# Ep 6. How do I help my child or teen navigate social media?

[00:00:00] And then children above the age of five years should have no more than two hours of screen time a day. And this then includes, uh, you know, children going up to the age of 18.

**Vanessa Pickford:** Welcome to episode 6 of the podcast series "The Heath Wrap", powered by Mediclinic Prime - Healthcare experts at your service. I'm your host Vanessa Pickford. Mediclinic Prime is a health programme created by our team of dedicated experts that unlocks a world of health information for you and your family.

[00:00:32] Sign up today through the link in the show notes, to gain access to a variety of free resources like a health calendar to view webinars and other events taking place in the hospitals, newsletters written by specialists, competitions, sporting entries and more! My job on this podcast series is to help you get the answers that you need from our experts for your children's healthcare.

[00:00:55] If you haven't yet, subscribe to our podcast so you don't miss any future episodes. Please note that the views shared by any guests in this podcast series may not necessarily reflect the views of Mediclinic, so please consult a medical professional if you have concerns. Now in this episode, we discuss a topic that I'm sure makes most parents and caregivers nervous -

[00:01:19] social media. In an article published by Unicef in 2021 they reported - and I quote- that about a third of South African children are at risk of online violence, exploitation and abuse. But is it possible to avoid social media? Not likely - it seems essential to the social life of our tweens and teens.

**News Clip:** Teenagers are using social media in a plethora of really positive ways. [00:01:49] There are groups, there are clubs out there to address anything that a teen has interest with. I see a lot of kids facing challenges with depression, anxiety, and they're able to [00:02:00] connect. I think it's incredibly important that

we're using social media appropriately. We're seeing teens architect, their Instagram photos using filters to create images that are not aligned with who they really are, but they're generating likes.

[00:02:14] It's a social currency and it's addictive. Sometimes teens make bad decisions and they can post things on social media that they don't realize that that exists forever.

**Vanessa Pickford:** As the parents of four children aged 17 through 6, I can say without hesitation that the biggest challenge for my husband and I, and the most common cause of tension in our home is our children's access to technology and devices.

[00:02:43] When it comes to social media, you might say to me, "but Vanessa, all this technology is so confusing, and it keeps changing! How can I keep up, is it just out of my hands? And there are so many news articles about viral challenges gone wrong, but I know my tween would struggle with being left out socially if I ban it - what should I do?"

[00:03:04] Well, I've got some good news: Educational Psychologist Karin Gerber is here to demystify social media for us. She also gives us guidelines on how to teach our children and teens how to use it safely and responsibly. Karin is an Educational Psychologist with a Master's degree in Educational Psychology from Stellenbosch University.

[00:03:27] She's passionate about helping children, teens, and their parents in the areas of depression, anxiety, trauma, challenging behavior. Grief loss or bereavement and parenting difficulties. Karin, we are thrilled to chat you about a topic that is so relevant to parents and children alike. Welcome.

[00:03:46] **Karin Gerber:** Thank you very much. It's lovely being here.

**Vanessa Pickford:** So let's dive right on in. Can you please tell us more about the most common or popular social media sites that children and teens are using?

[00:04:00] **Karin Gerber:** I think the most popular at the moment, specifically under teens and, um, tweens, you know, the, the pre-teen phase, uh, is TikTok and Snapchat.

[00:04:09] And then some of the other ones that I think we are most familiar with is Instagram, Facebook, even YouTube is seen as social media, and then some of the least popular ones, but still in use for teenagers is Twitter. And, um, WhatsApp is actually also seen as social media.

**Vanessa Pickford:** Are there specific age groups that tend to gravitate towards any of the specific ones that you've mentioned?

[00:04:34] **Karin Gerber:** I don't think there's an easy answer for that, but it sounds to me, or seems to me that children from as young as seven, eight years old, um, are already, um, using, uh, TikTok specifically, and then YouTube is, is familiar or, um, popular under even younger children. Um, if you think about the YouTube kids app that parents often allow the, the young children to use, then Instagram and TikTok, I think is very, um, [00:05:00] popular, um, for teenagers around the.

