hard topics

:social media + teens
Videos for parents

Here you can find a video from Dr. Beth Trammell about the importance of this topic.
Watch the video HERE - https://vimeo.com/373447375 (5 minutes).

Still worried you won’t get it right? No worries!
This video you can watch WITH your child if you would like a place to start. Beth addresses
the child directly in this video and will give you a prompt at the end to get the conversation going.
Watch the video HERE - https://vimeo.com/373448850 (4 minutes).

What’s the big deal?

1. Technology, and social media, is a big part of their lives
This generation of teenagers is surrounded by technology. It is so much a part of their
everyday lives. And researchers are not conclusive about the overall impact that technology
has on our teenagers. In this article from National Public Radio (NPR), three prominent
researchers all share their ideas about technology, from its damaging effects, to the
exaggeration of its impact. For instance, one researcher noted the suicide rate of tween girls
is on the rise, potentially impacted by the increase in social media use of girls between 10
and 14 years of age.

Our kids are also watching a lot of online videos. Recent stats suggest a rise in watching
videos “every day” – 8-12 year olds reported increase from 24% to 56%, 13-16 year olds from
34% to 69%.

In terms of overall screen time, the most recent statistics suggest:
- 8-12 year olds are spending approximately 5 hours a day with screens
- Teenagers are spending approximately 7.5 hours a day with screens
*Note: these numbers do NOT include those hours spent on screens at school.

19% of 8-year-olds have smartphones. I’m just gonna let that one sit right there.
Despite the controversy around this article (i.e., some argue this is a mild picture of the impact on teens) by Pryzybylski and Weinstein (2017) based on more than 120,000 adolescents in the United Kingdom, a couple of things were revealed: first, weekend use may be something we should pay more attention to as parents (as it was more indicative of problems in the study) and second, not all screens impact our teens in the same way.

![Image of device use comparison]

Here are a couple of images that are powerful visuals. First, notice the difference in types of device use between males and females above. **Our sons are more likely engaging in video game use, whereas our daughters are more likely into their phones.** Note, this image is taken from their paper published in 2017 and shares the weekend use of teens in their study.

What do you notice here?

What may you need to take notice of in your own kids?
The second image below shows how mental well-being is impacted by increased screen use. In other words, what you will notice is that **as the hours of screen time increase** (the numbers at the bottom of the graph tell us how many hours per day the teens in their study used screens), **mental well-being decreases** (as noted by the curved dotted line on the graph).

Notice in the caption, how the authors show weekday versus weekend use in TV and movies (Graph A), Video Games (Graph B), Computers (Graph C), and Smart phones (Graph D).

![Graph A](image1)

![Graph B](image2)

![Graph C](image3)

![Graph D](image4)

**Figure 2.** Curvilinear trends between daily digital screen time and mental well-being. **A.** TV and movies. **B.** Video games. **C.** Using computers. **D.** Using smart phones. Error bars denote the 95% confidence interval for the observed means. All quadratic trends were significant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

I think it is particularly interesting that there was actually an increase in mental well-being for the first 1-2 hours of screen time. This may mean that some screen time does do some good for our kids. Perhaps this is in the form of social connectedness with their peers. Or perhaps this is a way for them to unwind at the end of the day.

How might these graphs impact your discussion with your teenager?
2. It starts with us

Two things: many of us are worried about our kids’ screen use and our behavior directly shapes our kids’ behavior.

In a recent survey by Common Sense, approximately half of the 4,200 parents completing the survey reported worries that mobile devise use was negatively impacting their child’s mental health. Moreover, approximately half also said they believed their child was addicted to their device.

Interestingly, only 32% of those parents indicated they believed they were addicted to their devices.

When you stop to think about this…what do you think? Do you sometimes think your child is “addicted” to devices? And would you kids say you are addicted to your device?

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Parents, themselves, struggle with device distractions

% of U.S. parents of teens who...

- 59% say they at least sometimes feel obligated to respond to messages immediately on their cellphone

- 39% say they at least sometimes lose focus at work because they’re checking their cellphone

- 36% say they spend too much time on their cellphone

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. parents of teens ages 13 to 17 conducted March 7-April 10, 2018.
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A key factor is our behavior as parents.

