**Ethics Matter - Rotary**

**Module 1**

*“Relationships are based on four principles: respect; understanding; acceptance; and appreciation”*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

**Should parents monitor their children’s social media activities?**

An ethical dilemma for parents is whether to [**monitor their child’s social media activities**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkzwHuf6C2U)**.** Your children spend a large part of their day online engaging in behaviours that have implications for their health and well-being.

It’s important to set the ground rules when you as a parent first give a smartphone, tablet, computer, or other electronic devices to a child, including that they will be monitored until they are old enough to understand their obligations online.

Your child may unknowingly become involved in potentially dangerous behaviours online through chat rooms, instant messaging, and emails. Predatory behaviour can have damaging effects on your child’s self-image and feelings of self-worth.

It’s important to have conversations with your child to be sure they’re aware of the warning signs and what to do when they feel a predator is in their midst.

Another reason to monitor your child’s online activities is to teach them about cyberbullying. [**Cyberbullying**](https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/bullying) manifests in name-calling or insults, spreading gossip and rumours, and circulating unflattering pictures.

Cyberbullying threatens the safety and security of your child’s. It can create harmful effects, including hurt feelings, sadness, depression, anxiety, anger, shame, fear, frustration, low self-esteem, inability to trust others, withdrawal, avoidance of social relationships, poor academic performance, bullying of others, and, in extreme cases, suicide.

Being targeted online can destroy feelings of self-worth and make it virtually impossible to build and improve self-esteem. These behaviours make it more difficult for your child to be happy and lead a meaningful life.

**The case for monitoring**

The key issue is to teach your child responsible behaviour and that actions have consequences. The following lists good arguments for monitoring.

Communicating with your child about social media limitations can build responsible behaviour and they learn to be accountable for their actions.

Monitoring their behaviour can help deal with problems such as sexting and cyberbullying that can be harmful to their growth and development.

Monitoring can help to control predatory behaviour that threatens your child’s well-being.

Discussing online behaviours can be used as a teachable moment to explain what’s meant by respecting others and how online behaviours promote civility in relationships.

**Reasons not to monitor**

**There are a few good reasons for not monitoring as follows.**

Your child has a right to privacy and may not want their parents to see everything they do on social networking sites; they may perceive it to be invading their sacred online space.

Trusting parents is a key issue in strengthening the bond between your child and parent.

Your child may wonder what else parents are monitoring; do they follow them on dates, for example, especially at younger ages?

**Returning to the original question:**

Should parents monitor their children’s online activities? If you are a parent, the benefits of doing so and protecting your kids against harmful behaviours outweigh the costs.

Yes, privacy and trust are important issues to your child, and they may not understand why you have chosen to ignore these. Still, you are the parent and should provide guidance for your child in navigating the sometimes choppy waters online.

**Ask yourself:**

How would you feel if you didn’t monitor those activities and your child became the target of a predator or was cyberbullied?

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