

A Parent's Guide to

SOCIAL MEDIA





If you're reading this, you have likely found yourself—like most parents—concerned about the growing negative impact of social media on children and teens. We imagine this has sometimes left you feeling concerned and even powerless. Whether you want to increase your awareness for the future or address a pressing issue that's right in front of you, when you're armed with the right information, you will be empowered and more confident in defending your child.

In this guide, we will walk you through each platform and share how to set up parental controls and monitor their use. You'll become empowered and encouraged to actively monitor your teen's social media use and confidently provide guidance and boundaries for your teen and your home.

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Intro

Many parents today say, “We didn’t have access to all the things our kids have access to today.” It’s a common struggle, and most are learning to navigate as they go. In today’s digital age, it’s difficult to escape access to and the influence of social media in our everyday lives. That is especially true of teenagers who spend an average of 8+ hours on screens every day. That’s significant.

Platforms like Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram have revolutionized the way young people communicate, learn, and entertain themselves. But as a parent, you are keenly aware that with these advancements come new challenges and dangers that we must navigate to protect our teens’ mental and emotional well-being.

Studies like the U.S. Surgeon General’s recent advisory on social media highlight the dangers and damage caused by teens’ regular use of social media. The rise in teen depression, suicidal thoughts, and other mental health issues is definitively linked to social media use. Other recent studies show a sharp increase in anxiety, self-harm, loneliness, and suicide attempts with greater digital media use, especially among teen girls.

It has become clear that to address the alarming increase in mental health issues among teens, we have to get serious about addressing their time on social media.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart...” As teens learn to self-regulate what they consume and how often, they need parents to provide critical guidance, especially with social media.

We hope this guide will help you navigate our digitally saturated world with wisdom and empower you to provide guidance and boundaries your teen can follow into adulthood.



Understanding Parental Controls

With all the devices floating around (many of which allow internet access), it can seem like a jungle out there. It has left many parents feeling as if they’ve lost the battle before they’ve even begun.

So how can you, as a parent, monitor and guard your children and teens from explicit content and overuse?

One answer is the use of parental controls.

Almost every device offers some form of parental controls, and if they aren’t robust enough for your taste, you can add additional software or apps to help.

Types of Content and Interactions That Can Be Controlled

Content Filters: These powerful tools restrict access to websites, apps, and media based on age-appropriateness, ensuring your child isn't exposed to harmful or explicit material.

Time Limits: You can set limits on how much time your child spends on specific apps or the internet, encouraging healthier screen time habits.

Privacy Settings: Adjusting privacy settings helps protect your child from online predators and data privacy issues by limiting who can contact them and see their information.

Purchasing Blocks: These prevent unauthorized app purchases and access to adult content through app stores.

Parental controls are not the only step to protecting your teen, but they serve as a starting place. Here are just a few benefits:

Protection from Inappropriate Content: Parental controls filter out harmful content, ensuring that your child is exposed only to age-appropriate material and protecting them from the dangers of explicit, violent, or otherwise inappropriate content.

Reduced Risk of Cyberbullying: Monitoring tools and privacy settings can help you identify and address instances of cyberbullying, providing a safer online environment for your child.

Promotion of Healthy Digital Habits: Setting time limits on device and internet use helps inculcate balanced digital habits, ensuring your child has time for offline activities and interactions.

Prevention of Identity Theft: Privacy controls protect personal information, reducing the risk of identity theft and safeguarding your family's digital footprint.

For additional protection, you can install a filter on your Wi-Fi system. Filters like Gryphon keep pornography and other content out of every device. They also allow you to monitor the sites visited by each device using an app on your phone. You can also implement time limits and cut-off times for internet use in the evening. Just keep in mind that this option only works when users are in the home and not using cellular data, which can also be controlled.

The following instructions for parental controls for each app will help you “watch over the affairs of [your] household” (Proverbs 31:27). Keep in mind that none of these will guarantee your teen's protection, which is why many parents have started prohibiting their teens from using social media at all. Instead, this is one layer of protection against the dangers lurking online.



Managing Parental Controls on Instagram


Instagram's parental controls allow you to manage who can see your teen's content, who can interact with them, and how much time they spend on the app.

Let's walk through how to set up and make the most of Instagram's safety features.