[00:05:02] Let's say from, from about 12 and up. Um, and I, I think Twitter seems to be more popular under students. Um, tertiary students.

**Vanessa Pickford:** Albeit that I am familiar with all the social media sites that you have mentioned. I'm sure that I'm not the only parent who feels intimidated by social media. So how important is it for parents to keep up to date with social media trends and new network?

[00:05:25] **Karin Gerber:** Well in my line of work, I would go as far as saying that it's absolutely crucial. Children are growing up with smartphones basically from the moment that they can hold anything in their hands. And, you know, schools these days, I think specifically through COVID, a lot of the schools had to go online with, um, their schoolwork.

[00:05:44] So the children are in a sense forced to have a lot of, um, you know, uh, be on screens quite a lot. So for me, it's very, very important that with this access that children are almost forced to have on screens that parents [00:06:00] need to know exactly what's going. The dangers of social media and the things that children are exposed to on, um, screens are getting more and more.

[00:06:09] I am working with children as young as eight, um, that have been exposed to explicit content, um, going as far as pornography. So for me, it's something that parents - they, they can't get away from it. It's absolutely important for parents to know what their children are doing on their phones and what sites their children are visiting.

[00:06:30] Um, and also knowing the language that children use. For instance, um, you know, the acronyms that they use in terms of communicating with one another. So if, if parents pick up a child's phone and screen their messages to their peers. It might look a little bit like, you know, Morse code and a very strange language that the kids are speaking to one another, but it's important that parents keep up to date about what those acronyms and abbreviations mean so that they know, and that they can have conversations with their children about what they are [00:07:00] speaking about.

[00:07:01] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yes indeed. And it does feel like a bit of a moving target. I've got four children and I feel like the acronyms are every day. There's a new one that I'm having to learn

**Karin Gerber:** Exactly. Um, what I do as well. I, I think to have kids, um, coming in and then I hear them using these new words. Uh, and I, I remain curious about it.

[00:07:28] It's interesting. I think as, as, as humans, but mostly children, we want to know that someone is interested in what we, we have to say. And we want to know that someone is curious about what we are busy with. So having a curious, um, attitude towards what our children are busy with keeps them engaged. And that

means that there's a relationship where you can have that, that those conversations and talks about what does this mean?

[00:07:53] This is the first time that I've heard you use this word. Um, you know, it, it sounds quite strange, but I, you know, does it mean [00:08:00] something more? Um, really just staying up to date, uh, is, is very important.

**Vanessa Pickford:** Yes. And keeping those lines of communication open. I think it's very easy to get bogged down in all the negative or, or cons related to social media, but let's discuss some of the pros.[00:08:18] What would you consider to be the positive effects of children and teens engaging in social media?

**Karin Gerber:** Some of the pros that I would say that social media poses for children and teens would be that staying in touch is quite easy. And I think we are living in a fast paced society these days. So we all want something to be delivered quickly.

[00:08:39] So if you think about WhatsApp messages or any kinds of instant message, it's easy to keep in touch and, um, connect with your friends in that sense. Also social media is a, is a platform or a space where information is shared quickly and it can even be, you know, it can even go as far as, um, you know, teenagers showcasing some [00:09:00] of their talents or the things that they enjoy or that they're interested in.

[00:09:03] Um, we've all heard about. Now I'm assuming, but, um, many of us have heard about, um, social media influences and then it actually becomes quite a career. Um, if I think about young, young stars on Instagram, um, they might be singing or dancing and posting their content, and then they get, um, discovered by a talent scout.

[00:09:24] Uh, and, and that's a nice way for them to actually get themselves out there, which they wouldn't have if social media platforms weren't available. So definitely it has a space for us in our society these days. And we can't, um, we can't actually go as far as prohibiting any children from not being on social media or

not having a social media, um, presence, because this is the, the world that they are growing up in.

[00:09:52] Um, but I guess that gets, that, that comes down to how do we protect our children when we do allow them on these platform?

