

- **Don't set any false expectations of privacy.** Make it clear to your students that the phone in their pocket and the accounts they have online are not theirs, they are yours. You are allowing them to use them and one day they will have complete privacy and anonymity. But you are training them for that day. You should have all the passwords, and make it known you will review their activity often. I also suggest putting parental control software on their devices (see "**Going Further — Resources**" below for suggestions).

I know that it can all seem overwhelming, but the reality is that you have limited time with your teen before they will graduate, leave home, and make these decisions for themselves. So, don't miss this opportunity to train and equip them so they are ready for the day when they step out on their own and have to regulate their internet activity for themselves.

*By David Jackson, Student Ministry Director of Stafford Crossing Community Church*

## Going Further — Resources

- **Check out internet filters and parental control software:**
  - The Circle: <https://meetcircle.com/>
  - Bark: <https://www.bark.us/>

## Going Further — Church Support

**Fusion** is great places for students (grades 6-12) to meet friends and learn more about God, faith, and so much more! Fusion meets Sundays from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Get more info here:

- <https://staffordcrossing.org/fusion>
- Email [fusion@staffordcrossing.org](mailto:fusion@staffordcrossing.org)

# Teens, Social Media, and Porn

Helping families  
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## Can my teen have a social media account and still be protected from porn?

I was nine years old the first time I was exposed to pornographic material. I was playing hide and seek with my friends in my grandfather's shed when I discovered a magazine tucked away behind some old boxes. As I flipped through the pages, I had no idea that my brain was being damaged and rewired in a way that would take over a decade to undo. Like far too many teens (both male and female), porn became an addiction for me. It seemed like it was just a normal part of my daily routine. And it wasn't until I was in my 20s that I was able to see the harmful effects this addiction had on me and how out of line it was with God's will.

Today, I have an 8-year-old son and I don't want him to struggle the way I did. And since I don't have a shed and definitely don't have any magazines lying around, I should be fine, right? Wrong! The sad reality is that my son and daughter are just **one wrong click away from being exposed to porn.**

**So how can I protect them?** Simple, cut the cord. Turn off the internet. While that sounds nice—and it may be the right step for some—the reality is that teenagers today communicate, socialize, and network online using social media apps. And while my two children don't have social media yet, I know the day when they ask for an Insta account is fast approaching.

As a youth pastor I am on social media far more than I would be otherwise. I make an intentional effort to meet students where they are, and they are on social media. A recent study found that teens' most popular social media platform is Snapchat, followed closely by Instagram. The problem with this is that porn is often hidden behind hashtags and emojis that appear innocuous but are used as secret code to tag and search particular types of porn. If teens type a specific fruit or vegetable emoji into the search bar, a list of links pops up to images ranging from women barely clothed to women in sexual bondage restraints. Those images lead directly to pornographic accounts, which are used by many porn performers to build their fan bases. Though Instagram says it uses automated technology to continually

detect and remove nudity and pornographic content, it's clear the platform is not doing a thorough job.

While Snapchat technically doesn't allow "adult content," a whole ecosystem of online businesses help budding entrepreneurs manage and monetize "premium" pornographic accounts. To lure traffic, the premium account is linked to a more innocuous "teaser" Snapchat account and other platforms, including Twitter and Facebook. One of the biggest companies, FanCentro, serves as a channel to a whole universe of private Snapchat accounts and boasts that if one account is taken down, it will seamlessly set up another and redirect traffic. FanCentro also facilitates links from Snapchat to Pornhub, the major pornography site, in just a couple of clicks.

## What can I do to safeguard?

I hate to let you down, but if you were expecting a one-size-fits-all answer to that question, it doesn't exist. Rather, you have to be actively and intentionally engaged in your teen's life and social media habits. Here are a few suggestions.

- **Train your teen on how to use their smartphone and the internet in general.** When I was a child my grandfather once taught me how to use a table saw. He stood by my side, explained how the saw worked, and was very deliberate and intentional to explain that the sharp spinning blade WOULD cut off my fingers if I got near it. He told me I could never rest my hand on the table while the saw was in use. He didn't want me to even get close to it. We must do the same with the technology we use today. It may not have a blade that can amputate a finger, but it has the ability to do deep psychological damage and it can take a piece of you if you are not aware of the danger.
- **Make decisions that you believe are best for your teen, and don't feel guilty about it.** You will feel pressure to let your teen have a phone or a social media account because all their friends' parents let them have one. But I'll ask you the same question my mom used to ask me, "If all the other teens jumped off a bridge would you do it, too?" You know what your teens maturity level is. Some teens can handle in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Others may be seniors who still aren't ready.