Step 1: Set Up Your Teen's Account As Private

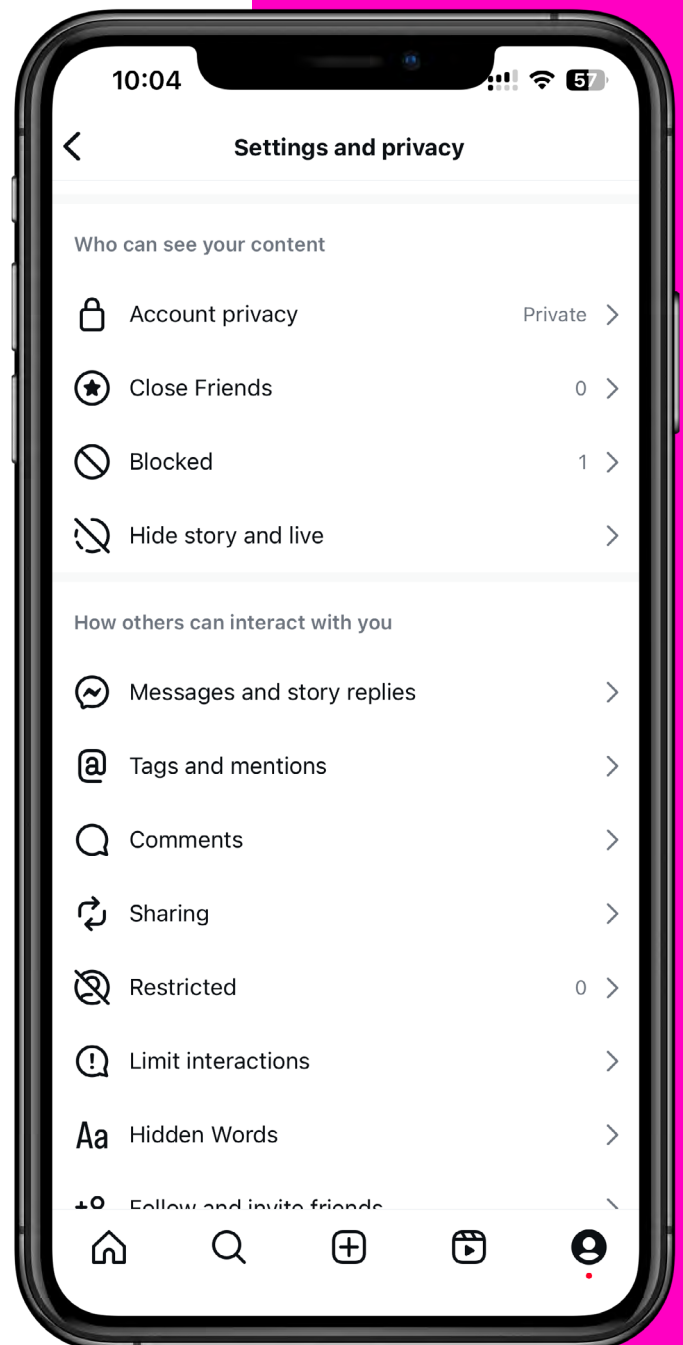
Creating a private and secure Instagram account for your teen is the first step to ensuring their online safety. A private account helps protect your teen's posts from being seen by strangers and allows them to control who can follow them. Monitoring their followers list is also crucial in preventing unwanted interactions and maintaining a safe environment.

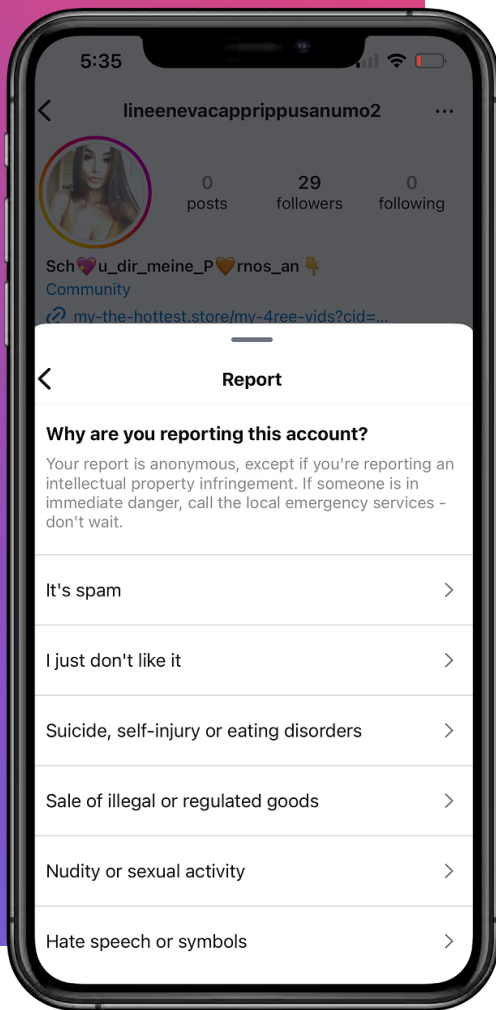
Creating an Account and Setting It to Private:

