kids to un-friend, but if you see someone they shouldn't be friends with, then mom or dad's rules trump Facebook. If the person follows up, suggest that your child let you know and maybe give them a response to be ready with. I would

suggest "my mom or dad wanted me to pare down my friends on Facebook."

-Another thing you say parents need to watch for is coded language?

You can keep the computer in a public spot in the house, and be doing all the right things, but kids often have their own language. You want to watch out for coded language, which are basically texting terms.

Some of the social network code words:

-Cyberbullying Terms: BIH ("Burn In Hell"); GKY ("Go Kill Yourself"); 182 ("I Hate You")

• *Warning of Parents/Adults Nearby*: POS ("Parent Over Shoulder"); AITR ("Adult In The Room"); P911 ("Parent Emergency")

• *Sexual Terms*: GNOC ("Get Naked On Cam"); TDTM ("Talk Dirty To Me"); D46 ("Down For Sex?")

• *Cries for Help*: IHML ("I Hate My Life"); IHTFP ("I Hate This F--king Place"); PHM ("Please Help Me")

• *Drugs/Drinking Terms*: CRAFT ("Can't Remember A F--king Thing"); UDI ("Unidentified Drinking Injury"

• *Meet Up Requests*: MIRL ("Meet In Real Life?"); W2M ("Want To Meet?"); S2R ("Send To Receive" [Pictures]

There are a lot of these texting code words. It's really important that you know what they are and what they mean and how to keep an eye out for them.
  http://digitaljournal.com/print/article/319016#ixzz1xnPMsnjX

-Can I block websites on my son's iPod touch?

A lot of parents have this question, and the answer is yes you can, but it's not as easy to do on the iPod as it is on your child's computer. One solution is in the wifi, and you need to be a little tech savvy for this. There are also apps you can use to block certain sites, although many cost money to download or charge fees. Also, make sure you use the iPhone or iPod's own security settings too.

This is also a good article about for setting up your kid's iPod or iPhone:

http://ipod.about.com/od/KidsiPhoneiPodTouch/tp/Nine-Things-Before-Giving-Kids-Ipod-Touch-Iphone.htm