[00:10:00] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yes, absolutely. Um, so I, I was just picking up on one of the things that you mentioned about the socializing aspect, and we found this a real saving grace during the COVID lockdown and the restrictions in socializing and specifically allowing those children to still have that social outlet on.

[00:10:22] These platforms so, well then let's steer the conversation slightly. Um, we've said that it can be used positively for showcasing talents, for socializing, for the dissemination of information, potentially for children to become influences in whichever sphere that takes their interest. But what is parents, should we be considering in terms of healthy social media screen time?

[00:10:47] What should that look like?

**Karin Gerber:** My, my first thing that I feel is very important to state here is that as the adults, we can't expect children to put limits and [00:11:00] boundaries in place. They are still learning. They are still developing and therefore our role as parents and as adults. We are supposed to put in structures and boundaries in terms of screen usage.

[00:11:12] So that is for me, the most important place to start is that when there are screens available in the house for the children to use, parents are ultimately responsible for how that is being used and that the children can't be given the responsibility without parental involvement. The research, according to the American association of paediatrics, they give some guidelines in terms of what.

[00:11:35] Appropriate screen time usage, according to age. So according to that association, any child between the age of 18 and 24 months. So that's basically, uh, you know, infant to tod-

dlerhood should have no screen time at all. And that means on any screen. So not on a phone, not on a tablet and also not on a, on a, um, TV or on a, a [00:12:00] computer.

[00:12:00] All right. The next age group says that for the ages of two to five years, the recommended amount of screen time per day is less than one hour a day. And once again, when we speak about screen time, that includes all devices. So not just. You know, on a phone or a tablet it's across all devices and then children above the age of five years should have no more than two hours of screen time a day.

[00:12:28] And this then includes, you know, children going up to the age of 18. So basically includes then adults as well. And when I think about screen time usage in the house, we as adults are the models of how screens are being, um, Utilized. So if we don't want children to have a lot of screen time in the house, what are we modelling for them?

[00:12:50] Are we sitting on our screens the whole time? Um, and if, if, if the American association of paediatrics recommends no more than two hours for teenagers, [00:13:00] even up to the age of 18, That typically extends to us as adults as well. And that we should also try and have, um, less than two hours screen time a day, which I know is difficult because a lot of our work is online and we sit in front of screens most of the day, but then if we are, um, you know, at home and we spending time with our families, that's also what we need to model to them is, um, less time on screens and more connection in the house.

[00:13:26] **Vanessa Pickford:** Yes. Yes. And in fact, that's a brilliant tool for parents to use when dealing with the pushback, that inevitable pushback from children who are wanting more time, but now are there apps or tools that parents can use to help limit screen time?

**Karin Gerber:** These days, the phones almost have a built in, um, screen time limit. [00:13:47] So I know iPhones and Androids all have Android phones, all have their own, um, built in, uh, uh, a screen time limit. But I would even go as far as saying that I think

all of [00:14:00] us have some other Google account, either a Google email account or something else. And Google has, um, uh, an apple Google family. And what that means is that every member of the family gets linked onto that profile.

[00:14:15] And through that profile, you have a lot of control and a lot of, um, power over what limits you put in, in place for your child. So that's the one thing I think would, would probably be the easiest for any person to download is Google family, and then other apps to consider as well. Um, that I've looked at. I mean, if you go and, and search you'll, you'll find many, but some of the ones that I've found being reviewed as, as quite popular is, uh, an app called family zone.

[00:14:43] And the other one is Family Safe. And they all have similar features in terms of, um, having access to what apps your child downloads, how long they are on their apps. Some of the apps even have, um, some of these safety apps even have features where you can monitor [00:15:00] messages and calls coming in through your child's phone, so that you know exactly what your child is busy with.

[00:15:05] It can also monitor what sites, your child visits. Um, and really, as I said, at the beginning, the disclaimer is, parents need to be involved. So don't give your child a screen or a device. If you are not going to be involved because then inevitably you're, you're setting the child up for failure. Um, and for them potentially getting into trouble and when the crisis hits and you want to then intervene, it's often already too late.