- Do we check our email at a stoplight?
- Do we look at our phones during dinner?
- Is our phone sitting out next to us as they are having a conversation with us?
- Do we spend more time scrolling before bedtime to numb out at the end of the day?

All of these things may be something that you need to change before you ask your teenager to do anything different in their lives.
This final image I will share here explores information about our monitoring practices for younger teens, but not as much with older teens.

### Digital monitoring is more common for parents of a younger teen; moms are somewhat more likely than dads to police their teen’s online behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of U.S. parents of teens who say they often or sometimes ...</th>
<th>TEEN’S AGE</th>
<th>PARENT’S GENDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look through teen’s cellphone call records/messages</td>
<td>15-17: 48</td>
<td>Father: 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-14: 72</td>
<td>Mother: 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit when/how long teen can go online/use cellphone</td>
<td>15-17: 47</td>
<td>Father: 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-14: 71</td>
<td>Mother: 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take away teen’s cellphone/internet privileges as punishment</td>
<td>15-17: 48</td>
<td>Father: 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-14: 69</td>
<td>Mother: 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check which websites teen visits</td>
<td>15-17: 52</td>
<td>Father: 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-14: 67</td>
<td>Mother: 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use parental controls to restrict which sites teen can access</td>
<td>15-17: 45</td>
<td>Father: 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13-14: 63</td>
<td>Mother: 54</td>
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</table>

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer or gave other responses are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. parents of teens ages 13 to 17 conducted March 7-April 10, 2018.

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### 3. It may make things worse

If they already have had issues with mental health problems and or bullying problems at school, screens may be likely to escalate those problems. They may be more likely to display symptoms of anger or defiance when you require them to put their iPads down. They may be prone to higher levels of anxiety if they do not achieve a certain status on social media. While it is tempting to allow free access to technology and screens, if you know your child struggles, you may want to consider increasing your connection with their social media use.

In other words, think about screen use not as causing mental health problems, but maybe as a symptoms of mental health issues.

We should mention here that not ALL research has noted a direct, linear, negative reaction between teens’ mental health and screen use. We must embrace the positive impact that technology has on ALL of our interactions with the world. Take a moment to consider what we BENEFIT from screens, social media, and technology.

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**Practical Tip:** Take a minute to write down 3 specific things that stood out to you so far that you want to share with your teen. By writing it down, it will help you feel more organized and confident in this conversation!
Step 3: REALIZE

What do kids need?

1. Girls (and boys, too!) need training in identity and self-esteem. Both need training in safety and cyberbulling, acceptance and coping skills.

One impact that we do see more consistently in the research is a relationship between teen girls’ use of social media and a negative impact on their self-esteem. In fact, this draw to comparison that social media does is not good for grown-up women either!

We need to help our teenager daughters remember their identities so they can stay grounded in who they are, rather than falling into the comparison trap.

One way to help our daughters (and sons too honestly…but here I am focused on our daughters) is to help them remember the components of their identity that matter the most. Note that this is an exercise that is best done together, when you are feeling connected to your daughter. Also, it will make it easier for your teen to do this with you if YOU are doing it alongside them.

Practical Tip: This may not feel intuitive, but if you find yourself always complaining with your teen about their screen use, find at least ONE thing you can say out loud today to your teen that you see as a benefit of technology. Remember, it is a huge part of their lives. So if they see you being “supportive” of it in any way, they are likely to respond positively.
Honor their identity: a parent-child exercise. You can have them draw circles on a page, or you can print the lower half of this handout. Have them write their name in the middle circle and then have them write parts of their identity in smaller circles around the main circle. These represent all of the different parts of who they are. Have them write as many circles as they can think of! Examples like – creative, talented, loving, kind, a great friend, a strong athlete, are great because it describes a variety of things they do. Encourage them to pick great qualities of themselves. Some additional ideas can be found here.

Practical Tip: Encourage her to keep her identity bubbles in her bedroom – as a daily reminder of what matters. You might also revisit these each year on her birthday to see if anything shifts or changes.

Once you have the identity exercise completed, spend a bit of time talking through why maintaining their identity is important with social media. For example, when she feels pressured to be something other than her identity – because she has compared her body to another person on TikTok – remind her of those small bubbles in a loving way.

