



Five Questions Every Parent Should Ask When Considering If Facebook Is Right for Their Child



Facebook's decision to investigate technology that would make them compliant with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), and subsequently allow children under the age of 13 to join the network, has me deeply concerned as a parent. The argument that this move would make Facebook safer for children is misleading and designed to placate the rightful concerns of parents and those who care about the well-being of children online. As a parent of five digital citizens ranging from 8 to 21 years old, and as a family Internet safety expert, there are a number of questions I urge you to ask, and facts that I encourage you to consider when deciding if Facebook is the social network that you want your child to be a part of, even if they choose to abide by COPPA.

The questions I encourage you to ask are the same questions you would ask when it comes to your child's offline activities whether it's the school they attend, the children they spend time with or the teams they join. These questions will allow you to assess if Facebook is the right decision for your family.

Is Facebook...

1. Safe for my child?
2. Honest and trustworthy?
3. Offering an age-appropriate experience for my child?
4. Beneficial to my child?
5. Necessary if there are other kid-centric social networks out there already?

Based on how the social network exists now, and the reputation it's garnered in the last five years or so, these are some of the answers you'll find to your questions:

Question: Is Facebook Safe for My Child?

Fact: Facebook has a reputation for being home to large paedophilia groups, NAMBLA (North American Man Boy Love Association), PTHC (Pre Teen Hard Core) and “Lolita” being a few examples. While you can make the argument that your child could run into these online predators anywhere on the Internet, nowhere is it easier to create and find a social community built around the desire to normalize and advocate for sex with children and preteens.

Fact: Law Enforcement authorities, including the FBI & UK LE & CEOP, struggle to keep up with the proliferation of child pornography on Facebook and what others call a “child-predator playground”.

Fact: Facebook’s members are constantly presented with malicious applications and links that allow hackers, identity thieves and online predators to stalk and/or lure users. Your children are no exception. In fact, a child’s undeveloped judgment skills make them even more susceptible to these issues.

Fact: Facebook has been referred to as the human-trafficking platform.

Fact: Facebook has been used as a distribution tool repeatedly for child pornography.

Bottom line is Facebook is not safe for your child.

Question: Is Facebook honest and trustworthy?

Fact: The Federal Trade Commission charged Facebook with *repeated* violations for deceiving consumers when it came to privacy practices. The commission’s settlement order outlined eight counts in which it claimed Facebook had deceived its users by altering its privacy practices without warning.

“The FTC alleges numerous violations of the FTC Act, which prohibits deceptive or unfair acts or practices,” says Jon Leibowitz, chairman of the FTC. You can read more about their violations, [here](#), and Facebook admitting their deception, [here](#).

Fact: COPPA has been around since 1998. Facebook could have eliminated the profiles of a reported 7.5 million children under the age of 13.

Question: Is Facebook offering an age-appropriate experience for my child?

Your child’s participation on Facebook isn’t just about status updates, Likes and sharing as we parents most often experience. It’s about the content and culture that surrounds your child on Facebook.

Fact: Take the popular Facebook group, “Smash or Pass”. As documented, young children can post themselves as available to be “smashed” (have sex) or “pass” (not have sex).

Fact: Consider Sims Social on Facebook, a game developed by Playfish and published by EA Games. While users avatars are incentivized to do everything including taking out the trash, they’re also rewarded for getting naked and participating in cybersex.

Fact: Violent games are commonplace, (Sniper Scope, Tequila Zombie, Rooftop Sniper, Trooper Assassin and Street Wars) and often members are required to be age 18 to play the games.

Fact: A parent can't do anything about the overwhelming amount of inappropriate apps, pages and groups dedicated to sex and violence. A simple search in Facebook for words like "horny" or "porn" will give you a glimpse into what's available on the social network.

Fact: Facebook members have harassed other members.

Question: Is Facebook beneficial to my child?

Fact: The content, culture and community that exists on Facebook is inappropriate, adult-intended, dangerous and in some cases illegal. Integrating technology solutions to comply with COPPA won't change this reality.

Advocates for this change argue that there's some educational value to allowing children to join Facebook, but the truth is, most kids join Facebook for the simple fact that many of their friends are members. They haven't joined for the education factor.

While COPPA compliance is a staple in creating a safer experience for children online, that's not really what's most important. What is important for children is being able to enjoy social media on a platform that:

- Makes it OK for your child to just be a kid
- Offers an age-appropriate experience
- Allows your child to showcase and pursue their unique interests and talents
- Teaches them the importance of responsible digital citizenship
- Teaches them why their privacy matters and how to protect it

Question: Is Facebook-for-children necessary if there are other kid-centric social networks out there already?

With children spending more time online, sometimes more than all other daily activities combined, it's important to assess the influence this media has over your child, and ultimately your family. There are a dozen kids-only social networks out there that were created with your child in mind.

Mark Zuckerberg built and designed Facebook for the adult crowd, so I encourage the raising and educating of young digital citizens by those who authentically care. After children have the opportunity to participate in a holistically healthy social media platform where they have the opportunity to become an educated digital citizen, then they should graduate onto Facebook if they so choose.