[00:15:30] So these things almost have to be communicated with a child before that device is handed over. And the bottom line of all of this actually comes down to what is the relationship that you have with your child? And a relationship is something that's fostered from a young. It's it's hard when, when you have a teen in the house and there's already a contentious relationship, and then trying to strengthen that communication, it should already happen from a young age, but even if there's a [00:16:00] contentious relationship or struggling relationship, it doesn't mean that you, you shouldn't do anything.

[00:16:04] It's then a space to actually have a, a conversation with your child and say, we need to talk about what boundaries are necessary for screen time and social media usage specifically. And we need to negotiate these things together. Once again, if we think about teenagers and what they developmentally need is they want more independence.

[00:16:24] They don't want anyone to tell them. These are the rules, I'm the parent. And it will be like that because I say so they will rebel against that. So when, when you want to approach a teenager in terms of setting boundaries, it, it has to happen in conversation and its typically negotiation. So you make a suggestion and you ask the child, how would this be for you?

[00:16:45] Is this something you can work with? If this doesn't work for you? How, what counter argument or counter suggestion can you bring me? And that is how you whittle it down. And really get, um, almost a contract down in terms of what are the rules [00:17:00] for having devices in the house. And also what will happen if those rules are broken, because children also need to know what their, um, what the consequences are.

[00:17:10] Um, consequences are very, very important. So you can't just punish a child and say, oh, your device will be taken away if they didn't know.

**Vanessa Pickford:** Right. That is excellent. Practical advice. Thank you. Now I know as a parent that I often feel a certain way about something and that governs how I might parent, but I don't necessarily have a refined narrative about why I may feel that way.

[00:17:36] And this includes the, the understanding, the very uninformed understanding about. What the effects of heavy social media usage can be on a child or teenager. So can you please go into a bit of detail as to how heavy social media use can affect the way that children think or perceive the world around them?

[00:17:59] **Karin Gerber:** Right. So when [00:18:00] we, when we think about what social media is, it's connection through a device

and that's artificial. So if children spend too much time on devices and connecting through a screen, they're actually missing out a lot on the actual social skills that, that they learn. Um, you know, just vicariously by being interaction with, with children around them.

[00:18:25] And it's also interesting that if you, if, if I can use an example, So during COVID when everything had to be online, um, therapy also had to happen online. So then I would see a lot of, um, it was difficult with the younger kids, but with teens and even parents and students, I met with them online and something that I noticed.

[00:18:45] And this is a, a very common experience that a lot of therapists have is that there's something lacking. There's there's a lack of depth. It's difficult to pick up, um, body language, facial cues and, and [00:19:00] our brains are wired in a sense to pick those cues up. So through a screen, we miss them. Um, so if we relate that back to the heavy use of children on screens is that they, they actually start losing social skills and then they don't know how to interact in the real world.

[00:19:17] So if in the real world they are at school or among their peers and they are in situations where there are, um, you know, there's conflict or there's an argument or even bullying as such. They don't know how to handle those things because on a screen there's distance, um, you can comment on someone's picture either meanly or rudely or nicely, but there's no immediate feedback in terms of how that person perceives your interaction.

[00:19:43] And that's dangerous. Uh, children don't learn those important skills specifically. How do I communicate socially with other people? And also how do I, um, orientate myself in social situations by picking up social cues from the people around me, that's all missing [00:20:00] on screens. The other thing that happens is, you know, we, we can even go as far into the addiction realm.

[00:20:07] Our brains are fascinating. So what happens with social media usage is that I actually read a very, very good book recently. Um, I read, uh, I think it was written by Johan Hari. I'm not sure if

I'm pronouncing his name right, but he released a book now called, um, uh, Stolen Focus. And it's specifically about almost an attention pandemic that we have worldwide and why that's happening.

