

I Hate To Admit It, But My Mom Was Right About Social Media

I've grown up sharing things with my sister, Juliana. Bathrooms, clothes, an affinity for sushi and baking, and even a bedroom. We nearly share a birthday. Mine is March 14, 2002, and hers is March 15, 2004. I'm two years older than Juliana, yet we both became allowed to download Snapchat at the same time. This wasn't uncommon in my family, as she was also allowed to get her ears pierced, go to Coachella, and start wearing mascara at the same time as me. The injustices of being an older sister are not lost on me; I'm sure they will continue for the rest of our lives.

At the start of our social media journey, Juliana and I received a 20-page phone contract from our parents, which listed out a set of rules we must follow as we embarked on the journey of posting over-filtered photos that would embarrass us in the years to come. In the contract, our mom wrote, "I hope that you understand that it is my job to raise you into a well rounded, healthy young woman that can function in the world and exist with technology, not be ruled by it".

And thus, our social media journey began. From the beginning, Juliana and I have used social media differently. I used to spend hours on Pinterest searching for fashion inspiration, and she would scroll through Instagram tirelessly for the perfect cookie recipe. Fast forward 12 years, and we are still doing things differently. I went viral last year on TikTok for posting our lab puppies, Bruce and Briggs (they have over 11 million views at the hashtag [#BruceandBriggs](#)). Juliana, on the other hand, was stalked and harassed by a creepy ex-boyfriend for months through social media.

I could write a whole other article about the injustices faced by stalking and harassment victims. [Did you know](#) most states will only intervene in stalking and harassment cases if the perpetrator threatens serious bodily injury or death? I digress.

I'm not saying that social media is the only factor that allowed this man to stalk my sister, but it gave him access to her in ways he wouldn't have had without it. My sister was only 15 years old when this all happened, and I think her age had a lot to do with her ability to prevent and handle this issue.

What I'm highlighting is the notable distinction in how I engage with social media compared to my sister. Starting at an older age, I've developed a clearer boundary between social media, my mental well-being, and my tangible life experiences. This distinction stems from entering the realm of social media with a greater maturity and life understanding, unlike my sister who had more growing up to do still. I believe that social media, especially for younger people, is a driver of mental health concerns. And the experts agree.

The [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the U.S. Attorney General](#) said, "We have gaps in our full understanding of the mental health impacts posed by social media but at this point cannot conclude it is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents." Not all parents are as proactive in protecting their children from the dangers of social media as my parents were, and even with their careful planning and teachings, my sister still experienced a

significant toll on her mental health. My sister isn't the only one who has had adverse effects on her mental health because of social media- 6 in 10 Americans say [social media negatively affects their mental health](#).

The Attorney General's report found that we are experiencing a national youth mental health crisis, and according to the [Child Mind Institute](#), social media can exacerbate the symptoms. According to CMI, for kids who are struggling with mental health issues like depression, experts recommend extra caution as social media algorithms tend to serve kids content that reflects their mood and can perpetuate negative feelings. Even now, as a fairly educated adult with a good pulse on social media, I find myself [doom-scrolling](#) and self-diagnosing myself with new allergies or illnesses based on videos I find on TikTok.

When I was younger, I was so annoyed with my parents for creating a contract for my sister and me to use social media. Now, I wish they would've added a clause preventing us from using it until we were older and understood ourselves and the world more.