1. Start by creating an Instagram account for your teen if they don't already have one.
2. To set the account to private, go to their profile, tap the Menu  button, and navigate to Settings > Privacy > Account Privacy.
3. Toggle on the Private Account option. This way, only approved followers can see their posts.

Approving Followers and Monitoring Follower Lists:

1. When your teen's account is private, they will receive follower requests that they need to approve. Encourage them to only accept requests from people they know in real life.
2. Regularly check their follower list to ensure all followers are appropriate. This can be done by going to their profile, tapping on Followers, and reviewing the list.





Step 2: Set Content and Interaction Controls

Managing Comments and Messages:

Instagram allows you to control who can comment on your teen's posts. In Settings > Privacy > Comments, you can block comments from specific accounts or choose to allow comments only from people your teen follows. For direct messages (DMs), go to Settings > Privacy > Messages. Here, you can control who can send message requests to your teen, limiting this to people they follow.

Tools for Reporting and Blocking Inappropriate Content:

Teaching your teen how to handle inappropriate content and interactions online is essential. Empowering them with the knowledge of how to report and block harmful content can make a significant difference in their online experience.

Reporting Inappropriate Content or Interactions:

Teach your teen how to report inappropriate comments, messages, or posts. They can do this by tapping the three dots (⋮) on the offending item and selecting Report. Reporting helps Instagram take action against users who violate community guidelines, making the platform safer for everyone.



Why it's important

Advocating for Their Own Safety:

Teaching your teen to report and block inappropriate content empowers them to take control of their online environment. It helps them understand that they have the right to a safe and respectful online space.

Recognizing Unsafe Behavior:

Educating your teen on what constitutes inappropriate behavior online is crucial. This includes recognizing cyberbullying, harassment, and any content that makes them uncomfortable. Knowing the signs of unsafe behavior helps them react appropriately and seek help when needed.

Building Confidence:

When teens know how to manage their online interactions and protect themselves, they build confidence in their ability to navigate social media safely. This confidence extends beyond Instagram, helping them handle various online platforms with maturity and awareness.

Promoting Respectful Interaction:

Encouraging your teen to advocate for their safety also involves teaching them to interact respectfully with others. Discuss the importance of kindness, empathy, and responsible sharing. This not only creates a positive environment for them but contributes to a healthier online community.

Step 3: Take Time to Communicate and Educate

Maintaining open communication with your teen about their Instagram use is key to ensuring their online safety. A critical part of protecting your teen is taking the time to communicate and educate them about Instagram's built-in safety features and the importance of protecting themselves from online dangers. Like anything with teens, education and open conversation are essential when it comes to responsible use of the internet and social media sites.

How to Encourage Open Discussion About Safe Instagram Use:

- Ask your teen to show you their favorite posts and talk about why they like them.
- Discuss the importance of being respectful online and the potential impact of their posts and interactions.
- Encourage empathy in sharing. Middle school and high school are tough times made worse by memes, spam accounts, and cyberbullying. Teach them to ask themselves how they would feel if someone liked, commented, or shared something like that about them before they engage.

Use Instagram's Built-In Safety Features and Resources:

- Instagram has several tools designed to enhance safety and well-being, such as time limits and activity tracking. Explore these together in Settings > Your Activity, where you can set daily time limits and view their time spent on the app.
- Encourage your teen to use features like Quiet Mode, which mutes notifications during specific times to help them focus on other activities.

By setting up these parental controls and maintaining an open line of communication, you can help ensure your teen has a positive and safe experience on Instagram. Remember, it's all about balancing their freedom to explore and express themselves with the guidance and protection to keep them safe.






