

What age should my kids be before I let them use Instagram, Facebook, and other social media services?

How old your kid should be before he or she starts using social media with your permission is really up to you. **Most social media websites and apps require that kids be 13 to sign up.** Despite what many think, this isn't to limit kids' exposure to inappropriate content but because of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act ([COPPA](#)), which prevents companies from collecting certain information from kids under 13. Rather than create an environment that protects kids from data tracking, Facebook and other websites and apps choose to restrict access to those under 13.

Aside from this, [13 is generally the age when kids start developing a broader understanding of the world around them](#) and, along with that, a better sense of what's appropriate to share online. As young teens, kids also are developing a desire to control more of their activities as well as the maturity to handle that control.

If your kid is expressing interest in joining [a social network](#), discuss the pros and cons and do your own research so you fully understand the implications of joining a particular network. If you want your kid to wait to sign up, consider pointing him or her toward more age-appropriate sites such as [Yoursphere](#) or [Fanlala](#). [Kuddle](#) is also a quality Instagram substitute. It's also possible you can rally your kids' friends' parents to restrict their kids from [Facebook](#), so you won't get that "but everyone is on it!" argument.

If your kid does end up joining a social network -- whether she's 10 or 16 -- here are some ground rules that work for many parents:

Use privacy settings. Privacy settings aren't foolproof, but they can be helpful. Take the time to learn how privacy settings work on your kids' favorite sites and apps, and teach your kids how to control the information they make public or private. Encourage them to check privacy settings regularly, since sites' policies often change.

Tell your kids to think before they post. Remind them that everything can be seen by a vast, invisible audience (otherwise known as friends-of-friends-of-friends), and, once something's online, it's hard to take back.

Be a friend and follower. Each family will have different rules, but, especially for younger kids, it's a good idea for parents to have access to their kids' pages, at least at first, to be sure that what's being posted is appropriate. Parents can help keep their children from doing something they'll regret later.

Keep private information private. Don't share your home address or other sensitive information online.

Be respectful of others. Kids may use social media to act out because they feel anonymous and that their actions are consequence-free. Make sure they understand that the Internet is a giant community that works best when everyone respects each other