NOTE: This is also an amazing exercise to do with your son!
Self-esteem matters so much during the teenage years. One additional way we can help our teenage daughters is to share our own personal stories about struggles with self-esteem growing up. This isn't meant to be a reverse therapy session. Rather, it is meant to help her see that she is not alone – and that it can get better as she grows up!

One final reminder about our teenage daughters specifically includes the unfortunate glorification of self-harm and suicidal gestures. There are more websites, hidden groups that praise young people for self-harm and/or negative acting out. Talking with your teenager about these websites — and the negative consequences of these types of groups is really important.

You could say something like, “There are some groups or websites about hurting yourself. These websites make it seem cool, but it is not safe to get involved in these websites. Especially when you are feeling sad or down, it might seem easy to just jump onto that website and find people who make you feel better. But those people are not good people for you to reach out to in those moments. Please come talk to me if you are having any trouble. I promise to make time for you.”

Acceptance and coping skills.

This is a seemingly obvious piece of information – our teens need to know we accept them – but I find that it is easy to inadvertently NOT do this well. I mention this because I have known so many teenagers who have shared that they believe their parents “don’t like that I play the guitar” or “hate that I am friends with Tara”. When I talk with the parents about this, they say, “I never said I hate Tara!” or “I actually really like that you play the guitar.”

So where do things break down? Typically, what happens is the small “corrections” that occur over time are misinterpreted by our kids. For example, Tariq is playing the guitar in his room and you are trying to have coffee with a friend. You go in and tell him he needs to stop playing because it is too loud. Let’s say this same type of interaction (where you go in and tell him he needs to stop playing the guitar for one reason or another) happens two or three or twelve times more. Can see how the message to Tariq becomes “I don’t like that he plays the guitar”?

Instead, if they are playing guitar at inopportune times, it’s okay to tell them to stop playing. HOWEVER, what we need to also include are moments when we specifically share with Tariq how proud we are of him for playing guitar. Or share how much we love that he is taking a risk with the guitar. Or how we love to hear the pride in his voice about it. ANYTHING positive that will help shift the balance in our messaging to him.

Take a moment to reflect on what behaviors you often correct in your child that might be mistakenly misunderstood by your teenager?

Practical Tip: What are the things your child does that you LOVE or are PROUD about? Be intentional TODAY to say that out loud to them.
I actually really dislike the term "coping skills." I think it is overused in our field and often misunderstood by the people who need to practice them the most. In short, for our teens, they need to learn how to manage their feelings appropriately. There are many other issues related to teenage coping strategies ([this is one great article](#)), but here, I want to focus on learning to express themselves with people they are close to.

For most teens, this includes learning to talk about how they feel with a trusted adult. For some, it means their parent. For others, it means a trusted family member, coach or pastor. Still others find the most comfort in conversations with their peers. It honestly matters less WHO their trusted person is and that they have at least one or two people that are within their inner circle. One interesting exercise I often do with teens and adults is what I call the circle of friendship.

**Circle of friendship as a means to realize coping.** Start by talking with your child about trust by sharing who you trust. Talk about how you developed that trust over time and how important it is to you. Then ask them to draw a few concentric circles on a page (like the image below).

Let them know that all of us have a range of different friends in our lives. We have an inner circle of people (friends or family) that is often quite small. Just a few people who we share our inner-most secrets/selves with. Then, there is the next circle of friends. Those might be people who are our better friends. And work your way outward to include acquaintances and then strangers. Note: you might have even more circles than this. They may prefer to have lots of “levels” of friends. That’s great!

As they are writing the names of people they know within the various circles, continue the conversation about trust and how they got to be from the outer circle to the inner circle. For most of us, that’s because friends were “there for us” or “listened to us” or something like that. This is the message we want them to hear – we build deeper and deeper relationships with people as we share more of our feelings and selves with them.

NOTE: This is also a good time to talk about people who may NOT be worthy of the inner
circle. Like people who aren’t trustworthy. Feel free to share a story about a friend or family member who moved from an inner circle to an outer circle and why that happened. This will give them a real-life example of how they can work through similar issues in their own life.