Setting Up Parental Controls on TikTok

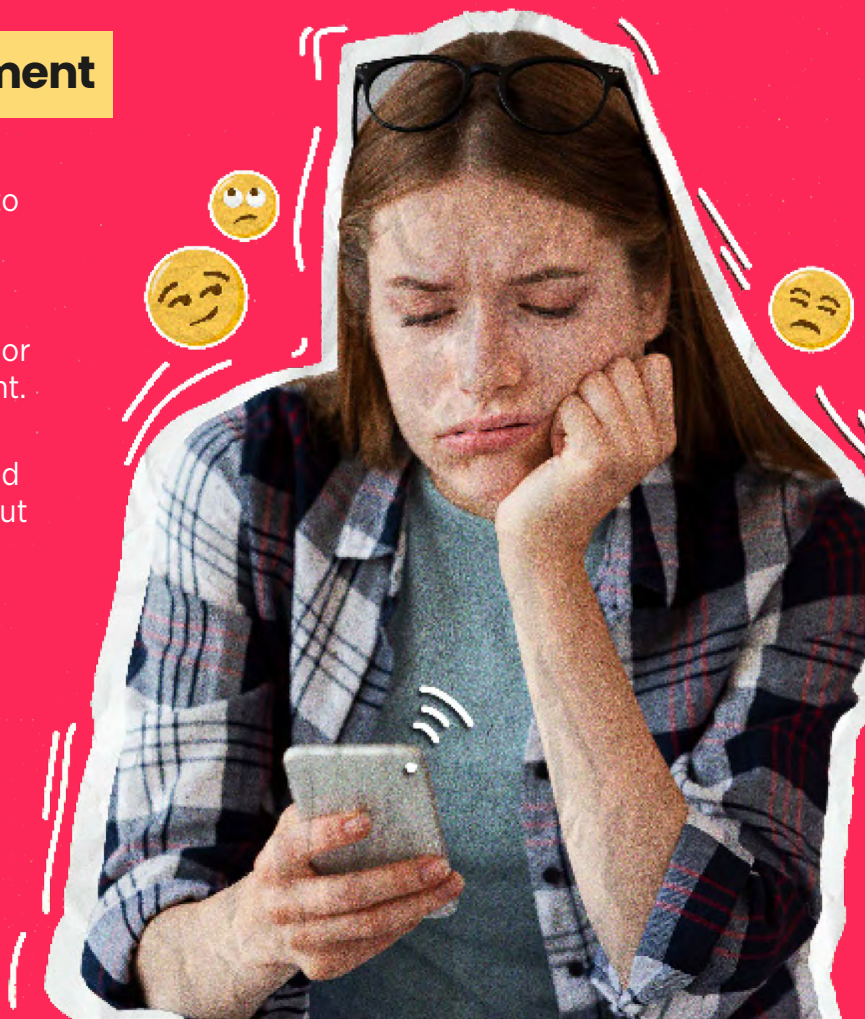
Step 1: Create a Safe Environment

TikTok's Family Pairing feature allows parents to link their TikTok account to their teen's account to control privacy and safety settings. This includes managing screen time, content, and well-being. For example, parents can set a daily limit on the amount of time their teen can spend on the app or who can like and comment on your teen's content.

The Family Pairing feature takes the control out of the teen's hands and gives control to the linked parent account - a feature your teen may hate, but is imperative for parents to utilize.

Here's how to access it:

1. In the TikTok app, tap Profile at the bottom.
2. Tap the Menu  button at the top.
3. Tap Settings and Privacy, then tap Family Pairing.
4. Tap Parent or Teen.
5. Follow the steps in the app to link accounts.



Step 2: Customize Controls

Parental controls on TikTok are more effective when actively managed rather than relying on default settings.

TikTok automatically sets some limitations based on age:

Users under 13 can't post videos or comment, and their content is tailored for a younger audience.

For kids aged 13 to 15, accounts are private by default, limiting interactions to friends only.

Users must be 16 to livestream and use direct messaging, and 18 to buy, send, or receive virtual gifts.

In March 2023, TikTok introduced a 60-minute daily time limit for users under 18 and required a password for extended access.

These settings are a great place to start, but as a parent, you will want to customize the settings based on your child's maturity and what you want them to have access to.

