

# Is it OK to read your kids' social media posts?

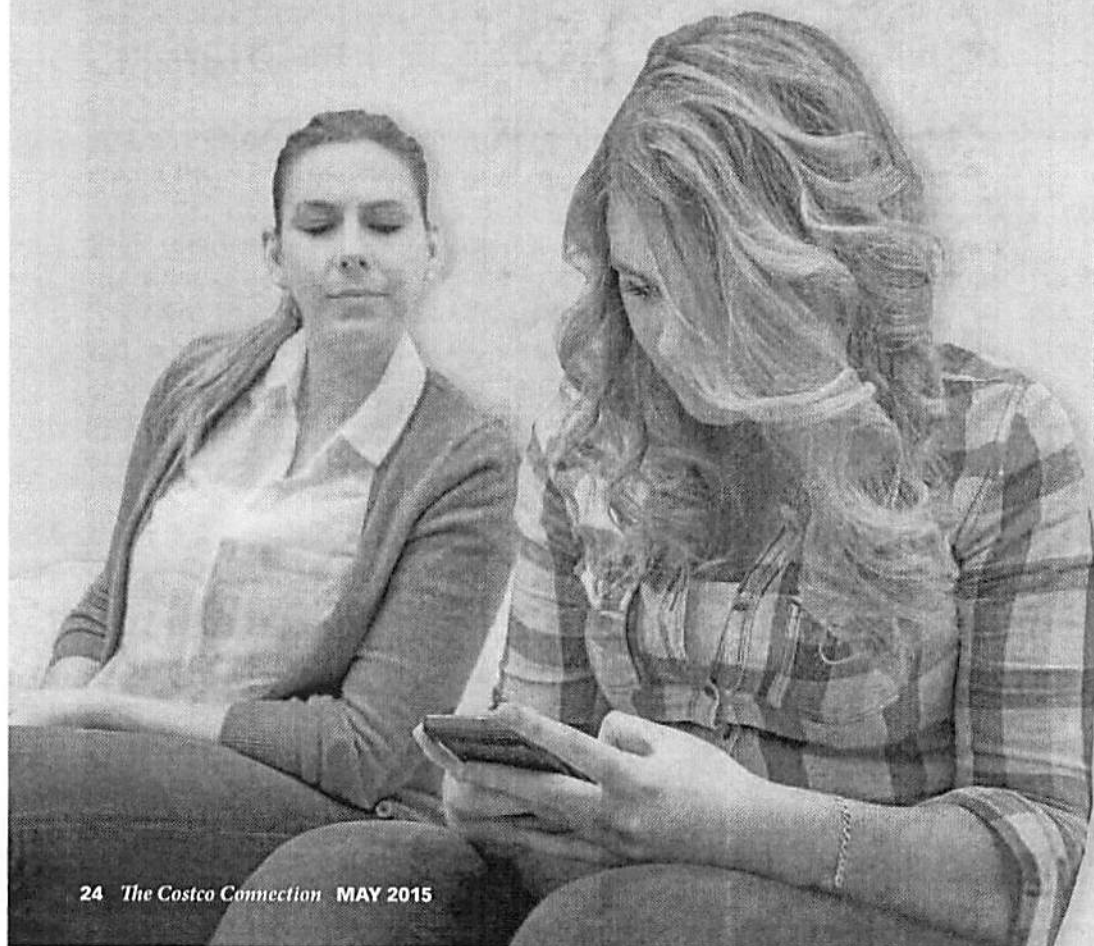
WITH TEENAGERS SHARING more information about themselves on social media sites than they did in the past, there is increasing concern about their safety. Some say that parents should monitor their children's social media activity more closely, including reading the posts they send and receive. Others argue that social media freedom teaches kids an important lesson in how not to behave, what not to share—and this won't happen with mom and dad looking over their shoulders. And, at what point does monitoring become snooping?

What do you think?

Find out more about this topic on the search engines of your choice.

Search these titles:

- "Teens, Social Media and Privacy"
- "Should parents snoop on their kids online?"
- "How do I monitor my teen online without 'spying'?"



## Voices from Facebook

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**Carol Weber Herdic**

Absolutely! Remember that in most cases it's the parents who pay for smartphones, computers, Internet and cellular coverage. [Kids] using the devices is a privilege.



**Bernice Marie VanVlack**

My parents never did that to me. They trusted me and I never gave them a reason not to.



