



A Parent's Guide to Twitter (From education.com)

By Rebecca VanderMeulen

Chances are your teen has a page on Facebook, the social-networking website with a massive following among users ages 9 to 99. And, chances are, if you've heard of Facebook, you've probably also heard of Twitter, another player in the ever-expanding fray of social networking platforms, micro-blogs and the like. Perhaps you have a Twitter account. But does your child have one too? And as a parent, should you be concerned about Twitter in the hands of your child?

The short answer: There's no reason to ban your child from Twitter, but it's important that both of you understand its ins and outs, its pros and cons and how to use it properly.

How is Twitter Different From Facebook?

Twitter is similar to Facebook in that users can broadcast their thoughts — from the most inane to the most earth shattering — for the world to see. But there are a few key differences from Facebook:

- On Twitter, users are limited to just 140 characters per post, where each post is usually referred to as a “tweet.” Web links in tweets are often shortened to fit within the allotted space.
- On Facebook, users have to mutually agree to be “friends” before they can see each other's whole profiles. On Twitter, each profile is public to everyone else unless the user decides to make it private. Twitter users have “followers,” or people who can see each tweet they post on a homepage. Unless a user sets up privacy settings, no one needs permission to follow anyone else. However, users can block people from seeing their tweets. If Twitter users follow each other, they can send each other private “Direct messages.” But essentially, Twitter profiles are completely public.
- Twitter's content, and by default its users, can be more "viral" than Facebook's (aka can more easily be shared throughout the web and other technology platforms) and this is mostly due to the nature of Twitter's content — it's short, quick, super sharable (through "retweets") and essentially "portable."

While 14 percent of America's 30 million Twitter users are 17 or younger, according to Web analysis firm Quantcast, the site is more popular among adults and has a more professional feel than Facebook. Faye Rogaski, founder of Socialsklz :-), which teaches

communication skills for the modern age to young people, says teens often start Twitter accounts and then tend to forget about them.

Still, Twitter is potentially a means through which personal information can fall into the hands of people who shouldn't have it. The key – especially for kids and teens – is to be smart and to be careful.

"Kids and teens often don't have the maturity level to understand that what goes online stays online," says Sue Scheff, founder of Parents' Universal Resource Experts and co-author of *Google Bomb*.

You, Your Child, and the Account

If your child is interested in exploring the world of "tweets" and "retweets" and the like, Rogaski advises that you and your child set up the account together. The two of you should discuss who the child will follow and who can follow back. But how can you and your child proceed savvily from there. Here are some tips from the experts:

- Remember that anything online is there forever. Anything negative associated with your name could keep you from getting into college or even from getting a job in the future. Help your child pick a username you'll always be comfortable with.
- Your child shouldn't tweet anything she wouldn't say in person or to someone's face. Keep bad language and gossip out of your tweets.
- Make sure you ok any photos your child wants to send or upload.
- Your child should only follow people she knows in real life and similarly, when it comes to her own followers, she shouldn't let anyone follow her who she doesn't know outside of the web.
- It's important for your child to keep users from seeing her tweets unless they've been given specific permission. To do this, click on "Settings" from your account, click on "Account" and check the box saying "Protect my tweets."
- Your child should avoid tweeting her name, address or phone number. It's also important that she doesn't tweet where she is – which is becoming increasingly popular as more people use platforms like *foursquare* to show where they are at any given moment.
- Only you and your child should know her password.
- Make sure your child knows not to click on any link promising a quick way to get rich, a free prize or anything else that looks too good to be true. For example, in the Spring of 2010, a message circulating on Twitter said teen pop sensation Justin Bieber would give a signed iPad to the first 5,000 people who entered their phone numbers on a website. The tweet was a scam to charge everyone who gave away their phone numbers a monthly fee without their knowledge.

Some Final Dos and Don'ts

Do: Set up your own Twitter account, if you haven't already. This is the best way to learn about how it works and how to use it properly.

Don't: Ban your child from using Twitter. This will only make her more curious about it, Scheff says.

Do: Set up a Twilert account for your child's Twitter handle. This service allows you to see what is being said about your child on Twitter.

Don't: Follow your child or her friends without her permission. This will do nothing but show your child that you don't trust her, Rogaski says. "They'll find a way to unfollow you," she says. "They'll find a way to set up a new account."

Rogaski says teaching your children how to use the Internet is as important as teaching them how to cross the street. And these days, learning how to use Twitter responsibly is part of that. "As a parent, you have to empower your kid with knowledge." The more you and your child know, the more you both can be smart and savvy social networkers.

Who's Following Your Child on Twitter?

Twitter Privacy and Safety Tips for Parents

By [Andy O'Donnell](#), About.com Guide

Everyone is tweeting about everything under the sun these days. If your brother-in-law had too much bran this morning you can expect that he will tweet about it later today with a #bran #kaboom hashtag thrown in there somewhere.

Following someone on Twitter is a lot easier than becoming their friend on Facebook. Kids often consider the number of followers as a measure of their popularity. The problem is that there may be people following your child on Twitter that have no idea who they are. You may be unwittingly providing complete strangers (Twitter followers) with their location information as well as other information that you shouldn't share.

How can a parent find out who is "following" their child on Twitter and how can parents prevent strangers from following their child?

Here are a few things you as a parent can do to help keep your child safe if they are using Twitter:

Have your child log into their Twitter account, click "Settings", and then consider making the following changes to their account:

1. Remove your child's personal information from his/her Twitter profile

Your child most likely uses an alias or fake name on Twitter. In addition to your child's Twitter alias, there is a field on their profile page that lets them enter their "real" name. I suggest removing this information because it provides personal information and lets you find out more information about your child.

You should also consider clearing the check box that says "Let others find me by my e-mail address" as this creates a link between their email and their Twitter account. In addition to personal information, you may want to make sure that your child is not using their real name on their Twitter profile picture.

2. Turn off the "Tweet Location" feature in your child's Twitter profile

The "Tweet Location" feature provides the current geolocation of the person posting a tweet. This could be potentially dangerous if your child posts something like "I'm all alone and bored." If they have enabled the Tweet Location feature, then their location is tagged on their tweet. This would provide a predator with the knowledge that the child is alone as well as giving them their exact location. To keep your child's location to be available to strangers, it's best to turn off the Tweet Location feature.

3. Turn on the "Protect My Tweets" feature in your child's Twitter profile

The "Protect My Tweets" feature is probably one of the best ways to prevent unwanted people from "following" your child. When this feature is turned on, tweets produced by your child will only be available to people that are "approved" by you or your child. This means only the current followers, but it does create an approval process for future ones. To remove current unknown followers, go to your child's profile, click on the gear icon next to the follower's alias. This will show you a drop-down list where you can click "remove".

To find out more information about a follower, click on "followers", and then click the alias of the follower you want to know more about.

4. Follow your child on Twitter and check their account settings on a regular basis

Your kids may not be crazy about the idea of having you follow them on Twitter, but it helps you to be able to see what they are saying about them, and what links, videos, and pictures others are sharing with them. This could also help ensure their safety if there was any cyberbullying or other shenanigans going on. Also check their settings periodically to make sure they are set back to wide-open.