

NO FILTER



WE'RE TEACHING THIS

Social Media is awesome. It's brought us some of the best inventions in modern times. Like the selfie, or even better, the selfie stick. Maybe you're a fan of the hashtag or the GIF or weekly holidays like Throwback Thursday. All of those were all made popular by one social network or another. And, maybe one of the best things these apps have given us is the *filter*. Filters are amazing. They basically change the way you see something in a picture. A quick swipe and you can instantly make your photo look brighter, dimmer, older, or newer. You can change the shape of your eyes, change the color of your hair, or even swap faces with another human being! You know what we called that in the old days? Magic. Now, it's just normal. You take a pic and you automatically start swiping to the left or right to find filters that will make

the scene better or funnier or more interesting. But in the process of posting our lives online, other things can get filtered too. Maybe even things that shouldn't—like how we see ourselves, our words, and other people. When we can't see a situation clearly, it's easy to forget how powerful our posts and pics really are. Even though the Bible doesn't say much about which Instagram filter to use or whether screenshotting Snapchat is actually a sin, it does offer a lot of advice that's really helpful as we navigate our social lives online. As we explore what an ancient book can teach us about modern social life, we may just find God's plan for us isn't to use social media *less*, but instead enjoy it *more* as we learn to apply the right kinds of filters to what we do and say online.

THINK ABOUT THIS

by Dr. Kara Powell

Often parents feel like kids are tethered to their phones, constantly glancing or full-on staring into a screen. It's unnerving. But before we judge kids or insist they "put that thing down," we need to understand what *motivates* them to check social media so frequently. At the Fuller Youth Institute, we're fans of the adage, **"There's a belief behind every behavior."** By identifying our kids' motivations, we can empathize before we seek solutions. Without this empathy, our conversations about boundaries, rules, and good decisions get lost in translation.

Teenagers often seem hypersocial to adults because they are in a stage of life when they begin to form their own identities. The question, "Who am I?" plays like background music on a continuous loop throughout adolescence. Teenagers largely work on the answer to this question through relationships. And with lots of experimentation.

So why *do* teenagers constantly check social media? Why do they care so much about the likes, shares, and posts from their friends? We've found it helpful to think about social media as today's version of the school lunchroom.

School cafeterias have always been a kind of petri dish within which young people experiment—a social laboratory. To parents and educators, the noon break is about eating lunch. But for teens it can be the defining moment of the entire day. Every lunch is a kid's opportunity to try out an identity, observe, tweak the formula a bit, and get ready to test out a new version of themselves tomorrow.

Parents often underappreciate how a quick scroll through social media can be a lot like scanning the lunchroom.

Young people have very sophisticated ways of conveying social cues with digital media that we may struggle to see. Many of these cues are non-verbal, the equivalent of a thousand words in one image. That's why phenomena like emoji and photo sharing catch on like wildfire (and keep evolving). It's also why monitoring all the likes, shares, votes, and views is so important for our kids. And the irony of the lunchroom analogy is that often today's teenagers are also using social media in their *actual* lunchrooms, navigating all these layers at once.

It turns out teenagers' drive to connect today is motivated by the same social drive that helped us to form our identities decades ago, with new technologies layered in. And just like you used to talk to your friends on a home phone—probably one attached to a wall, maybe with a long curly cord—the basic need to connect remains.

In other words, our kids are a lot like us after all. The more we understand that reality, the more we can help our kids discover their identity through relationships—whether or not those bonds are forged digitally. They're just navigating the journey in the only world they've ever known, and it's a digitally-connected one.

Adapted with permission from the book, *Right Click: Parenting Your Teenager in a Digital Media World*, by Kara Powell, Art Bamford, and Brad M. Griffin.

**To connect to a wider community of parents,
check out www.parentcue.org.**

TRY THIS

As parents, it's tempting to wonder if our role in social media is on the sideline, but there's no reason to sit this one out. This week, **try downloading the same social media apps that your kids use and get an account.** The goal is to get to know the app and the specific vocabulary (tweet, swipe, DM, filter) that your kid is using.

Of course, as with everything, there are a few ground rules that can make your experience more pleasant.

1. Let your kid know you're getting an account and ask for their help.

2. Decide as a parent whether you will participate, post, send messages, or simply observe. Remember, the goal is not to embarrass your kid, but to better understand their world.

3. Just like being at a new job or in a new community, some things won't make sense. Try not to get frustrated, but be patient as you get to know the unique culture of this social network and how things work.