

Guidelines for Parents Regarding Middle School Social Media Use
(from CommonSenseMedia.org)

Hoover City Schools encourages a partnership between schools and families when considering the safe, productive, and meaningful use of technology in education. There is too much at stake with our middle schoolers to passively provide technology without appropriately and firmly establishing guidelines for ethical and safe use. Although each family is unique, the following practical tips have been developed to serve as a compass for Hoover parents and guardians when establishing guidelines and expectations for technology use with their middle school student. Many families have already developed safe-use guidelines for their middle schoolers; for others, this may be a starting point. No matter where your family may be on this spectrum, read below and consider these suggestions:

1. **Start the dialogue** - Discuss very openly with your middle schooler about what is acceptable technology use. Ask them about current trends they are seeing at school, and friends' houses, and in their own home. Understand the technology they are using.
2. **Conduct a technology inventory**: Know what devices your middle schooler is using and what these devices are capable of in the online world. This includes desktop computers, laptops, cell phones, iPods, iPod Touch, iPads, Kindles, Nooks, and gaming devices (many video games systems are wifi capable and can be used to interact online). Keep track of where these devices are kept in your home.
3. **Accountability** - Establish boundaries for when, where, and how technology will be used in your home. Firmly establish an acceptable time each evening when technology devices will be turned off or turned in to parents. Closely consider WHAT your child has access to in your home and WHERE that access is located.
4. **Websites**: Clearly outline sites that are acceptable for viewing, and sites that are unacceptable for viewing. Discuss consequences for viewing inappropriate content. It is advisable that middle schoolers not have full unfiltered access to the internet (except for possibly in a very open and public area of the home). Set parental control settings on the Internet at home.
5. **Online safety** - Firmly discuss the dangers of giving out their personal or identifying information to anyone in an online environment. Be sure they understand that this includes photos, addresses, phone numbers, first or last names, email addresses, passwords, name of their school, parents' workplaces, etc.
6. **"What do I do if...?"** - Outline how you expect your middle schooler to respond if a situation occurs which is uncomfortable, unethical, or threatens their or someone else's safety (unfiltered access at a friends house, cyberbullying, pornography, plagiarism, online harassment, etc.). Let them know that you expect to be informed so you can determine what the best course of action may be.

7. Technology acceptable use checks: Learn how to check your middle schooler's devices for internet history, downloads, photos, videos, and more. Parents / guardians should know all passwords to all students accounts. Middle schoolers (although they will tell you differently!) simply do not have a right to privacy in this area at this point in their developmental lives. Monitor your child's use of technology in your home.
8. Communicate with the school: Contact your school's counselor, teachers, or administrator with questions, concerns, or any needs you may have. Although a situation may be new to you, it could be something that the school has seen before and can help with. Or, you could be bringing up a new situation or circumstance of which the school needs to be aware.

The safety and well-being of our students is the foremost priority in promoting technology in education. Schools depend greatly on partnerships with families in order to ensure the safety of our students.

In summary, it's critical for schools and parents / guardians of middle schoolers to know:

- **what device** your middle schooler is using,
- **when** they are using their device,
- **how** they are using the device,
- **where** are they going in their online world,
- and **with whom** they are interacting.