Other common, and important, healthy coping strategies include: creative outlets like music, art, drawing, dancing; yoga and/or meditation; healthy eating; exercise; drinking water; getting enough sleep. If you are able to circle any of these strategies that you regularly practice, I encourage you to invite (or force) your teen to join you in these practices. Particularly if you are worried they aren’t coping well. Sometimes teenagers need a little nudge when they are stuck in a rut!

Both need training in safety and cyberbullying

Below (in the Resources section), I share several great resources for talking specifically about issues of safety and cyberbullying. What I have found over and over and over is that our teenagers are blissfully unaware of the dangers within the online world. And there is part of me that wants to keep them protected from living in a place of fear, and another part of me that needs to share with them the rules of safety and civil engagement. Take a few extra minutes as you work toward the Resources section to find some great ideas on next steps with your own teenager about safety and cyberbullying.

2. Avoid monitoring, focus on mentoring

This shift from monitoring to mentoring is critical. Rather than conceptualizing screens and social media as something you have to “check” over and over and over, think about it as something you need to mentor and teach. This certainly doesn’t mean free reign and never checking. But it does mean teaching them effective use over fighting for control.

As you think about your teenager and social media, or any kind of electronic use, it is always a balance of trust versus privacy. We need to be able to trust they are making good decisions, while also honoring the privacy that comes along with being a teenager. In the book Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive (and Survive) in their Digital World (2016), author Devorah Heitner shares the importance of mentoring over monitoring. She suggests spending continued, intentional time teaching them about the pros and cons, risks and rewards of screen use and social media use – just as you are doing with this e-book! And honestly, there’s no way we could fully monitor them every moment of the day. And truthfully if they really want to engage in any kind of behavior, they will find a way to do it.
It’s important to always keep the lines of communication open. We need to have clear expectations and firm boundaries that we are able to continue to come back to in conversation. The real key is continuing to revisit conversations whether we have had them before or it is a new situation.

Remember, taking away their phone privileges may not always be the correct form of punishment – though it is used the most frequently with this age group. Sometimes taking away the phone will make things worse. Try to get creative with punishments if you need to – additional chores, volunteering for a non-profit, etc.

3. Stay up-to-date and relevant

Stay relevant with their friends by becoming familiar with common apps and even trying the apps they solve before you let your team be involved. The best way to do this is to have your child (or their friends) teach you how to use it. Ask them to show you what is good and not-so-good about it. Mention that if you trust that they are teaching you the WHOLE story, you are more likely to allow them to get the app for their own use.

Be aware that there are lots of sneaky ways that our teenagers can use apps and the online environment inappropriately. They can have accounts under fake names or use apps that are specifically created to “trick parents”. If your teenager is doing this, you have bigger issues. Since these types of apps are changing all of the time, I didn’t include a reference to these types of issues here. Instead, I encourage you to search on the internet “apps that are designed to trick parents” or something similar to learn about specific apps to look for on your child’s phone. If you generally trust your teenager, it’s okay to check their phone for such things, and to have an honest conversation about these sneaky apps (or fake accounts). The important thing is to let them know trust is quick to break and hard to build.

There are a couple of great websites that also share common apps and a commonsense approach to online environment that I list in the Resources section as well!

4. Watch for signs of imbalance

Watch for signs of in balance. If you are finding that your teen is spending a greater majority of the day on their phone or in media apps than face-to-face interaction, then it might be a problem. If they are choosing to stay home and disengage instead of being around people that they love, you might have to talk about having balance with technology. Share your feelings about how much more connected you feel to them when they are away from their phones – as well as your own feeling of connection to others when YOU are not connected to technology.

Beyond that, if they are too focused on affirming their identity in “likes” or status. That is a red-flag for you to have a conversation about worth and identity away from technology.

If you are seeing signs of depression or anxiety secondary to their status online. This is a growing sign that there may be bigger issues you would want to address with a mental health
professional. Perhaps they aren’t feeling quite comfortable talking with you or their other
parent about this. That’s okay! That’s why therapists are here!

Always try to encourage face-to-face communication or over the phone communication for
big decisions, and practice modeling that very same thing.

