

# SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUR TWEEN



by Michelle Mitchell

Hi parents of tweens,

I'm guessing you are reading this eBook because your tween is asking you for their own social media account or phone - or you know that these requests aren't too far off!

I have noticed that it is SO EASY for parents to say YES without thinking too deeply about the potential risks. After all, most tweens are ONLY posting pictures of their new shoes or video calling their friend after school. However, fast forward a few years, and things can be very different. You may have wished you had thought ahead.

Boundaries do their finest work when they prevent harm, rather than respond to it.

This eBook will share five tips to help you manage technology so it lasts the rockiest of the teenage years. Let's get started...

**When it comes  
to social media,  
HOW is just as  
important as  
WHEN!**

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## **Tip 1. Never a Gift**

A phone really is a privilege, not a right. If you buy your tween a mobile phone (or phone plan, or a gaming console or a ipad!) as a gift it is more difficult to manage. That is why I suggest that parents OWN ALL technology in their home and give their children the privilege of using it if they use it responsibly. It's a small but significant shift.

Take advantage of this while you can because it will only work until they are old enough to buy themselves a phone and a phone plan and repair their own cracked phone screen!

Once they can buy their phone you may hear them say, "I've bought this phone so I can do whatever I want to do with it." Hmm...well I have bought a car and I can't do whatever I want with it.

## **Tip 2. Crystal Clear Agreements**

I think it is ridiculous to have a written agreement for everything that happens in a home, but when it comes to social media a written contract really is ESSENTIAL. Tweens need very clearly articulated rules and boundaries.

I like to write technology agreements WITH tween's input. Although you will always have to have the final word, the exercise is certainly an interesting one!

It forces them to communicate assumptions regarding their phone use and express their ideas and disappointments upfront. It will also force parents to stop and think about whether their expectations are reasonable. Nothing should be left unsaid.

## **Sample Contract**

This is a sample agreement which has been negotiated between parents of a just turned 12 year-old girl who is relatively responsible online. It covers all the basics that a family needs to cover when it comes to a girl's online life and can be adjusted to suit your needs.

## **Parents' Agreement**

- I will set up all technology to ensure your safety. Your entertainment is important but a secondary issue.
- I own and manage all technology.
- I will install safety software to protect you.
- I will ask you to be transparent about your online activity.
- I won't unnecessarily invade your privacy - promise.

- There are certain things that I am concerned about. These things include predators, identity theft, bullying, sexting and pornography. I would like to keep talking to you about these things because you may come across them.
- I hope you will communicate with me if you are unsure about anything online. I will try not to over react if you tell me about a problem you are having online. It's our job to solve it together.

## **Teenagers' Agreement**

- My time on the internet will be between the hours of 8am and 8.30pm except for meal times and family activities when I may be asked to put the phone away.
- All electronic devices including mobile phones will be shut down at 8.30pm at night and put in the office to recharge.

- While online I will behave politely and show respect for others.
- I will not share any personal details online including my name, address, phone number, sporting club or school.
- I will not enter competitions to win free things nor will I buy things online from companies that ask for private information such as my birth date, address or bank details.
- I will never click on links in emails or open attachments from people I don't know.
- I will ask before downloading or installing games, music or videos.
- I will never meet with anyone I have talked to online without getting my parent's permission.
- I will let my parents know if I come across pornography or feel uncomfortable about anything I see or hear.



- I will be cautious about the photos I post of my friends and myself.
- I will talk to my parents if I ever feel uncomfortable or upset by something that happened online, knowing they will help solve the problem.

Signed. \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent)

Signed. \_\_\_\_\_ (Tween)

To be reviewed: Every school term

As your tween grows into a teen, they will gain greater autonomy online and contracts like these will not be needed. In my experience, you have up until they are about 16 (max 17) before they have full independence online. Right now you have valuable teaching time that you will never be able to get back. It's a window of opportunity.

## Acknowledging Risk

Technology provides our tweens with incredible benefits, but there are also significant risks we need to minimise. As you set up a contract with your tween, please consider how to address these.

