

The Digital Lives of Teens: The School is the Neighborhood

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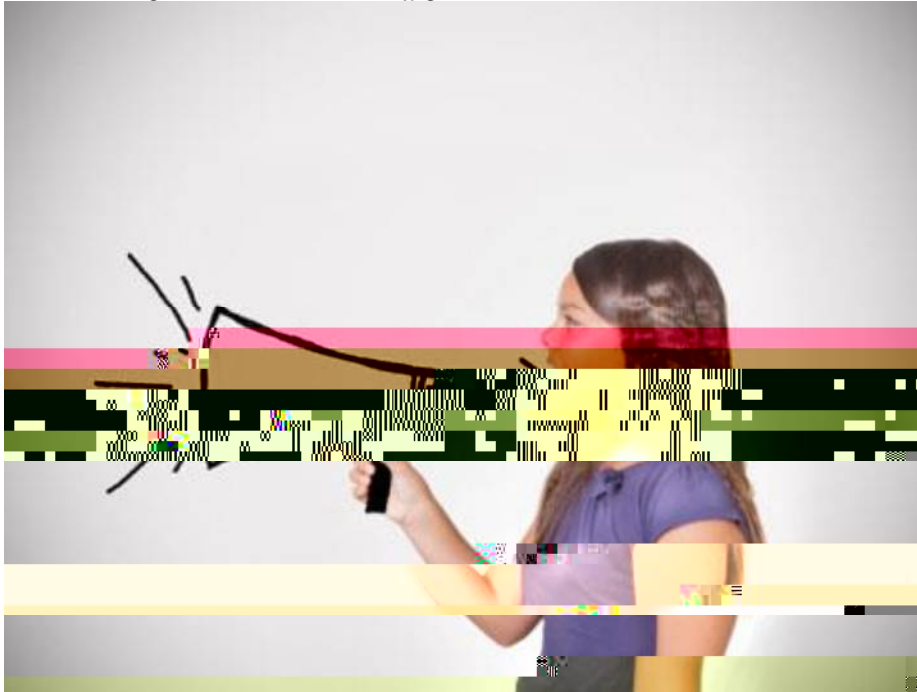


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It's hard work to parent a teen. In [a recent *New York Magazine* article](#), Jennifer Senior writes, "It's dicey business, being someone's prefrontal cortex by proxy. Yet modern culture tells us that that's one of the primary responsibilities of being a parent of a teen."

Of course, it's no surprise that the last thing teens want is to have a parent looking too closely into their lives. It's a constant push-pull phenomenon for parents and for teens. One minute, a teenager can descend into grumpiness, isolation and solitude, and in the same breath, that teen wants a hug, affection and a laugh.

And, when we throw social media and texting into the mix, the equation does not always balance out.

Megaphone Madness

For the parent, it can begin to feel like taking middle school algebra all over again, with the elusive search for the meaning of X, the giant unknown variable.

In the realm of social media and texting, teens want to go wherever the adults are not. The evidence bears this out, as Facebook grapples with how to keep teens in the fold. Facebook's failed attempt to purchase Snapchat for \$3 billion fell through to much public fanfare and reflected a larger issue of the migration of teens away from adults. The kids want their own digital playground.

It's a bit like a parent playing four square or pickup basketball on a nine-foot hoop at school recess. With the parent in the mix, the game is going to change. For the parent, sure, it can feel good to dunk on a nine-foot hoop or slam the red rubber ball into one of the four square corners, but the kids are left looking at the adult as though he or she has three heads. It's not the way the game is supposed to be played at school recess. The same thinking applies to social media and teens. Parents are not meant to be part of texting, Instagram or Snapchat.

Rachel Swan, in *San Francisco Weekly's* article "[Spy Kids: We're Snooping on Students to Stop Them From Snooping on Each Other](#)," explains the digital migratory patterns of teens:

When Facebook became the province of old people showcasing their baby pictures or preening about their lasagna, teens had already fled to [Instagram](#)

An important thing to remember, according to British psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, as quoted in New York Magazine, is this: "The adolescent is somebody who is trying to get himself kidnapped from a cult."

The cult is social media.