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SOCIAL MEDIA AND TEENAGERS



*A Talking Points lesson for
English reading & speaking*

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Introduction

Give some examples of social media.

Which ones are good and provide a useful service? Which ones are not so useful and maybe unhealthy?

In your country, is there a problem with teenagers using social media too much?

Reading

Social media has become a keystone in our daily lives. Not a day goes by when most people do not check their updates on social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram.

And for teenagers, this is even truer.

They cannot go one day without any of their preferred social media apps. Look at any teenager on the street, on a bus or simply idling time waiting for a friend and you will see them with their head down facing the screen of their smartphone

Teenagers have always had secrets. Long before social media, teenagers liked to chat with their friends after school, catching up on all the news and gossip going on in their circle of friends.

All the juicy details kept far away from the ears of their parents.

Teenagers kept diaries and journals — little notebooks where they wrote their darkest secrets and thoughts and stored them in private places. Under their beds, on top of a wardrobe.

Somewhere where their mothers would not find them.

But now social media allows teenagers to chat with their friends all the time. They no longer have to wait until after school and gather at the school gates to catch up on the latest piece of news.

They can write their deepest and darkest thoughts on social media apps, share them with select groups of people, and not have to worry if these thoughts can be discovered by one of their parents.

Phone passwords or hidden folders on their phones can hide the apps away from the prying eyes of grown-ups.

There are benefits to social media for teenagers. It can help them practice and improve their social skills. This can help them later in life when they join the workforce and for life as an adult.

It can help them maintain better relationships with their friends. What parent doesn't want that for their own children? The thought of their own son or daughter being alone and isolated is not something to bear.

They can also learn about current affairs. Every parent wants their child to be up-to-date with the news and what is going on in the world.

But then there are the downsides to social media and teenagers.

Despite being always connected, always communicating, many teenagers are spending large amounts of time alone. They are chatting with their friends, updating their social status, but all alone in their room with no one else around them. Just them and their phone.

Then there are the risks of their reputation being tarnished through immature games or the spreading of rumours.

A harmless photograph is sent around and within minutes a teenager can become a laughingstock — or worse.

There are now reports of several teenagers committing suicide or suffering from depression.

Certain images or messages circulated around that are not suitable for a young mind.

Girls gaze at the perfect bodies of Instagram influencers and then have negative opinions of their own bodies.

If fashion magazines were not bad enough many years ago, social media presents a far more sinister threat.

And of course, the social media giants like Facebook and Instagram shirk all responsibility. They wash their hands of any blame.

Essential Vocabulary

keystone	platforms	preferred
idling time	screen	secrets
chat	catching up	gossip
juicy details	diaries	journals
darkest secrets	wardrobe	gather
select	passwords	folders
prying eyes	grown-ups	benefits
social skills	workforce	maintain
isolated	to bear	current affairs
up-to-date	downsides	social status
reputation	tarnished	immature
spreading	rumours	harmless
laughingstock	committing suicide	suffering from depression
images	circulated	gaze
influencers	sinister	threat
giants	shirk	wash their hands

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Notebook—*a small book with pages of blank paper that students use to make notes when studying.*

“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”

Questions

1. What social media platforms are popular in your country? Why are they popular? Which ones do you use?
2. Are teenagers obsessed with social media as the article says? Why are they?
3. What other benefits can you think of for social media? Is there a real need for social media in modern society?
4. Is it a good idea that teenagers can communicate with their friends 24-hours a day? Why?
5. What other downsides can you think of for social media? What can be done about it?
6. How can a teenager's reputation be at risk through social media? If you have any examples, tell the class.
7. Should social media platforms hold more responsibility towards the effect they have on teenagers' lives? What should they do?
8. What do you think of the influencers on social media? Is this acceptable or not? Tell your reasons to the class.
9. Should parents have access to their children's social media accounts? Why/why not? At what age should a child's social media account be entirely private? Why do you think this?
10. What is the future of social media? Do you think there will be a big change in the next few years?

Teacher's Notes

This topic is so well-known it may need no introduction at all.

Most parents of the world worry about their teenage son or daughter using social media too often. The reading covers issues that are related to suicide and mental health—I will leave it to your discretion whether to talk about this topic in class.

Credits

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