- Each time our kids go online they are joined by 4.5 billion others (some of whom don't have our kids best interests in mind). We want our tweens to have a childhood free from abuse, and adult content. Remember the average age of pornography exposure is 11.5 years. Software, transparency and communication will all help minimise the risk.
- If tech time comes at the expense of health, exercise or real life interactions, it will take its toll on our tween's health and wellbeing. Setting deliberate limits

on the amount of time tweens are online will help minimise the risk.

- The price we pay for connecting with friends (in real life and online) is that there will be moments of disappointment and pain. More time spent connecting often means more challenges. We want our tweens to use technology wisely. Setting time limits, ensuring tech is charged outside of their room overnight, transparency and communication will minimise the risk.

**Don't set rules  
WHEN there is  
a problem.  
Set rules  
BEFORE there  
is a problem.**

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### **Tip 3. Insist on Transparency**

I want you to directly ask your tween to be completely transparent with you when it comes to their online life. I can already hear you hesitating. You just breathed in and said to yourself, “Is that even possible? Do I have the right to ask them that?”

In the back of most parents’ minds is the nagging, unsettling notion that their kids can (if not now but in the near distant future) set up fake profiles and trick any safety software we install. We also know that they can use their friend’s spare phone or purchase a second-hand one at school the next day.

So we waiver.

We hesitate.

We don’t eyeball the topic.

We are doing our kids a disservice if we don't insist on transparency. When they go for job interviews in the future, it is possible an employer is unable to uncover their past online history if they do a little research. Their digital footprint is real. That's why asking for transparency makes sense. It confirms the fact that the Internet is a public place.

The trick is to ask for transparency **CONFIDENTLY**. Lay out your expectations without flinching. I promise that if you flinch, your son or daughter will see it. They can smell fear.

I often laugh when mothers tell me, "I'm surprised she hasn't worked out that she can say no to me and I wouldn't be able to do anything about it." You might feel like you are bluffing your way through the management of social media but as they say, 'you have to be in it to win it'.

If your tween does fully allow you into their online world, please be respectful of it. Don't jump on every little swear word and error they make. You will see some things you don't like! Remember that they talk to their friends all day long without you being over their shoulder and they do just fine.

I encourage parents to literally schedule time into their diaries to thoroughly check their son or daughter's technology use so it doesn't go by the wayside. I also encourage parents to Google the son or daughter's name occasionally. Some parents are surprised by what they find.

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CONFIDENTLY.**

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## **Tip 4. The Elephant in the Room**

Our sons and daughters do face real challenges online. We know they are there. They know they are there. The more we talk about the elephant in the room the more likely we are to save our tweens from danger. Parents, I promise you that your tweens are looking for an adult to delve straight into their world, 'boots and all'.

I have noticed that online problems can go undetected for long periods of time without parents noticing them. I have sat with tweens who have been viewing pornography for years without anyone in their lives knowing. I have also sat with kids who have been chronically bullied for months online without anyone knowing. Parents often miss what they aren't looking for.

No matter how many contracts we draw up or how much software we install nothing can replace our relationship with our tweens. Our intuition and communication will far outweigh any other strategy we implement. When it comes to social media we have to have eyes in the back of our heads - and then some.

One thing we can't stop doing is talking openly about the things that concern us. This won't eliminate the risks but it will reduce the risks. Pornography, sexting, body image, cyberbullying are just some of the issues that have the potential to trip our tweens up.

We should never expect our tweens to be the first person to bring up these issues. We have to be the ones who are brave enough to start the conversation. You might call it your 'check and chat' time.

I have noticed how easy it is for parents to let emotions drive them to starting conversations during inappropriate times. Timing is everything when it comes to big conversations.

Walking or driving and talking may be easier than talking face-to-face. Some tweens are more comfortable in their own bedroom where they are surrounded by familiar things.

There have been times when I have just put my son in the car, locked the doors and said, "This is going to take a while so strap in and let's get some food along the way." There was no easy way around some conversations so you just have to jump in and get on with it. There are some talks that have to happen, so be upfront about it. Wade on in.