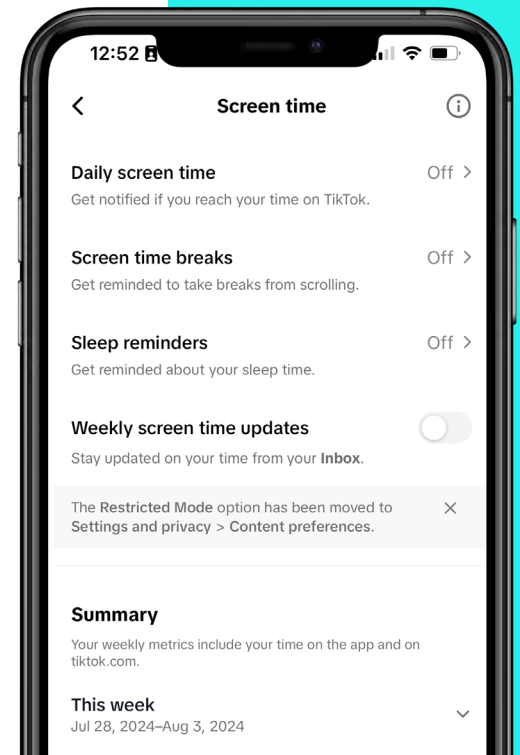
1. Screen Time Management

Screen Time Management on TikTok does just what it says – it lets you control how long your teen can use the app each day. It's a great way to ensure they don't spend too much time scrolling through videos. Keep in mind that this setting won't override any Apple ScreenTime settings you might already have in place for TikTok.

Plus, TikTok will occasionally show reminders and short videos encouraging your teen to take a break, which can be really helpful for managing their screen time.

If you want to manage your teen's TikTok time in the app, here's how:

- Open the TikTok app and tap on Profile at the bottom of the screen.
- Tap the Menu button at the top right corner.
- Go to Settings and Privacy, then find Digital Wellbeing.
- Select Screen Time Management and set daily screen time limits to ensure your child doesn't spend too much time on the app.



2. How to Filter Inappropriate Content:

TikTok's Restricted Mode is a fantastic tool to keep content appropriate for your teen. Sure, you might hear some complaints when their friends talk about videos they can't see. Your teen will probably hate it, but it's worth it. Restricted Mode helps filter out content that's not suitable for all users, making TikTok a safer space for your teen.

Now, here's the real game-changer: once Restricted Mode is on, your teen won't be able to log out or log in to another account on their device. This means they can't create a "secret account" or "spam account" to bypass your parental controls. So, no more sneaky work-arounds that let them see content you'd rather they avoid.

Here's how to set up Restricted Mode:

- Tap on Profile at the bottom.
- Tap the Menu button at the top right.
- Go to Settings and Privacy, then tap on Content Preferences.
- Select Restricted Mode and follow the steps to set a passcode.

3. Managing Privacy Settings and Direct Messages:

Limiting direct messages on TikTok is another key step in keeping your teen safe on TikTok. The internet's anonymity can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it allows people to connect and express themselves freely. On the other hand, it also enables strangers to pose as anyone they want.

By restricting direct messages to friends only or turning them off completely, you can help protect your teen from potential dangers like inappropriate conversations or encounters with potentially dangerous people. It's a simple yet effective way to make their online interactions safer and more controlled.

Here's how to manage these settings:

- Go to Settings and Privacy, then tap Privacy.
- Adjust settings for Discoverability to control who can find and view your child's profile.
- For direct messages, you can decide who can send messages to your teen or turn off messaging entirely. If they're under 16, this is automatically restricted to Friends only.

Remember, regardless of your teen's age, you can also turn off DMs entirely.



Implementing Parental Controls on Snapchat



Step 1: Understanding Snapchat's Platform

To effectively manage your teen's Snapchat use, it's crucial to understand how the platform works and why it appeals to younger users. Snapchat allows users to send photos and videos that disappear after being viewed, share stories that last for 24 hours, and use various filters and lenses to enhance their snaps. This temporary nature can be exciting for teens but also makes it harder for parents to keep track of what's being shared and seen.

Overview of How Snapchat Works:

Snap: Photos or videos that can be sent to friends and disappear after they are viewed.