[00:20:31] So basically what happens in our brains is that on social media, You get instant feedback either in terms of a, a person commenting on a picture or liking your picture. Um, and, and our brains almost become dependent on that feedback constantly. So what happens is a child is constantly distracted by these screens, the phone pings.

[00:20:53] Um, even if they put it on silent, I mean, I have many kids sitting in my office and then I just, yeah, how the phone vibrates the [00:21:00] whole time on the couch next to them, and that's quite distracting. So that's a problem is that they cannot focus appropriately on the, on the information or the things that are important to them.

[00:21:09] If their screens or their phones are constantly distracting them from what's important. Another thing as well is that they get so absorbed in this virtual world, because funny enough, there aren't many demands on you there. Um, you can choose what you want to put online. You can provide a whole.

[00:21:28] World or a whole fake image to people. Um, and, and maybe that's very enticing. It, maybe it feels very comfortable. Um, it's a safe space maybe for some people. Um, whereas in the real world you're exposed, um, you have to deal with conflict, you have to deal with people's, um, expectations and that is something that, that a lot of kids tend to want to avoid.

[00:21:49] **Vanessa Pickford:** Right, right. You've painted a, a very scary picture. So for all of the parents and the caregivers who are li listening, what would those signs of [00:22:00] social media addiction or the point where social media use becomes problematic? What would those be?

**Karin Gerber:** All right. So what for me typically happens is that children become deceptive around their phone usage. [00:22:12]

Typically what happen is that there might be a rule, um, that all the devices have to be handed in or put in the kitchen at night-time. And then I typically hear parents saying, oh, but I've, I've noticed that my child sneaks up or sneaks downstairs at night and then takes their phone. And then they're up at all hours of the night.

[00:22:31] And then, you know, before the alarm goes off in the morning, they'll quickly sneak downstairs again to put the phone back. So obviously that means that your child isn't getting a lot of sleep and also. Who are they communicating with at that time of the, of the night? So that's already a danger. Um, so just to go back, the, the fact that they're not getting a lot of sleep affects their ability to concentrate the next day at school.

[00:22:54] And then you, you might even see a drop in marks, uh, a child that's constantly yawning, constantly tired. [00:23:00] Um, and they, what also happens is that a child that has a problem with too much screen time use might even get quite, um, Aggressive or, uh, rebellious when boundaries are, are being set in, um, to, to limit their usage because they're craving that interaction.

[00:23:18] So you are taking their fix away and they will react by their behavior. They might become, yeah, very obstinate and, and argumentative. When that happens. I wanted link in, yeah. Also the, the danger then of, um, you know, cyber bullying because that you know, the signs that you look out there, if your child is perhaps being exposed to bullying on that platform, is that they might be quite, um, edgy, you know, every time a message or a call come, a call comes through on their phone.

[00:23:48] Um, they might suddenly look, their behavior might look a little bit odd when they come off a device like a, their computer or their, their screen. Maybe, because they are constantly afraid of what [00:24:00] messages they are receiving. Um, and you typically pick it up in their behavior. Either they don't want to go to school anymore, or their group of friends suddenly change without you knowing why, uh, that they don't want to go to this friend anymore.

[00:24:12] Or that friend that they've spent a lot of time with suddenly doesn't come over anymore. Um, so you can notice clear changes and patterns. So it's not, I, I typically say, look for patterns. It's not a once-off that your child. One day says, oh, I don't wanna go to school today. But the next, next day, everything is fine.

[00:24:30] Or that they maybe had an argument with a friend, but the next day it's also fine. Again, it's typically a pattern where you can start seeing that they, they struggling. Um, and a lot of the, the other things that you can notice is changes in sleep, changes in eating, um, and changes in behavior. Typically more aggressive, argumentative, or more emotional.

[00:24:50] **Vanessa Pickford:** Gosh, it sounds like any other addiction out there. Doesn't it. So then how could a parent help a child to break a social media?

[00:25:00] **Karin Gerber:** Once again, it would, for me, it would mean, um, if it, if it's a, if it's as serious as an addiction and this is, is, um, a problem that parents feel, they don't know how to do themselves or how to resolve themselves, my suggestion would then be, get professional help.