You might just say, "This is going to be an awkward conversation. You can expect it is going to take about half an hour so grab a snack and let's go for a walk." At least it will strike their interest!

The first time your son or daughter hears you talk about pornography or sex they are likely to think it's totally weird and awkward, but it is amazing how quickly they will get used to it. Don't be put off by their initial reaction.

One shot at a tough topic is never enough so give yourself a few goes at it to get it right. The more often we talk about sensitive issues, the more it reminds our tweens that the door is always open to them. It also communicates that we aren't naive to the pressures they are facing. Have the mindset that these conversations never really finish.

## **Tip 5. Buy a Radiation Shield**

I do get concerned about the health risks for tweens (and us as adults!) who are connected to our phones all day. There are enough clinical studies to show increasing evidence that there is a link between mobile phones and certain brain tumours. Because the electromagnetic radiation is invisible the dangers to this exposure are not taken seriously or even thought about. It's the whole, 'out of sight, out of mind' scenario.

Although it is another expense (I can hear you groaning from here) a radiation shield is definitely worth putting on your tweens phone. Just Google 'radiation shields for phones' and you will find a range of scientifically approved shields to choose from. These shields block harmful radiation, which has to be a good thing for a growing brain!

# Bonus Video 1



For a 5 minute video on  
Social Media for Tweens

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# Bonus Video 2



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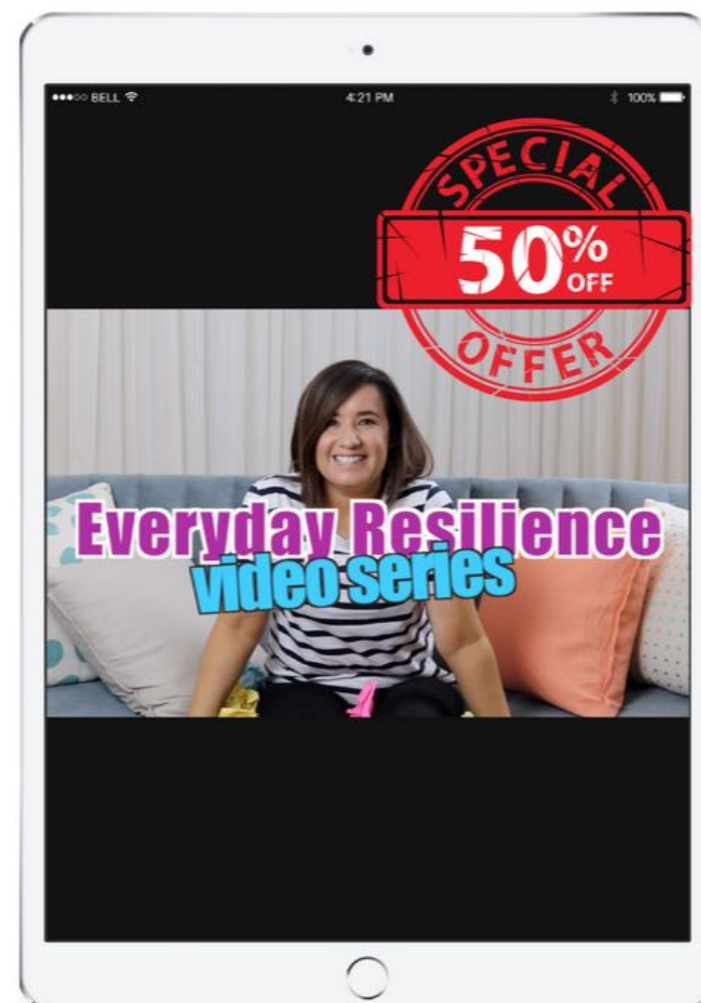
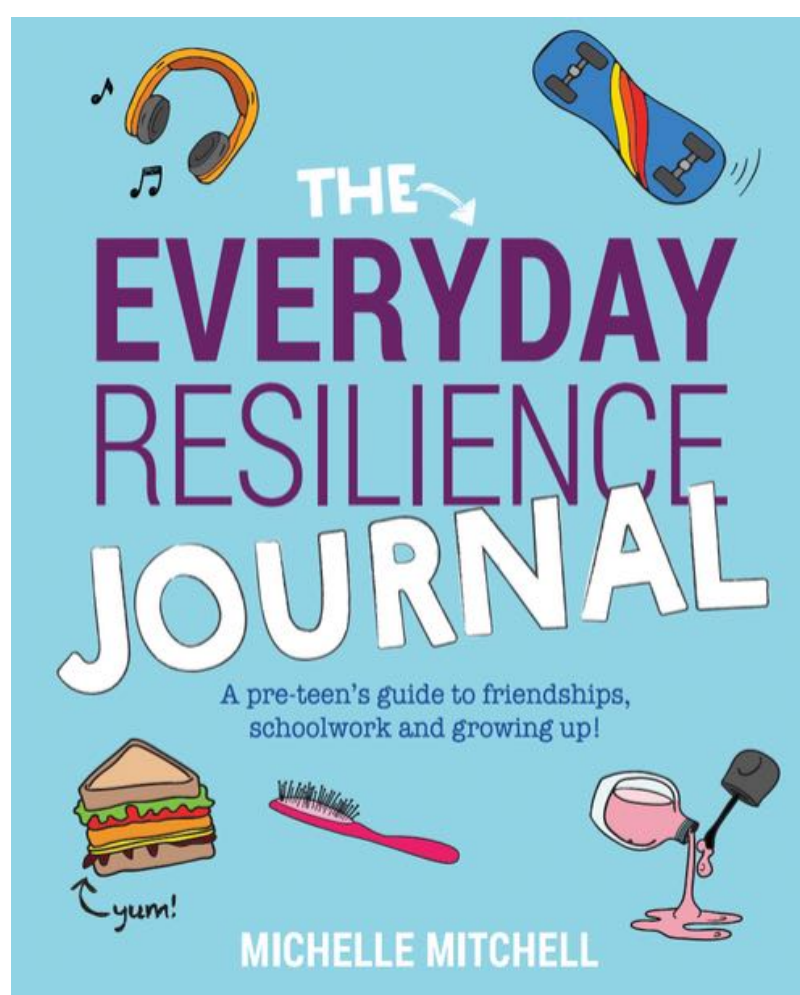
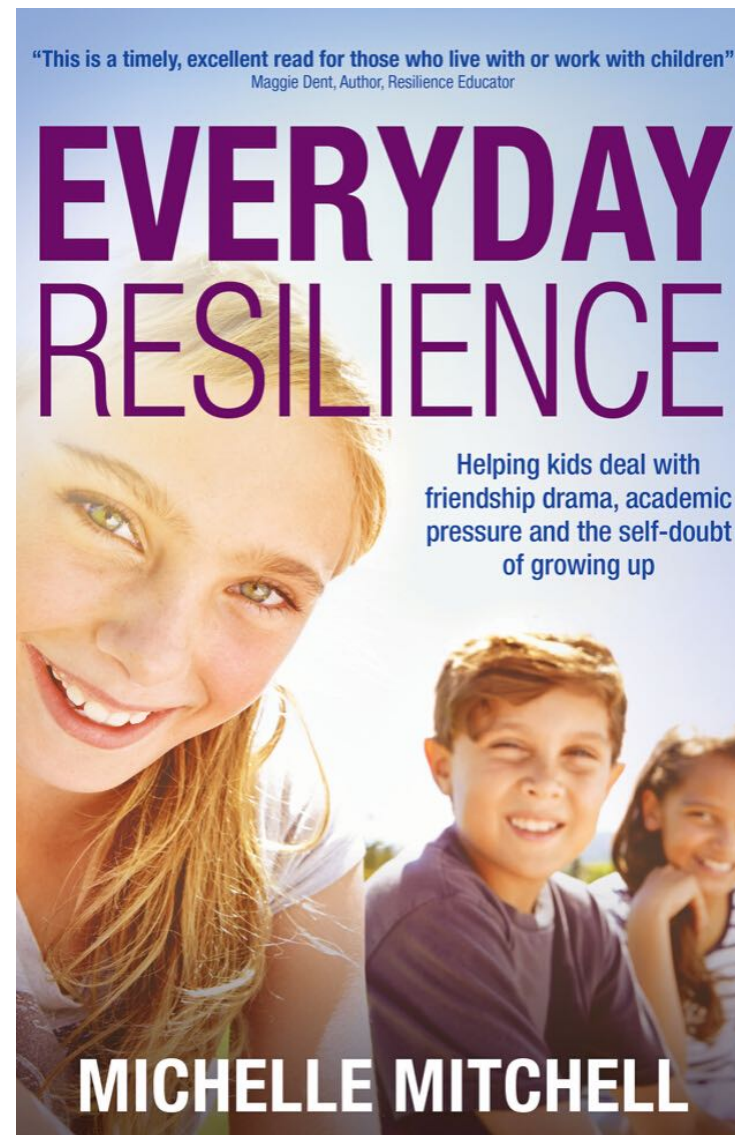
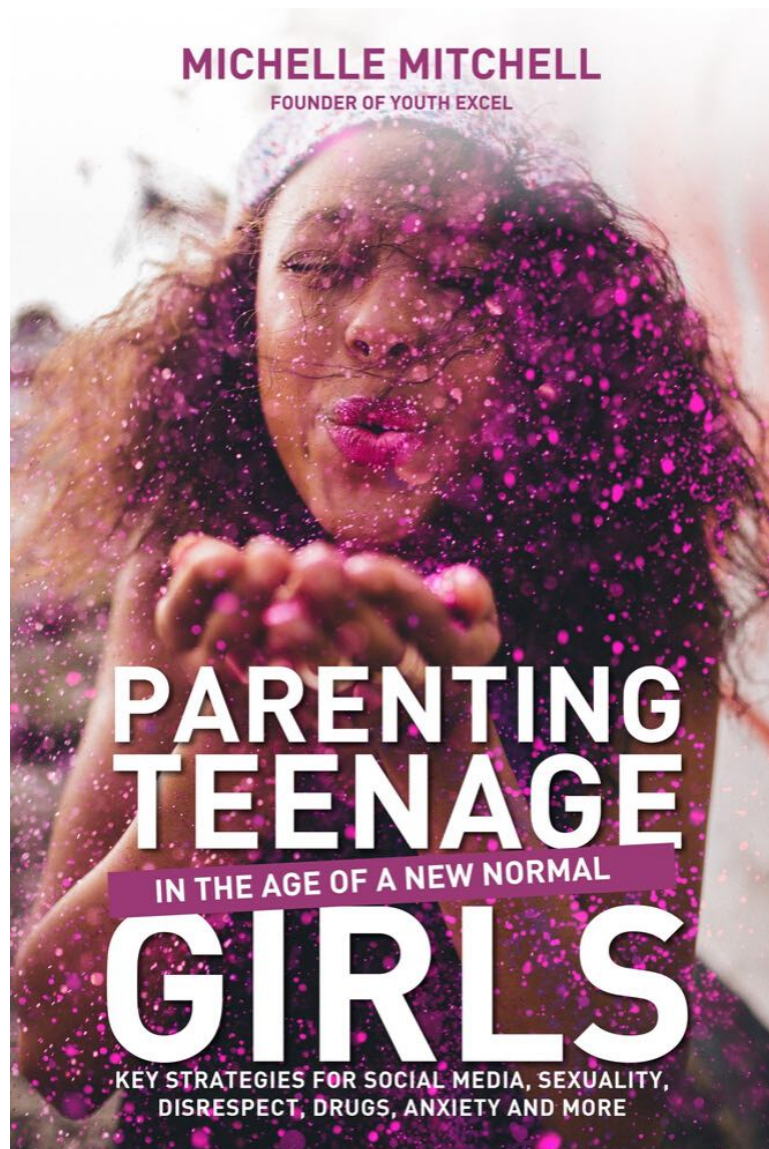
AN INTERVIEW WITH  
MICHELLE MITCHELL &  
BRETT LEE

A 30 minute interview with  
Brett Lee on Keeping Safe Online

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