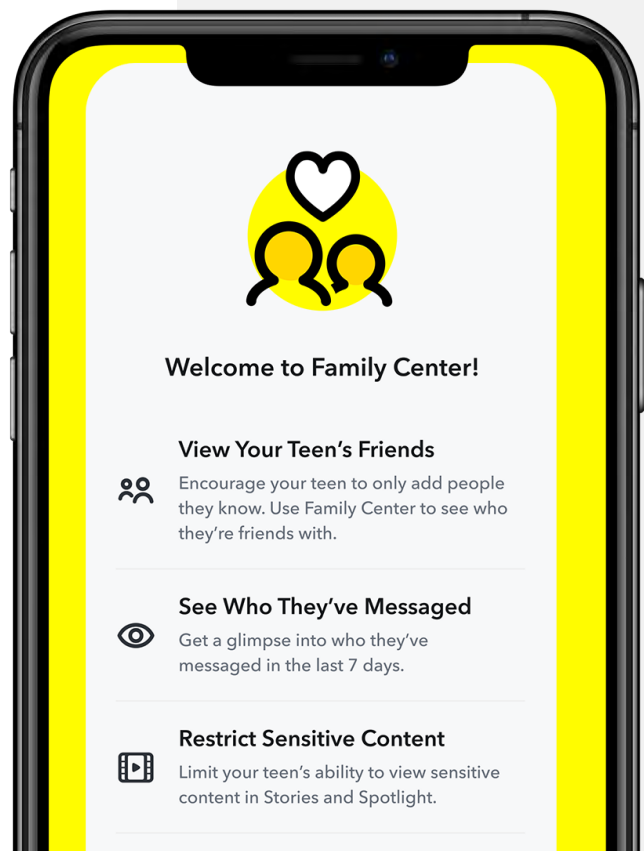
Stories: A collection of snaps that are viewable for 24 hours by followers.

Filters and Lenses: Fun effects that can be added to photos and videos.

Snap Map: Shows the real-time location of users who have opted to share their location.

Snapstreaks: Tracks how many consecutive days two users have exchanged snaps, marked by a flame icon. While fostering friendship, Snapstreaks can lead to an obsession, with some kids sharing their account details to maintain the streak when they're away from their phones.

Understanding these features helps you better grasp the potential risks and benefits of the app, allowing you to set appropriate boundaries and expectations with your teen.



Snapchat's Family Center

Snapchat's Family Center is a comprehensive set of parental controls designed to help you see who your teens are communicating with on Snapchat and set Content Controls. The Family Center reflects the dynamics of real-world relationships between parents and teens, where parents have insight into who their teens are spending time with while still respecting teens' privacy. On Family Center, parents can view their teen's privacy and safety settings, manage parental controls for My AI, and easily and confidentially report any concerns directly to Snapchat's Trust and Safety team, who work around the clock to keep Snapchatters safe.



Why Family Center Was Created:

Real-World Reflection: Family Center was designed to mirror real-world dynamics, allowing parents to have insight into their teen's online interactions while respecting their privacy.

Comprehensive Monitoring: It offers a comprehensive view of your teen's safety and privacy settings, making it easier to manage their online experience.

What Family Center Does:

Monitor Communications: See who your teen is talking to on Snapchat.

Set Content Controls: Customize what kind of content your teen can see.

Report Concerns: Easily report any safety concerns directly to Snapchat's Trust and Safety team.

How to Access Family Center:

Download Snapchat: Start by downloading Snapchat from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store to your mobile phone.

Create an Account: Open the app and tap 'Sign Up' to create an account. Enter all the relevant information as prompted and create your Snapchat username.

Add Your Teen as a Friend: Ask your teen for their username so you can add them as a friend. Once you have their username, search for it using the search bar at the top-left corner of the Camera screen.

Get Started with Family Center: Once your teen has accepted your friend request, you'll be ready to get started with Family Center.