[00:25:16] So that would mean, um, search for a psychologist in your area, um, that is familiar with working with children. Um, and that can be any psychologist, a clinical psychologist, a counselling psychologist, or an educational psychologist. Um, but specifically someone that works with teens and children that can help you in support you through the process and also support your child by understanding what it's doing to their brains and how to put in.

[00:25:42] Healthy alternatives, uh, in terms of filling their time. So if it, if it's as serious as an addiction, I would say then obviously professional is needed. If it's not as serious as an addiction yet, but it does cause a lot of conflict in the house, then it's time to, to, to have some [00:26:00] conversations about this.

[00:26:01] The first thing would be, is really setting some, some, um, rules about. You know, screen time is a privilege. I think sadly, um, children have gotten to the point where they think, oh, but it's my phone, it's my device. And that's maybe a bit warped because that's not actually true if they bought it with their own money.

[00:26:24] Yeah, then it's their own device, but that's not typically what happens. It's typically something that's given to the child by their parents. So it's not actually the child's property, the wifi isn't their property, the phone isn't their property. It's something that the parents own. The child has the privilege and, and not the right to use that device.

[00:26:45] And therefore when the device is handed over certain settings or certain rules need to be in place. The one thing for me is when I think of a privilege is you have to work towards a privilege. You just, you don't just get it. So have some rules in [00:27:00] place in terms of, okay, your screen time is guaranteed.

[00:27:03] If X, Y and Z is completed first. So the rule might be, um, during week times, your screen time limit is let's say one hour a day, but before that, the following things need to happen. For instance, chores need to be done. Homework needs to be completed satisfactorily. Um, so that children know it's not just, you know, rambling through the work and, and get it done properly.

[00:27:27] It has to be, uh, you know, done properly, uh, and also good behavior. I mean, if, if you're going to be disrespectful, um, or, or, you know, have sibling issues the whole time, then that's one of the things a tick against your name that says no, but then, then you're showing me that you're not ready for screen time usage today.

[00:27:46] Um, so children need to know you work to earn that Privilege. You don't just get it. Um, and then over weekends, they might then have some more screen time and they can even, um, earn some screen time by doing [00:28:00] more chores or by doing some extra, you know, uh, outdoors activities like going cycling for an hour earns you half an hour of extra screen time.

[00:28:09] But that needs to be limited again. So it doesn't, if the child goes cycling for five hours, it means that they can't get five hours of screen time. Then, uh, there should be a maximum of, of only two hours, let's say on a Saturday and two hours on a Sunday. What I would say is that often when we want to watch movies together as a family, that.

[00:28:28] Is different, you know, that special family time that, that, you know, isn't included in the overall screen time, because it's something that you all do together. And there I would also say that children should be aware of what are the consequences for their screen time if they don't, if they choose not to do their chores or, you know, don't behave well or don't, um, complete their homework or forget stuff at school, then they lose out on their screen.

[00:28:52] Um, and that's a, that's a way to monitor everybody's screen time usage in the house. One of the other things that I would suggest, I think it goes back to [00:29:00] that sense of what we model to our children and children are very clever in this sense, if we don't, if we have a set of rules for them, but we apply different rules to ourselves as adults, they will ask.

[00:29:12] But why are you allowed to do this? And I'm not, and it's, they're not fair to tell a child, Oh, because I'm an adult or because I said so they deserve more of an explanation for that. And we do need to model healthy phone usage to our children.

**Vanessa Pickford:** Absolutely. Quite right. Um, now even if we are able to create those healthy boundaries around the usage of social media and that there is no specific threat of social media addiction.

[00:29:40] Are there other kind of dangers that children and teens could face on social media?

**Karin Gerber:** Well, I think the one thing that, that pops into my mind immediately when I think of danger is that, um, you know, we, we sit with a huge problem in South Africa. Firstly with, uh, you know, um, trafficking, trafficking of [00:30:00] children.