Finally, if you notice they struggle with the ability to engage in appropriate communication,
either verbally or in writing, then they may be too focused on social media or shorthand
texting.

Step 4. Practice

What to say and what not to say.
See the chart below for specific FAQ. The ultimate thing to keep in mind is that even if you
can’t remember exactly what to say, that’s okay! Just keep the conversation open and keep it
going.

Helpful tips to keep in mind.
1. First, identify your own issues about social media and technology use. Identify your
overall goal. Do you want them to be limited in screen time? Have healthy online
presence? Avoid social media? Realize that your attitude and experience matters a lot
here.
2. Admit your own challenges with social media and
technology. Letting them know it is something you
are still working on will also help them feel like
they aren’t alone.
3. Don’t lecture; plant seeds. (This will ALWAYS be a tip to keep in mind with teens. For
any conversation.)
4. Teach them explicitly about cyberbullying – from both sides. Remind them that it is
common to think teasing and spreading rumors online isn’t as harmful as face-to-
face bullying. Give them specific examples so they can know if they are being
 cyberbullied, or are joining in with others who are cyberbullying someone else.
5. Have hard limits around meal time and bedtime. And any other time you want to keep
sacred. For instance, family time or vacation time together. Encouraging and
modeling sacred time where it will be technology free is an important part of
developing healthy boundaries with technology.
6. For our teenagers, parental control is not the answer. They WILL find a way around
you if you are holding on too tight to the control.

Practical Tip: Don’t freak out.
That’s really the best advice. 😊
7. Taking away their phone is not always the answer. One of the first punishments for bad behavior is to take away our teen’s phone. However, removing cell phone privileges may not always be the best punishment to change your teen’s behavior.

8. Based on the aforementioned survey from Common Sense, 58% of parents indicated their kids see inappropriate content on YouTube “frequently” or “occasionally”. Be aware of the content they are watching on those video-based sites.

9. Create a plan that turns into a pledge, together. See an example in the resources section below.

10. Know the law and policies within organizations. For instance, the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) helps protect kids younger than 13 from releasing personal information without parental knowledge when they’re online. Or some organizations will refund unapproved purchased by your child if you simply call their customer service line.

How to START the conversation.

Often the hardest part of any hard conversation is just getting started. I hear parents saying “it just wasn’t the right time” or “I can’t find a time that feels right.” The truth is, it’s called a hard conversation for a reason…it is probably never going to FEEL right. And talking about something as important as social media will probably have the same impact.

I really like [this website](#) that gives 10 specific questions to ask your teen. I actually recommend picking one of the first 5 questions to just get the conversation started. And then, save the other questions for another day. Don’t bombard your teen all at once – with all 10 questions! They will NOT appreciate that!

Instead, find a good time – when things are calm – to begin the conversation.

- In the car on the way home from an appointment.
  - “I was reading something online today that shared how many teens really don’t know the people they are ‘friends’ with on social media. How many of your ‘friends’ on Instagram are people you see frequently?"
  - “What do you think is the best thing about TikTok (or any social media outlet)? What do you think is the worst thing about ______?”

- At the end of the night...
  - “There’s something I have been meaning to talk with you about… This might not seem like a big deal, but sometimes those online quizzes you take might be..."
sharing more information with the internet than you realize. Could we talk more about this?”
  o  “Can you show me how to use _________(social media app)? Why do you like this app specifically?”

•  At a time when you are just casually sitting around the house (but still private from siblings or others).
  o  “This might be a weird conversation to have, but I want you to feel comfortable talking about anything…I am worried about allowing you so much freedom with social media. Can we talk about some limits?”
  o  “I’m realizing how much I get sucked in to social media accounts. Do you want to do a social media fast with me? Set aside special times of the day when we both put our phones away to do other things that interest us?”

The idea is to have a time that feels casual, but private. You want to clearly convey the message that you are cool with whatever they are going to talk about. Remember, you want to be an ASKABLE parent. Them asking you for advice is going to be WAY better than anything they get from friends!

How to CONTINUE the conversation.