There are two ways to access Family Center on Snapchat:

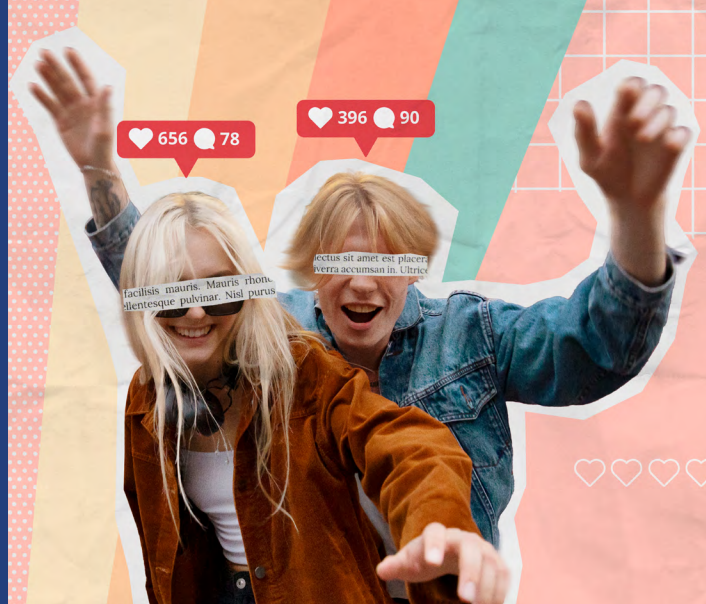
Search Bar: Use the search bar and search for terms such as "safety," "family," or "parent," and Family Center will appear.

Settings: Go to Settings (gear icon) located in the top-right corner of your Profile Page, where Family Center has a permanent home.

Once you have Family Center, you'll need to invite your teen to join. Your teen will receive an invitation card and must opt-in to participate. Teens need to tap 'Accept,' and you'll both be notified that the status of the invitation has been updated. Now, you can use Family Center to see who your teens are talking to and set Content Controls.

Step 2: Privacy and Safety Settings

Customizing privacy and safety settings on Snapchat is essential to protect your teen from unwanted contact and exposure. Snapchat offers several features to help you control who can interact with your teen and view their content. While monitoring can be challenging due to the lack of a public feed, focusing on privacy settings is a practical approach recommended by experts.



Steps to Customize Who Can Contact Your Child and View Their Stories:

- **Who Can Contact Them:** Go to Settings > Privacy Settings > Contact Me. Set this to 'My Friends' to ensure only approved friends can send snaps and messages.
- **Who Can View Their Story:** Navigate to Settings > Privacy Settings > View My Story. Choose 'My Friends' or create a custom list to limit who can see their stories.
- **My Eyes Only:** Encourage your teen to use the "My Eyes Only" feature for storing snaps they want to keep private. This feature is password-protected, adding an extra layer of security.

Focusing on Privacy Settings:

Expert Recommendation: Experts suggest that parents adjust privacy settings to limit exposure to strangers and ensure that only known friends can see their teen's snaps. Additionally, turning off the location-sharing feature is crucial.

Adjusting Privacy Settings Together: Sit down with your teen and go through the app's settings (the gear icon next to the profile image). In the "Who can" section, make the following adjustments:

Contact Me and View My Story: Set both options to "My Friends" to restrict interactions to known contacts.

See My Location: Enable "Ghost Mode" to hide your teen's location from everyone, or after discussing it with you, selectively share it with trusted friends.

Quick Add: Turn off "Quick Add" to ensure that your teen's Snapchat handle isn't easily discoverable by strangers, requiring others to request to add them instead.

Important Considerations:

Photos and Videos Don't Truly Disappear: Kids often believe their photos and videos on Snapchat will disappear forever after being viewed. It's crucial to remind them to think before sharing. While snaps are designed to disappear, recipients can still take screenshots or use another device to capture the image, making it permanent.

Screenshot Alert Limitations: Although Snapchat notifies users when someone takes a screenshot, this feature isn't foolproof. A viewer can still capture the content using another device without triggering an alert, which means a supposedly temporary snap can be saved and shared later.

Challenges of Monitoring Disappearing Snaps: The disappearing nature of snaps makes it difficult for parents to monitor the content their children are sending and receiving. This feature can facilitate the sharing of inappropriate or bullying content without parental knowledge. Open communication and regular check-ins are vital to help mitigate these risks.

A few things you (and your teen) should know:

Snapchat's settings make it difficult for strangers to contact teens, reducing their visibility in search results unless they share mutual friends or phone contacts. The app also provides warnings if someone without mutual connections tries to contact them.

Snapchat provides tools for blocking unwanted contacts and reporting safety concerns directly through the app. These concerns are handled by a dedicated Trust & Safety team available 24/7.

