

Help Tweens and Teens Clean Up Their Feeds

Eliminate the posts that lead to negative emotions, and load up on stuff that feeds your soul. By [Caroline Knorr](#) 7/2/2018

Topics: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Social](#), [Mental Health](#), [Technology Addiction](#)



You know that girl from TV -- the one whose [Instagram](#) always looks perfect even with #nofilter? Or what about that amazing singer on [musical.ly](#) whom you can't believe is only 14? And then there's that kid whose [Snapchat](#) stories of Coachella got 500 views. Your kids may be following people like this right now. Obsessing. Over. Every. Detail. And starting to [feel kind of crappy](#) about it.

Keeping tabs on the rich, famous, and just-plain-cool is nothing new, of course. But social media can take that fixation to a pretty dark place. The feeling is common enough that some doctors are calling it [social media anxiety disorder](#) (SMAD) -- although what most kids have is more like [FOMO](#)... on steroids. While it's tough to see your kid in despair, there's a good solution that doesn't require an all-out social media ban: Just help your kid clean up their feed.

Self-comparison is a natural part of the tween and teen years. And for most kids, so is social media. While there are [plenty of good things](#) kids get out of their online connections, sometimes the combo can lead to a negative feedback loop that gnaws away at them. Depending on whom they're following and what's going on in their lives, their [overall self-assessment](#) can cycle from wistful ("I wish I was like that") to highly critical ("What's wrong with me that I can't be like that?"). Even for kids who know when to close their laptops and move on, their self-esteem may take a hit. And for the more self-critical, [anxiety](#) and [depression](#) are real risks.

If your kid mostly enjoys social media but suffers the occasional bout of self-doubt, help them find [a healthier balance](#). Ask if -- or what -- they're already doing to take care of themselves. They may already be tweaking their social media feeds to limit posts that make them feel bad. Or they may be intentionally trying to curb the endless scrolling through the cool kid's Insta. Work together to prune out the parts of their social media feeds that trap them into judgy comparisons, and encourage the stuff that bolsters positive social connections, supportive relationships, and validation of their inner qualities.

Encouraging your kids to see and appreciate their individual strengths has always been a part of parenting. And learning to **stop comparing yourself to others** is a part of growing up. By helping kids clean up their feeds, you're bringing together two critical aspects of raising kids in the digital age. Try these tips:

Identify the triggers. Maybe it's a certain couple who always look happy and in love, when your kid really wants a romantic relationship. Maybe it's ads from a dog-toy delivery service that makes your kid miss your old mutt. Explore what's behind their emotions. Sharing your own FOMO-induced feelings will likely get your kid to open up. Once they recognize the cause of their emotions, they can **take steps to manage triggers**.

Fine-tune levels of engagement. All social media offers ways to see and hear less from your contacts -- without totally unfriending them. Check out settings such as these from popular platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter: unfollow (you're still friends, but their posts won't show up in your feed); hide post (see fewer posts from someone); snooze (temporarily stop seeing posts); mute (turn them off for a while); and do not disturb (temporarily block the person).

Turn off notifications. Most social media apps send updates -- and none of them are life-and-death. To prevent your kid from interruptions -- especially ones that might trigger negative thoughts -- you can encourage your kid to check their social media once or twice at a certain time of day -- say, 4 p.m. That might be a stretch, but you can still **encourage them to turn off notifications** either in the app itself or on their phone.

Follow people who nourish your soul. Kim Kardashian may be all over social media, but there are **lots of folks** who post uplifting, life-affirming, thoughtful, inspiring things that get kids thinking -- and maybe even behaving -- in ways that make them feel good about themselves. Follow these kinds of people.

Suggest apps to help with focus. Just as you can use technology to excess, you can use it to rein yourself in. These **productivity apps** help keep kids on task, boost concentration, and remind you to stop doing stuff that's not good for you.