**Kelly Keagy**

Knowing what's going on in your teenager's life is important. Teens (especially older teens) need some privacy. But there are dangers lurking out on the Internet and a parent needs to be aware about how and [with] whom their kids are communicating online.



**Travis Faherty**

Nope. Read them and they rebel and create an account you can't see. Then what?



**Jodi Crane**

Absolutely! Your children are not entitled to privacy. Your job as a parent is to know what your children are doing. Just don't embarrass them with parent comments. Keep those conversations private.



**Lisa Dahl Dwyer**

Yes! They are out there for the public to read anyway. In fact, many times friends of mine alert me to posts my kids have made, and vice versa. How are kids supposed to learn what's appropriate and what's not? They need direction.



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**Stephen Balkam** is the founder and CEO of the Family Online Safety Institute, an international nonprofit organization ([fosi.org](http://fosi.org)).

## YES

access to social media.

First, have an open conversation about appropriate use of technology, and set ground rules and parental controls. Next, be open and tell your children that you will be checking in on their social media interactions. Parents need to understand and respect their kids' online space as much as they do their personal space. The main job of parents is to keep their children safe, and in an instance where there appears to be true risk of harm, a parent should feel entitled to read and monitor a child's social media activity in the name of ensuring the child's well-being.

There is a vast difference of opinion about what some consider monitoring. Parents should "friend" or follow their children from a respectful distance, and intervene only when necessary. Most important, parents should encourage their children to maintain a positive online reputa-

THE BOTTOM-LINE answer to the question of whether parents should monitor social media use is "Yes, when the situation requires it." But there are steps parents should take before allowing kids

tion, reminding them that digital is forever and not to post anything they wouldn't want a parent, grandparent or teacher to see.

This is especially true when one considers the needs of different age groups. While it may be perfectly acceptable to read a 13-year-old's social media posts, shouldn't the rules change by the time the child is applying for college? Parents know their children best, and are therefore the best equipped to decide when reading social media posts is not an invasion of privacy but a necessary teaching moment.

A better solution than attempting to monitor children's every interaction on their social media accounts would be to monitor their overall relationship with technology.

When giving them access to personal devices, setting the appropriate rules and boundaries, having regular conversations about what is acceptable to share online and utilizing the available parental controls may decrease the chances that kids will begin to engage in behavior that requires restrictive monitoring.

This is why the Family Online Safety Institute has developed Good Digital Parenting, a resource to help parents start conversations and learn more about the technology their kids are using. [E]



**Peggy Drexler** ([peggydrexler.com](http://peggydrexler.com)) is a research psychologist, assistant professor at Weill Cornell Medical College, writer, speaker and author.

## NO

every single day. If you're one of those information-hungry parents, you know: It's a hard temptation to resist.

Social media makes it easier to know the goings-on of everyone in your life—without ever having to exchange a word. So why not use it to keep track of your kids? For the same reason you resist the urge to sit in the backseat with your newly licensed driver every time she takes the car out. The state says she's ready; she's ready! Letting kids grow up means acknowledging that you can't, and shouldn't, steer them from every last danger.

Learning to stand on their own prepares kids for a time when you aren't there to protect them. Making mistakes is part of that. Letting kids grow up also means that we, as parents, learn how to trust them—and, in turn, teach them how to respect that trust.

While it's OK to read social media posts that are clearly public—at the very least, your kids need to know that if you can see it, so can

A RECENT STUDY found that nearly half of all parents using Facebook joined the social network with the primary purpose of spying on their kids; 93 percent of those parents check their child's profile

the whole entire world—you shouldn't go deeper than that. Using their passwords to track private posts, read direct messages or intercept emails in the name of figuring out what they're up to is an invitation to a world of misunderstanding and miscommunication. Even trying too hard to use social media to decipher where they're going, what they're doing and who they're with (and whether you like those people) is problematic.

You're the parent. Just ask them. If you don't feel like you're getting a straight answer, the way to solve that problem isn't to go down the long and winding rabbit hole of your kids' and their friends' Twitter feeds. Tracing their every online—and offline—move won't make you feel any more connected or safer in the knowledge that they're out there making the right decisions. What might? Trust and respect.

The best approach: Make sure your kids are clear about how social media works, and who can see what. Give them examples of regrettable behavior. Talk to them about possible repercussions. Encourage them to practice honesty and thoughtfulness and all the other qualities you've worked hard to instill in them offline. And then let them out into the cyber world. Snooping around will only make them better at hiding things. And that's most definitely not a skill you want to teach. [E]



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