Step 3: Regular Check-ins and Updates

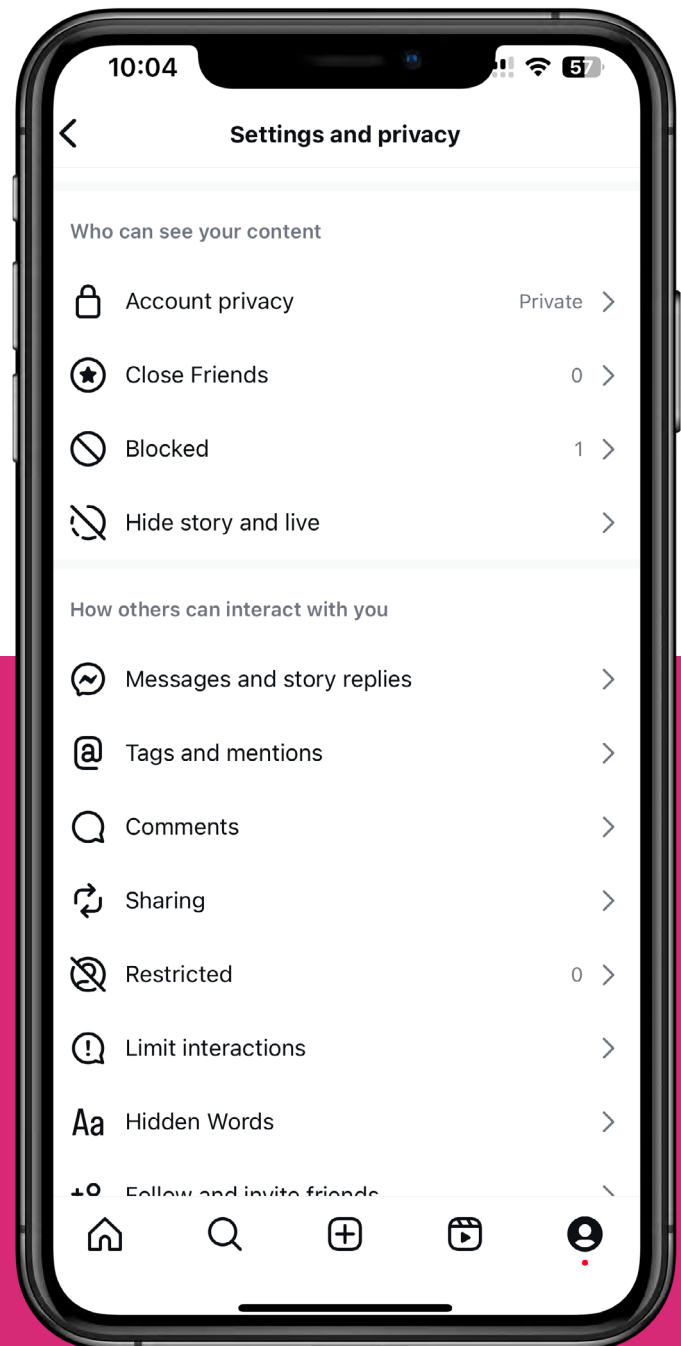
Staying informed about new features and potential risks on Snapchat is crucial for ongoing safety. Snapchat frequently updates its app with new features, and regularly reviewing these updates helps you understand any new risks or opportunities they may present.

By having regular check-ins and conversations with your teen about their Snapchat usage, you can stay updated on their online activities and reinforce safe online habits. This proactive approach helps you guide your teen through the ever-changing digital landscape and ensures that they have a safe and positive experience on the platform.

The Importance of Ongoing Monitoring

In closing, we hope this information will give you the confidence to take control of your home and ensure the safety of your family members in this digital age. In the meantime, we encourage you to do the following:

- Once you've implemented these parental controls, don't just set it and forget it! Ongoing monitoring and conversation are key.
- Encourage your teen to pursue activities outside of internet use, such as sports, clubs, community service, and other extracurricular activities.



Pray over your teen. Our best line of defense as parents is to pray for our teens. God knows far better than we do what is happening in their lives, minds, and hearts, and He will protect them when we ask. Please know, we are here for you in your parenting journey with resources and prayers for success for both you and your teen. We want you to feel equipped to exercise your authority and responsibility as a parent regarding your teen's online safety.

To find more parenting resources from House of Hope click [HERE](#).