

# Six Ways to Avoid Those Social Media Landmines

By [Gwyneth Jones](#)



*I've been sharing on social media professionally for eight years now, and I have to admit, it can be kinda tricky. There is a goldmine of information out there for teachers, but also landmines that can be quite treacherous if not deftly avoided.*

*As educators, I passionately believe we should use social media to push the positive, celebrate student successes, share resources with our colleagues, and connect with parents and the community.*

*But how do we professionally use these tools without torturing ourselves over every Tweet, update, or Instagram pic? Easy! Try these six tips to share sensibly online.*

**Follow School District Policy**

Does your district have a technology and social media upolicy? If so, read it and follow it to the letter. I'm so proud that my district has had a "Responsible Use of Technology and Social Media Policy" since 2002 and has updated it every three years. Here's one of the many parts that I agree with:

*"Any postings by employees will not reference, link or contain: Statements that could be viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening or intimidating; that disparage students, employees, parents or community members; or that could be viewed as harassment or bullying."*

Well, duh! Before you Tweet, post, or share—make sure you're following the rules. I'm daring, but I'm not stupid, and I kinda love my job.

## **Should You Follow Students?**

No matter your school policy, the easiest answer is no. Do not follow or "friend" students. Sure, we all want to be cool, connect with our kiddos, and be there for them in a crisis, but there are too many potential hazards in following their lives on social media. My pat answer to students who ask me to follow their private Twitter or Instagram accounts goes something like this: "Sorry, no can do. Until you graduate I'm a teacher, not a friend. After you graduate, then maybe I can become a friend and a mentor."

But the answer to students who ask me to follow their public accounts is a definite maybe, depending on whether the account is open and transparent, they're over 13 and out of my school, and that they asked me directly to follow them.

The clear caveat that could turn a maybe into a yes is this: I would make sure to clearly and firmly tell them that "anything I see that you post that is the least bit inappropriate, bullying, uncivil, illegal, against our school policy or state law, I am ethically and professionally impelled to act upon, inform the authorities, and call your Mama! Yes, I would totally tell on you in a heartbeat for your own good and because I care."

I recently talked to my supervisor, Julie Alonso-Hughes, district coordinator of instructional technology and library media, about additional social media guidelines. She said, "It's really all about common sense. If you saw suspicious behavior in the hallway, same rules apply, you would have to report it." She also added a few handy hashtags to keep in mind: *#youwouldntsaythattomyface*, *#thinkb4upost*, *#commonsense*

## **Don't Share the Private. Do Share the Personal (Maybe)**

On social media, it's good to overshare the professional; under share the personal; and NEVER share the private. Because that's just creepy!

There's a big difference between sharing what is personal versus sharing what is private. We all know the professional tone to take when we talk face-to-face with kids, parents, and the community, but sometimes with the buffer of a keyboard we lose proper perspective. What sounds funny in your head doesn't always translate to hilarious in the written word. You can delete a Tweet or a post but they can always be captured...and BOOM! Landmine! Best to err on the side of professional.

That's not to say that I don't occasionally post personal stuff on Twitter, Instagram, Scoopit, and Pinterest. I might share a Kindle quote from what I'm reading, a picture of my Mom's perfect Thanksgiving turkey, or a selfie with a friend at an Ed Tech or Library conference. Sharing personal info shows you're human, approachable, and authentic.

# ON SOCIAL MEDIA

It's Good To: **OVERSHARE**

*the Professional*

**UNDER SHARE**

*the Person*

**NEVER SHARE**

*the Private*

(BECAUSE THAT'S JUST CREEPY)

@GwynethJones - The Daring Librarian

Flickr CC Photo by @KAlexanderson

## Do Share the Awesome!

I think the best way to use social media in school isn't with kids but about kids. Without being preachy, we can be a role model for effective and ethical social media use to our kiddos and colleagues. Most of us have smartphones on us all the time, making it so easy to capture those exciting daily lessons, activities, projects, and general fun. With Instagram tied to my Twitter, I like to catch pictures of my students being *awesome*. From #Shelfies (kids posing with books they've checked out), science projects, robotics, school plays, impromptu dancing, lip dubs, to our Makerspace—this is an opportunity to connect with the community.

Make sure to check your school policy about publishing the faces of kids. If that is a concern or a confusion, or if you have kids who are camera shy, consider taking dynamic pictures from behind, not showing their faces but their hands doing, making, writing, and creating.

## You Are What You Like and Re-Tweet

It may not seem fair, but you are what you and like, favorite, and share on social media. Sure, you may not have said it yourself, but a re-Tweet or “like” is an endorsement. Just ask any politician or public figure who has felt the heat for it. People can also see what you like or favorite. So, it’s best not to re-Tweet bad language or something controversial.

## **Be Human but Avoid Dinner Party Topics**

When it comes to controversial topics, think of social media like an enormous dinner party, taking place in public. Even if you have a disclaimer saying “opinions my own,” people will judge you (and your colleagues, your school, your district) for every touchy, snarky, hot-button personal opinion that you express. Keep personal topics for face to face conversations. Of course, using the term “Bless your heart” is always correct and ever so nuanced!

Bottom line: Social media is here to stay. It’s a powerful tool for educators that can transform your professional practice or blow up in your face. Before you get started, consider just lurking and listening for a while. Know this: You will never regret being kind. Don’t give toxic people, situations, or haters the time or energy...in life or on social media. Passion and positivity go a long way in almost all situations—and it’s a super start on social media!

This article was greatly inspired by Keegan Korph, @OPSMrsKorf and her excellent Edublog post: [“When Students Ask to Follow or Friend: An Ethical Response Guide for Educators.”](#) (For additional online sources and material, check out the [NEAToday app](#))

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