[00:30:00] Um, and then with that also comes, um, child pornography, um, which is a, a very real danger and a very real threat in South Africa. So for me, it is important to know who your children are communicating with online. Um, if I think about you know, these aren't even social media sites, but even games where, um, members from all around the world can, can participate in these games like Minecraft and Roblox.

[00:30:28] Um, a lot of, a lot of kids will say, oh no, but that's a place where I play with my friends. So, you know, you have to allow me to play. Yeah, which is true, but it's also a space where, uh, predators go and look and they, they seek out vulnerable kids. Um, and, and then start grooming them, um, to meet with them offline.

[00:30:48] Um, either via messaging, uh, you know, privately and, and then things can happen, like sending messages, um, sending explicit messages and then going as far as sending, um, inappropriate or, or explicit [00:31:00] pictures. So those are the, the dangers that, that I am concerned about most, um, in terms of how vulnerable children are.

[00:31:07] If they don't know what the dangers of social media and if they are allowed to use devices without being monitored. Um, and without having conversations with them, with, with your kids about these dangers, the other danger that I would say as well is, um, you know, children are, they often don't think through the consequences of something.

[00:31:29] So we all know kids are impulsive and they do silly things and then get into trouble for it. So what could also happen is that that your child might post a picture, um, that they think is funny and then it spreads like wildfire and they might not have had a bad intention for that picture to get out there, but then they can be legally held legally liable for, um, defamation.

[00:31:55] Uh, or, or spreading content that's, uh, inappropriate. [00:32:00] Um, yeah, so South African law, um, can be quite explicit with, with kids. A child under the age of ten cannot be held criminally liable in South Africa, but their parents can be held crim-

inally liable for their actions online because, um, this was quite interesting, uh, that I read up is that remember if you sign up for social media, you are.

[00:32:24] Actually signing a contract, um, you're agreeing to their terms and conditions. So social media rules actually says that no one under the age of 13, um, is allowed to have a social media profile. So if you allow your child to sign up to social media under the age of 13, you are actually consenting to them and you are then.

[00:32:44] Um, by proxy signing that contract, um, for your child, and then you are responsible for everything that your child posts online, and then anybody above the age of 10 with the mental capacity is seen as, um, you know, legally, [00:33:00] uh, that that can be legally charged.

**Vanessa Pickford:** Um, I've further to your point about pictures being taken or perhaps whether they're graphic or not, um, that it's not only [00:33:13] the person who originally took and posted that picture who could potentially be held liable, but also everybody who disseminates it to sends it on that it's the, I can't quite remember the term for it now, but essentially the, the sharing of that information. Is makes those people liable as well.

**Karin Gerber:** Exactly. [00:33:32] Yeah. And there's lots of, there's lots of law experts in South Africa. I think Emma Sadleir is one of the, the most familiar at this stage that, that does a lot of talks, um, about social media safety specifically among teens. So, um, that's a resource that I can really refer parents to if they are, um, unsure, you know, what they need to, to be doing, uh, with their teens, um, using social media and screen.

[00:33:56] **Vanessa Pickford:** Right, right? Yes. So how can a parent [00:34:00] then help a child or a teen? If there have been either exposed to do something harmful on or through social media or perhaps been the, the victim of having had their, their picture or their information disseminated.

**Karin Gerber:** I think it's important. Once again, everything comes down to having a conversation. [00:34:18] The ideal situation would be to almost run through a practice example with your child before something like that happens. So in the ideal world before you, you hand the device to your child, sketching some scenarios to them and say, you know what, um, let's say someone posts a mean comment to a picture that you share, or let's say you send a picture to someone and they, you know, distribute it to a bunch of other people.

[00:34:44] What would you do? That kind of gives your child an, an opportunity to think through some possibilities and it empowers them to know that there are options. So it would often be okay if someone, if someone comments on your, on your picture and it's rude or upsets [00:35:00] you, uh, what do you do? For instance, you can block that person.

