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An estimated 74% of Americans over the age of 18 use social networking websites. Naturally, some of these adults are educators. But with news stories of teachers being fired or disciplined for tweets, status updates, and Instagram photos becoming more common, educators can be (understandably) anxious when using social media.

Below are some cardinal rules educators must know about using social media. Following these rules may save you from being fired one day!

1. Know your school, county, and state's social media guidelines for employees. There may already be rules set in place by your employer regarding status updates, profile pictures, and more.
2. Do not "friend" or "follow" students on your personal social media accounts! Implement a rule that students can follow or friend you only after they graduate.

On Twitter, you may have to block students from following you. Facebook lets you decide who you are friends with, but will also automatically allow anyone that attempts to friend you become a follower of your profile. This means students that attempt to friend you might automatically see your status updates. Learn how to block these students here.

3. Keep your profile pictures clean. Your profile picture should never show alcohol, drugs, or anything that can be misconstrued as a gang sign (remember, administrators in central offices often lack a sense of humor). Even if you have your profile locked down for privacy, your profile picture can still appear on search engines.
4. Do not affiliate yourself with your school on a personal profile. List your employment as "Teacher at XXX County Schools" or not at all.
5. Do not geo-tag your posts with your school location. This will lead students right to your posts.
6. Remember, it is possible to take a screen shot on Snapchat. "Snaps" or Snapchat posts can last forever.
7. Set your Instagram account to private. That way, you must approve of anyone who views your posts. And remember, if you link your Instagram account with your Twitter or Facebook accounts, students may be able to see individual Instagram posts without accessing your entire profile.

8. Never mention your school in any post. Even with privacy settings, your post could be found on search engines.
9. Never complain about your job online, especially if you are followed by your school and/or co-workers. This is a good practice for all professionals, not just teachers!
10. Never, ever, ever post photos of your students on social media! Each parent has their own personal beliefs about posting their child's likeness online. Some parents overshare while others don't want their children online at all. It is not your place to post their children online. You are also violating a student's privacy by doing this. Not only are you sharing their location information (if your location/school is listed in your profile, that child is now associated with that location/school), they may not feel comfortable having photos of themselves online.