

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF-DOUBT

### HOW PARENTS CAN HELP KIDS RESIST THE PRESSURE CREATED BY SOCIAL MEDIA DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/ID PROGRAM FEBRUARY 2017 RESOURCE SHARING

Using social media, today's teens are setting impossible standards for their classmates and friends by showing only the best and most enviable moments while concealing efforts, struggles and the ordinary aspects of day-to-day life. When teens compare themselves to these images, a "perfect storm of self-doubt" can be created. As one teen says, "Looking at friends' feeds makes you feel like everyone has it together but you."

So what can parents do to help their children build a safe and reasonable relationship with social media?

**Take social media seriously.** The power of visual images is very strong. For many teens the things that happen online are very real. When you talk about social media, make sure you're really listening and be careful not to dismiss or minimize your teen's experiences.

**Encourage them to think outside the (crop) box.** Encourage your child to explore social media in a more critical way. Ask what they think has been edited out of friends' perfect pictures and why. That can lead to discussions about whether people really are who they appear to be online, what's the purpose of posting a photo and whether looking at social media affects mood.

**Model a healthy response to failure.** Children and teens have to get the message that it's okay to fail and that showing it is okay, too. When things don't work out as you'd planned, show your child how to accept it with grace. Let your children know that failure is part of how we learn to succeed and let them see you pick yourself up and try again.

**Go on a social holiday.** This means everyone! If you're asking your child to take a break, practice what you preach and pledge to stay off media as well. Declare "screen free" days.

**Trust people, not pictures.** Don't rely on social media to let you know how your child is really doing. Make sure they know it's safe to talk to you by encouraging them to share feelings and supporting them when they do. Let them know you're proud they reached out.

The term "duck syndrome" was coined to refer to the way a duck appears to glide effortlessly across the water while below the surface its feet work frantically and invisibly to stay afloat. Sometimes these carefully edited feeds can mask serious issues and make it harder to see that a youth is struggling emotionally and needs help. Teens who have created idealized online images may feel frustrated and depressed at the gap between who they pretend to be online and who they truly are.

In the end, you want your child to be happy and successful. Making sure they know you love them and you're proud of them as is—unfiltered, unedited and imperfect—will help them build the confidence they need to accept themselves and stay safe and healthy.

Excerpted from <https://childmind.org/article/social-media-and-self-doubt>