[00:35:04] Um, you know, you, you don't have to have allow those things in your, in your life. It's also important then to, um, educate your child about privacy settings. So it's very important. Make your profile private and then you can allow who sees your content and who doesn't, because if your profile is, is public, anybody can go on there from wherever over the world.

[00:35:27] So that is something that I would suggest to, to parents if it's, um, you know, what typically happens is that if the child's profile is public, the people that comment are strangers to the child. So then it's easy. You can block the person. Uh, you can also, uh, report them to the site. Um, so that action is taken from the administrators of the site.

[00:35:49] If it's, for instance, in a chat room or, um, let's say on a Facebook group, there are always administrators there where you can report anyone treating you, uh, in a, in a difficult way, so [00:36:00] empower your child so that they know what their options are, but if the bullying or the, um, let's say comments that a child receives online is from a person that they know that's at school with them.

[00:36:11] Or in their social circle. Um, and it's quite distressing once again, have conversations with your child about what is it that happened? What, what did the person say? How did it make you feel? What would you like us to do? Would you like us to take this to the school? Would you like us? Would you like us to speak to the, the other child's parents?

[00:36:30] Um, it's once again, because when we work with teenagers, they want to know and also have a say. They don't want decisions to be made on their behalf. And because it creates a lot of anxiety, I can just imagine, um, you know, there's a, a crisis, your child is being cyber bullied and you get so upset as the parent and you charge into the school into the principal's office and demand action.

[00:36:54] Firstly, it's extremely embarrassing to your child and also creates a, a, a lot of anxiety because it's [00:37:00] completely out of their control. They don't know what's gonna happen, they don't know what you're saying, they don't know what the other child is gonna do. So it's important to create as much, um, safety and security for your child by giving them as much information as possible and asking them to have a say in the matter as well.

[00:37:16] Um, obviously if a child is very timid, um, and, and says, no, but I don't want you to do anything. Um, It's also important to remember that just because your child says, no, I don't want you to do anything. You shouldn't just back off because they're talking out of fear as well. They, they actually do want you to do something.

[00:37:35] It might just mean, um, "Let's work together to see how we can protect your social media profile or your, um, your, your online, um, activity."

**Vanessa Pickford:** Yes. Yes. And I was just thinking that it's easy possibly to become a bit complacent because once we've set those parental controls or had that conversation in our minds possibly, well, we've done it now.

[00:37:57] So how often should we be revisiting [00:38:00] this with our children? Um, regarding their social media usage.

**Karin Gerber:** I'm hesitant to make it a rigid thing. Um, you know, to say, oh, at least once a month, you need to check in. I feel like it needs to be an organic thing when you guys are sitting in the car, um, or around the dinner table or having walk together, whatever, just bring it up.

[00:38:21] Um, otherwise it feels quite structured and the teen is gonna, like I say, the kids are clever. They're gonna look at you and. Are you trying to catch me out now, do you have some other angle here? Um, and, and then they become suspicious. So it, it should just be part of the typical conversation that happens in the family, because all of us are on devices.

[00:38:41] It should be as ingrained in our, in our conversations as how was your day? Um, or what did you do at school? Um, you know, did you Google anything today? Like what's happening on TikTok? You know, do you, did you see any funny videos today? Um, things like that, it should, it should become part of our typical conversations and not as [00:39:00] rigid as check in once a week or check in once a month.

[00:39:02] **Vanessa Pickford:** Mm-hmm Karin, thank you so much for the valuable insight you've shared with us about social media. We learned about the different types of social networks and the pros and cons of social media. You also shared with us how to spot dangers and signs of addiction, and how to help children if they are being harmed. I'm sure this will give our parents and caregivers food for thought when approaching this issue with their children and teens. So thank you for the time that you've shared with us today.

[00:39:22] **Karin Gerber:** It's been a big pleasure. Thank you, Vanessa.

[00:39:44] **Vanessa Pickford:** Thank you for joining me, Vanessa Pickford, on The HealthWrap podcast, powered by Mediclinic Prime. If you haven't yet done so, subscribe to our podcast chan-

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