

KELLY GORDON: Some big changes are on the way for kids who use Instagram or Facebook. It comes as part of a \$17 billion settlement reached last week between the tech giant Meta and 47 states, including Minnesota. Besides the money, the deal mandates changes like a two-hour daily limit, blocking the use of these apps at night, and silencing notifications during school hours.

To help us out how this will work in the real world for families and kids is Jodi Dworkin. She's a professor and extension specialist in family social science at the University of Minnesota. Welcome to *Minnesota Now*, Jodi.

JODI DWORKIN: Great, thanks for having me.

KELLY GORDON: So let's just say, start at the beginning. When you first heard about this amazingly big settlement, what was your first reaction to these changes?

JODI DWORKIN: I think it's really great news for families. I think these restrictions are really promising, and just another piece of the puzzle for families and navigating social media with young people, and figuring out how to best support them in becoming healthy and responsible digital citizens.

KELLY GORDON: I'm curious, because you study this, how do these changes, as part of this settlement, how do they line up with the guidance that you give parents and guardians about helping kids control this environment?

JODI DWORKIN: So I think the good news is that they align really well with a lot of the things families are concerned about and perhaps should be concerned about. So things like social media interfering with sleep, with schoolwork, social comparisons, wanting to seek likes and trying to post the perfect picture. And so these restrictions really align with helping us think about how we can limit and reduce those risks for young people. So that's the good news about it.

KELLY GORDON: And talk a little bit about why this is particularly an acute risk for young people and for teenagers with brain development and those sorts of things that are happening at that age.

JODI DWORKIN: Adolescence is a really interesting time for development, and it's a time when young people are developing, in lots of ways, but also when their brains are developing. So they're particularly vulnerable to reward seeking, so seeking likes, for example. But they're also at a time when their brains are developing really important connections for adulthood. And those connections happen through new experiences. So we want young people to be in different environments and different contexts and interacting with different people in different settings because that's how those brain connections are going to be built. And they look different when you talk with someone in person than they do when you're simply on social media with them.

KELLY GORDON: And that's what I was going to ask, because I do hear that pushback. I'm a parent to teenagers so I hear that pushback, sometimes. Like, I am talking to people. I am interacting. I'm going to different virtual communities. But you're saying it's not the same in our brain as in real-life experiences. Right?

JODI DWORKIN: It's just a different experience. It just triggers us in different ways. Even as adults, right? When you're in a Zoom meeting with someone, you're just experiencing it very differently than when you're sitting in a room face-to-face with someone and are having those interactions.

KELLY Do you think this settlement does enough to help address some of the concerns and issues that you hear about

GORDON: and see?

JODI DWORKIN: Well, I think, it's complicated. And I think it's not a one-pronged response. So I think some of the critique around even school policies has been, it doesn't hold social media companies accountable for what they're doing. And so I think this is one piece of it. And I think we still need families setting rules and policies. We still need schools setting rules and policies. So I think this is another really important piece of the puzzle to really help support young people and help mitigate some of the potential risks that they can experience.

KELLY What would you advise schools and/or parents? I'm thinking especially as schools starting back up. I know a lot of

GORDON: schools are changing their policies around cell phone use, at least. What would you advise them and/or parents when it comes to how to help their young people interact with these kinds of apps?

JODI DWORKIN: So I think one of the things that I hope this settlement will do is create opportunities for conversation. You know, it'd be really interesting to sit down with young people and say, hey, this is coming out. Why do you think these restrictions are being put in place? How would you feel if you weren't allowed to use filters? How do you think you and your friends would experience posting things differently if you weren't worried about filters or you didn't get to see how many likes were there? What would that look like for you?

So I think continuing to have some of the same conversations that we're having with young people, continuing to hear their perspective. They're pretty clear that there's a lot of benefits to them of being on social media. And they're also pretty clear that they understand social media companies are not designed to protect them, that they're not designed to keep them safe, and they are designed to keep them addicted and scrolling.

