

Ignite Your Faith 5 Rules for Social Media Sanity

It's a big, big world out there. Don't get lost in it.

Ashley Grace Emmert

When I was in middle school and high school, the closest thing I got to “social media” was AOL Instant Messenger. I didn't have a cell phone, even for texting, until I was 17, and I got my first smart phone at 26. I'm just saying, I was a teen only nine years ago, but the things teenagers have to deal with and navigate now are *way* different from what I dealt with in the very recent past. Luckily, as a twenty-something adult I am just as obsessed with social media as the average teenager, so I've had time to navigate the cool new apps and social media sites over the past few years.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and all the rest are fun, and a great way to connect with friends. But they're also, as I experienced even back in my AIM days, kind of tricky. I remember messaging with a boy from my high school, and, because it wasn't face-to-face and felt more hidden, having semi-inappropriate conversations that would have horrified my mother if she'd ever found out about them. These were conversations I would *never* have had in person. As a matter of fact, they horrified me, and I later ended up confessing it all to my youth pastor—and my youth group, while the boy I'd been talking to was *in the room*. Talk about mortifying. (I didn't give his name though—although I probably should have, to my youth pastor.)

It's easy to find yourself talking about something you wish you hadn't—and now, there are all the added temptations of photos and videos. Seriously, it's kind of a crazy jungle of temptation. So let me spare you the drama and the guilt that comes with inappropriate interactions by giving you my patented lists of do's and don'ts for social media sites:

Rule #1: Do not, in any circumstance, interact with someone you don't know.

Like it or not, there are predators on Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and any other new website or app that comes along. I know it's easy to think, “This would never happen to me,” but for your own safety, don't interact with anyone who you don't know in real life.

Predators and creeps look for ways to find out your personal information, and I want to keep each of you just a little bit safer by saying, *don't give them anything*. Instead, block anyone you don't know on any social media platform. Even Twitter. And Instagram. Seriously, you don't need to place yourself in the position of

becoming a victim to some criminal that may be out to use you. God has put you where he's put you, with the people who surround you each day. Live your life with them and enjoy the fact that maybe sometimes the world feels a little bit small. Trust me, that feeling goes away eventually, and then you will miss it. Beware of stranger danger on the internet.

Rule #2: Do not, EVER, post a picture of yourself wearing (or not wearing) anything you wouldn't wear in public.

I know this sounds harsh and unnecessary, but you've got to be careful what kind of images of yourself you're sharing with the world. Especially those "hold the camera up super high and make a duck-face in a low cut t-shirt" pictures—girls, you don't want someone looking down your shirt, do you? Don't offer that view. And boys? Put on a shirt before you snap that pic.

It's important, especially with Snapchat, to remember that anything you send out into the web never, *ever* really goes away. Even if you're snapping a close friend of the same gender, be careful what you're putting onto that world wide web. You can show your bestie your new swimsuit when she comes over. You don't need to snap it to her. It's too easy to screenshot anything you receive, and you don't want something like that showing up somewhere you weren't planning for it to go.

Rule #3: Do not chat late at night.

I once had a high school youth leader tell me that nothing good happens after 10 p.m., and I've found that to be true, especially when it comes to chat conversations with the opposite sex. When you're tired, you're more loosened up, and it's harder to make good decisions.

One summer during college, an acquaintance from high school asked me online to meet up with him at midnight to "hang out." I turned down that offer, though it was tempting to say yes—he'd always been so cute in school, and we talked way more online than we ever did in real life—but I'd seen the way his life had been heading, and I decided, in a brief moment of level-headedness, to say no. I'm glad I did, because I was tired, and my inhibitions would have been way down. It could have led to a way bigger mistake than I would have even imagined.

Don't chat, or text, or snap, so late at night, and don't sneak out late to hang out with someone because they ask you to online. Have the respect to either ask for or be asked on a real date, not a late night "hangout." This rule is amplified if you are

in a committed relationship because you could easily find yourself involved in an emotional affair.

Rule #4: If someone is asking you to do or say something you don't feel good about, get out of that situation. Immediately.

The beauty of social media is that you can literally just turn off your phone or shut your computer and that situation is over. Don't hesitate to block or unfriend someone who makes you uncomfortable or asks you to do something you don't want to do—those people aren't worth your time, and you aren't going to “love them to Jesus” by sending them a selfie.

Along with this, if someone is really out of line (asking you to send nude pictures, requesting to have inappropriate conversations, etc.), stop the communication with this person. If someone is harassing you online, remember, they're probably doing so to other people as well. Tell someone, especially the police, sexual predators are notorious for online stalking.

Rule #5: *Do* use your social media interactions to show people the love of Christ.

Like it or not, social media is a huge part of all of our lives and relationships, and the way you represent yourself on those platforms can be a direct representation of Jesus. Wouldn't it be incredible to find out that you encouraged a friend with a status or comment? How would it feel if you were able to pray for someone because you saw on Twitter that they were really having a hard time? What if you were able to help a friend who was getting sucked into inappropriate conversations? It's a weird world, and it's important for you all to look out for each other.

God has placed you in this time, with all of these social media platforms, for a reason. Be a witness for him. And use it—to connect, and to love people well. But be wise.