

A recent study by the Pew Research Center on teens' social media use found that 71 percent of teens use social networking sites. The study revealed that use of sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat is the most preferred portal of communication for teens.

With this popularity, it is only natural that schools and teachers have begun to use this medium to communicate with students and parents. However, parents and concerned adults aren't quite sold. Many believe it blurs the lines between respect and rapport. Other feel that it's no big deal, if you can't beat 'em join 'em, right?



The problem with this is that the opportunity for abuse or inappropriate use rises and becomes hard to monitor. Whether it is cheating on tests, communicating outside of school hours or development of inappropriate relationships, the cause for concern is valid. The state of Missouri is so concerned about this they have passed a law [SB 54](#) that precludes teacher-student communication via social sites, citing "Teachers cannot establish, maintain or use work related website unless it is available to school administrators and the child's legal custodian, physical custodian or legal guardian. Teachers also cannot have a non-work related website that allows exclusive access with a current or former student." Whether you agree with the rigor of the legislation or not, establishing regulations and setting boundaries at your school is important as technology increasingly becomes the primary mode of communication.

In response to these concerns, an app called [Remind](#) has been created to allow teachers to capitalize on the convenience of sending messages electronically to students and parents. The app keeps contact information private, as teachers never see students' phone numbers and students never see teachers' numbers. Parents, teachers and students have easy access to message history and can use reporting tools to flag words or content shared.

So, what can you do now to protect your kids or help your school create appropriate policies around social media interaction? The following steps will help protect students, teachers and schools:

- Create a social media policy for your school. Use this [guide](#) as a starting point.
- Have teachers create [Facebook Pages or Groups](#) to share class information.
- Use a tool like [Remind](#) that limits the accessibility of personal information and keeps communication professional.
- Design a privacy policy prohibiting the use of students' images without a [permission slip](#) being obtained.

There is a need to connect with our kids where they are. But it is also important that adults maintain a level of rapport with students that promotes positive, healthy relationships, preserves mutual respect for all involved and balances the strengths provided by traditional communication methods with the benefits that innovative methodologies offer.