•  You remember how we talked last week about social media and your ‘friends’ on Twitter? I want to follow-up about that. How do you think things have been going since then? What other questions have you thought about since then?*

•  I want to follow-up with you about our conversation last month. I recently also heard that _____insert stat here______ kids your age are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression related to comparing themselves to others on social media. I have even felt this pressure from time to time. Have you ever felt sad or upset about something on social media? What do you think we should do about that?**

*Notice this is an open-ended question. Be sure to start with … What other questions...(rather than Do you have any questions? – which is MOST likely going to be a one-word answer…NO!).

**Notice the same open-ended question format.
Step 6: LEARN MORE

Resources

The VERY BEST resource for media use is Common Sense Media. It has a huge range of information and is organized in an easy-to-use format. This website includes tutorials for parents, suggestions and reviews based on age and so much more. Just plug in your child’s age and off you go! Or… plug in the name of a movie, book, app or TV show and it gives you a wealth of information to make a better decision about whether your child is ready for that type of content.

This website includes tips for “safe social networking,” and this website includes online safety both written FOR teenagers. This could be a great place to start the conversation with your teen, as well as a good reminder for those safety issues you might be forgetting.

This website includes an age-based guideline for screen time usage that might help you get a sense of how much is too much for your child based on his/her age.


Just a bit more about that federal law from https://epic.org/privacy/kids/:
“The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) helps protect kids younger than 13 when they're online. It's designed to keep anyone from getting a child's personal information without a parent knowing about it and agreeing to it first. COPPA requires websites to explain their privacy policies and get parental consent before collecting or using a child's personal information, such as a name, address, phone number, or Social Security number. The law also prohibits a site from requiring a child to provide more personal information than necessary to play a game or enter a contest.”

Citation for the graphs above
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAQ FROM KIDS</th>
<th>MAKE WORDS MATTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **I JUST WANT TO MEET NEW PEOPLE. ISN’T SOCIAL MEDIA A SAFE PLACE BECAUSE PEOPLE DON’T KNOW ME?** | In true therapist style, my first reaction to this question is often a reflection question back to them. Because there is so much more to this question that I want to know about! Are they struggling with friends? Why do you want to meet people who don’t know you? Etc.!
So after I asked my other questions, I would say something like, “Social media is a place where people get to know others. It can be a place to make friends or catch up with people you haven’t seen in a while. And it isn’t necessarily unsafe, but online communities make it easy for people to only present a certain version of themselves. And so it isn’t always easy to get to know people that way. Because they are only presenting a snapshot of who they really are.” |
| **HOW OFTEN SHOULD I POST?** | This one might feel tricky to answer. Because our initial response to this might be “NEVER!” But step back and consider your own behavior and/or that of the people around you. And again, perhaps a good reflective question would help start this productive conversation.
“Well, how often do you think you should post?” (WAIT FOR RESPONSE)
“What is pressuring you to feel like you need to post more? Or less?” (WAIT FOR RESPONSE)
“I prefer to think less about how often I should post and more about what matters most to me that I should post. What are the types of things that matter to YOU that you think you could post?” |
| **SHOULD I HAVE MULTIPLE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS?** | Again, your insides might be screaming “I don’t even want you to have ONE account...much less multiple!” – Refrain from saying this.