KELLY Just to keep them plugged in. And I do say, I think, as I talk to young people, especially the younger kids, like Gen

GORDON: Alpha, they are really coming into this with eyes wide open with that because they are watching what's happening, maybe, to their older siblings or cousins. Their parents have watched what's happened. And I do feel like there's a shifting in the way that they look at social media, parents and kids saying, that this tool isn't just here to help me. Like, it is useful, and I can use it, but I have to be really wise about it.

JODI DWORKIN: Right. We're hearing that even from college students, who are now coming in saying, no, I don't want to be using AI. Like, this is not the expectation. And we are seeing a shift.

So parents of teenagers, many of them still did not grow up with technology. So we still have some interesting generational shifts that we're starting to see, where parents of younger kids did. And so, I think, we will start to see some differences as young people develop and grow up, having grown up fully with technology versus those who didn't, and how they experience and want to navigate that.

KELLY Do you have any specific tips, if people are listening right now, when it comes to teens and families, how to

GORDON: monitor this, how to make it so that it's a place you can still visit? You're not saying, OK, what we're going to do is get rid of all of our computers, and we're never going to have a phone. But you're saying how do we use it wisely and in a way that keeps kids safe?

JODI DWORKIN: I would say one thing to keep in mind is that this settlement is not a solution. So we're going to see restrictions roll up slowly. We don't know what they're going to look like when they actually do roll out. And so families still need to be really aware of how they're setting up social media accounts. What are the privacy settings? The social media accounts are all set up differently. The defaults are all different. So sometimes location setting off is off, sometimes it isn't. And so it's really important for families to stay up on that with different social media sites.

This is also only Facebook and Instagram. It doesn't address YouTube, which is the most commonly used social media app by young people. It doesn't address TikTok or Snapchat, either. So I think engaging with young people is really important about what kinds of rules and restrictions are needed in your family and why, understanding what the benefits are for them of using social media so that you can balance that and co-create rules together as a family.

KELLY GORDON: And I mean, that kind of leads to the next thing is that some kids are going to be like, yeah, I don't really like these rules. I like having a free for all. I don't want limits. Do you have any advice for parents who are saying, yeah, I'm trying to keep the conversation open, but my kids know this tech better than I do, they can go back in and turn things on? Like, it's tough.

JODI DWORKIN: It is super tough. It can be a full-time job to monitor your kids' social media. And so, I think, continuing to work through that together. And so when we make rules and changes with our kids, they don't often like them. And so, I often recommend, so put something in place for a couple of weeks and see how it goes, and then agree to come back together and talk about it.

How did it go? Did it work? Did it not work? Maybe, they're OK. Maybe, I could see, yeah, it didn't take me 10 times as long to get my homework done, or I slept better at night, but I didn't quite like, we turned it off at 8:00, and maybe could we negotiate to 8:30? So being able to revisit that and work through some of that discomfort, I think, is really important.

And so having that open conversation, having it in a way that kids don't feel like you are completely monitoring everything they do and criticizing everything that they're doing online, and trying to just prevent them from being online. when you can come together to think about, OK, I want you to have this space, if that's what's appropriate in your family, so how can we create it in a way that is safe for you, but also meets those your goals of wanting to interact with your friends and peers and other people?

KELLY GORDON: It's that conversation. Last question here.

Minnesota is set to receive at least like \$214 million from this settlement. What do you hope that money will be directed toward?

JODI DWORKIN: I hope we'll see a lot of research coming out so that we can understand how these bans and how these changes and restrictions are really getting rolled out, how families are experiencing them, and then what are the changes that we're seeing for kids. So the US is not the first country to do this, but a lot of those restrictions, even Australia was the first country to set bans, but even that has not been in place very long. So we just don't know a lot about the actual benefits and risks of doing this for our young people. And so, I think, research is really important.

I think the other piece is that we really need to help families again, understand what these restrictions are, what they mean, how they can help enforce them. So if you need to go in to opt in to avoid autoplay, for example, so you don't have the endless scrolling, like, families need to understand why is that important, and how do you actually do that.

KELLY Jodi Dworkin is a professor and extension specialist in family social science at the University of Minnesota.

GORDON: Thanks for joining us today, Jodi.

JODI DWORKIN: Thanks for having me.