

#TheDrFs: Selfies & Self-Esteem in Tweens



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For tweens the world has inarguably become more expansive through the use of social media. Posting “selfies” and being tagged in friends’ photos has become the norm for many, often with the well-intentioned stamp of approval from parents.

And while many parents have successfully deterred their 10, 11, and 12-year-olds from social networking sites like **Facebook** and **Tumblr**, **Instagram** seems to be the most popular platform for tweens and parents alike.

A recent North American survey shows that 55% of parents had not given their tweens rules about social media use: There were no discussions about who they could and could not interact with on social media, the number of followers allowed, and whether they were allowed to use social media unsupervised. The prevailing attitude was that “It is just pictures, so what is the harm?”



Anxiety | CommonSenseMedia.org

Social media can, of course, connect our kids with peers and extended family, serve as a medium to connect with volunteer opportunities, and of course, provide entertainment.

However, **social media can also cripple our kids' self-esteem**, resulting in social problems and mental health challenges.

For one, the use of social media is directly related to an increase in body surveillance. What we mean by that is the physical comparison between your tween and their peers, fueling thoughts like, my thighs look too big and is my waist as thin as hers?

While many like to point fingers at models, and celebrity and fashion magazines, research consistently demonstrates that there is a **great negative impact** on self-esteem from tweens viewing their own 'selfies' and those of their peers.

While negative feedback or **judgement from "haters"** is can be upsetting and damaging, positive feedback can also have lasting negative effects. In fact, positive appearance-based compliments (You look hot, Hey beautiful, or I love your hair) increases girls' awareness of their own appearance and encourages them to adopt an objectifying perspective of themselves.

Self-objectification then quickly leads to **body surveillance**. Are my lips full enough? My breasts big enough? Is my nose too big or too wide? All such questions can lead to body shame, which can in turn manifest as disordered eating and other mental health concerns. We know that among 8 to 12-year-olds, as their communication via electronic media increases, their social well-being decreases. Also, tweens with more than 200 'friends' on social media score significantly higher on all body concern measures compared to non social media users of the same age.

We recommend sharing these rules of engagement with your tweens:

- Follow people who you know. It is a lot easier to objectify and make appearance-based comments when dealing with strangers.
- Avoid buying into the 'more followers is better' trap. Keep your list of followers small and

personal.

- Trust people, not images. Images can be so easily edited and filtered, it can be impossible to know what's real.
- It is a good rule of thumb to avoid interacting with any sexualized compliments, things like, Hey hottie.
- Think about posting in a way that showcases your personality, your efforts, and your values.
- When commenting on photos:
 - Comment on the action in a photo: Nice goal! You nailed it!
 - Comment on the emotion in a photo: Looks like you were having a blast!
 - Comment on the creativity of the photo: Awesome angle on that sunset!

Tips for Parents:

- Help your tween to choose social media sites that encourage them to feel good about themselves.
- Educate yourself about the qualities of different platforms and help your tween-ager to steer away from appearance conversation-focused sites.
- Empathize with any unfollowing, unliking, ghosting upsets that your tween shares with you.
- Model appropriate posts on your own social media.



Social media and our tweens | MindMake.com

- Start curiosity-based conversations with your tween.

For example, I would love to hear why you posted that picture, what did you want people to see about you in that post? What do you notice about your emotions when you are on social media? Do you notice feeling more or less positively on different sites?

Parents come to us asking us for age guidelines regarding social media use. We steer families away from using age as a decisive factor in making these choices. Even though most social media sites state that 13 years of age is the guideline, we know that younger kids are

accessing social media and that age is not the best predictor of whether a child is ready for social media.

Parents need to fully understand who their tween is, know their social strengths/weaknesses, understand their ability to cope, and appreciate how resilient their child is. Will they be likely to handle the pressure of what is known as FOMO (fear of missing out)? Can they bounce back from negative social feedback? Will they be consumed with the amount of likes they do or do not receive?

If you can confidently answer Yes to these questions, perhaps your tween is ready for social media.

We hope these guidelines will help turn this potential minefield into a positive experience for the entire family.

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