Instead, say, “I’m not sure. What do you think you need?” (WAIT FOR RESPONSE)
You could go on to say, “For me, it’s about balance and connection. If I have too many social media accounts, it is more likely that I will be too focused on that, and not focused on real life. Connection for me matters more than anything. So if I feel more connected to my friends or family through social media because I don’t “see” them otherwise, then I will get the social media account that will allow me to do that.” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT IF I DON’T WANT TO FRIEND SOMEONE?</th>
<th>“I want you to know that you always get to choose. What is making you feel pressured? What do you think will happen if you don’t?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WHAT IF SOMEONE POSTS SOMETHING ABOUT ME?</td>
<td>“This is hard. We can’t really control what people say or don’t say about us. First, we should try to contact them to ask if they can take the post down – and share with them how it made you feel. If you would like me to contact his/her parents, I will. I want to support you, but also want to empower you to reach out to that person yourself first. Then, we probably should talk about whether or not social media and/or this friend is really right for you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT IF SOMEONE POSTS SOMETHING INAPPROPRIATE OR SCARY?</td>
<td>“I would prefer you came to me first. And as soon as you can. If someone posts something about hurting themselves, please get in touch with me or another trusted adult as soon as possible. If it is something inappropriate and it bothers you, just be sure to come to me and let me know so we can work through the best thing to do together.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMEONE ASKED ME FOR PICTURES. SHOULD I SEND THEM?</td>
<td>I encourage you to be really honest about your feelings here. “I prefer you don’t share any pictures with anyone that you don’t know. Even just normal, everyday pictures. You just don’t know what that stranger will do once you send them. If it is someone you know, or someone you are close to, and they are asking for nudes (or inappropriate pictures of you without clothes), you should never send them. Never. We could talk more about why if you are curious, but the rule in our house is that I need to trust you with your phone. And our rule is never to send pictures.”</td>
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<td>I FEEL ANXIOUS WHEN I AM ON SOCIAL MEDIA. IS THAT NORMAL?</td>
<td>“Unfortunately, it is normal to feel a bit anxious or uneasy when you see all the fancy or beautiful pictures on social media. We call that the comparison trap. It’s when your mind tells you that other people are better than you because they have better things. Although it is normal to feel anxious, I never want you to feel anxious about this. And if you feel this way a lot when you are on your phone, then we probably should take a little break. I’ll even join you in this little break! We can do it together.”</td>
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<td>I FEEL LEFT BEHIND. I FEEL DEPRESSED. I FEEL INSECURE. I FEEL LEFT OUT.</td>
<td>Start with... “I’m sorry you feel this way. I never want you to feel this way.” Then you can do a version of the discussion above. OR you could go on to ask a bit more... “What specifically is making you feel this way?”</td>
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<td>FAQ FROM PARENTS</td>
<td>MAKE WORDS MATTER</td>
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<td><strong>WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE FOR MY CHILD TO HAVE _______ (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc.)</strong></td>
<td>Unfortunately, there is no clear answer here. There are some folks who say wait until 8th grade (waituntil8th.org) for a number of screen/social media issues. But mostly this comes down to not the chronological age of your child, but more the maturity, trustworthiness, and resiliency of your child. Are they mature enough to handle it? Can you trust them to come to you with questions or concerns? Are they resilient to bounce back from the many social nuances that come along with social media? If you aren’t sure or said no to any of those things...WAIT.</td>
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<td><strong>I AM AFRAID MY TEEN IS BEING BULLIED ONLINE. WHAT SHOULD I DO?</strong></td>
<td>First, don’t freak out. Second, when there is a good time to talk privately with them (and they are calm), talk with them about it. Ask them if they are okay or need anything related to being online. “I’m worried you haven’t been treated well online. Can you tell me how things are going?” or “It seems like you are sad after you look online. I’m wondering if you are okay.” If you are still worried because they are withdrawing or it seems they aren’t telling the whole truth, reach out to their best friend and ask. Or, you could ask your child for permission to check their account because you want to be sure you are protecting them well.</td>
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<td><strong>HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CHECK THEIR ACCOUNTS?</strong></td>
<td>This is always a tough one. We need to be sure we are balancing their autonomy while keeping them safe. If you don’t have a reason NOT to trust them, I would recommend periodic checking (once a month or so). If you have concerns or they are engaging in anything suspicious, I would recommend telling them in advance that you are going to check their phone once a week. And that if they give you a reason not to trust them, it will be more frequent and/or there will be consequences.</td>
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<td><strong>SHOULD I “FRIEND” THEM OR “FOLLOW” THEM ON SOCIAL MEDIA?</strong></td>
<td>Again, this one may vary. We certainly don’t want to be a helicopter parent. Imagine your mother read every note you wrote to your peers when you were in high school. Or read your journal/diary. We need to give them space within the realm of what they are capable of handling. Typically, I would say it’s okay to friend or follow them, particularly if you have open conversation about it.</td>
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Step 7: COMMENT BACK TO US!

Tell us what you think!

We would love for you to share your questions, comments or experiences with us. Your specific comments about how this was helpful to you matter so much to us. We welcome your thoughts on our website or Facebook page or you can email Dr. Beth Trammell directly at Beth@makewordsmatterforgood.com.


Thank you for your feedback!

- Beth