

Starting Conversations with Youth about Social Media

Social media use comes with both benefits and risks. Having conversations with youth about their behavior online is important to their **overall well-being and safety**. This resource provides parents and families with information about helping youth stay safe and practice appropriate behavior online. Parents and adults can use these helpful tips when starting a conversation with youth about social media use, including participation in social media challenges.

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), social media offers youth a way to create online identities, communicate with others and build social networks. Social media can provide a **meaningful connection to peers** and a wide social network might even help youth avoid feelings of isolation. However, social media use can also negatively affect youth by distracting them, disrupting sleep, exposing them to bullying, rumor spreading, unrealistic views of other people's lives, peer pressure and an increased risk for mental health problems.

Due to the stage of their brain development, youth are more likely to **act impulsively** which puts them at greater risk for taking part in social media challenges. Recently, middle and high school students have recorded themselves stealing and vandalizing school property, then posting their videos on social media as part of the 'devious licks' challenge made popular on TikTok.

Conversation Tips

To encourage **responsible use of social media and limit some of its negative effects**, here are some tips from [Prevention Action Alliance](#):

- **Encourage open communication and build a trusting relationship.** Frequent and age-appropriate conversations with youth help build trusting relationships. Having conversations with youth about living healthy lives and practicing appropriate behaviors builds a foundation for positive decision-making.
- **Set reasonable limits.** Talk to your child about how to avoid letting social media interfere with his or her activities, sleep, meals or homework. Encourage a bedtime routine that avoids electronic media use and keep cellphones and tablets out of bedrooms. Children model behavior of adults in their lives. Set an example by following these guidelines yourself.
- **Monitor your child's accounts.** Let your child know that you'll be regularly checking his or her social media accounts. You might aim to do so once a week or more. Be sure to follow through.
- **Explain what is NOT OK.** Discourage your child from gossiping, spreading rumors, bullying or damaging someone's reputation — online or otherwise. Talk to your child about what is appropriate and safe to share on social media.
- **Encourage face-to-face contact with friends.** This is particularly important for youth vulnerable to social anxiety.
- **Talk about social media.** Talk about your own social media habits. Ask your child how he or she is using social media and how it makes him or her feel. Remind your child that social media is full of unrealistic images.

Share Your Expectations

The key to discouraging such behavior is to **talk with your child** about this and other social media “challenges.” As you do, here are some points to keep in mind:

- **Don’t assume your child will not try it.** Remember, the brain is not fully developed until 25 years old. Impulsivity, peer pressure and competitive desire to one-up a peer are powerful influencers.
- **Set clear boundaries.** Share your expectations and what you consider to be acceptable and unacceptable behavior. What your child thinks is okay, may not be okay with you.
- **State (and restate) the obvious.** Stealing and destroying school property is wrong. Explain that fellow students may do it to fit in or because they think it is funny. However, it is no joke, and the punishments can be harsh.
- **Prompt critical thinking.** Ask your child, “What do you think would happen if you do this?” Help your child learn to step back for a moment and apply basic logic and reason before making a decision that could impact the child’s future, as well as your trust.
- **Keep it positive.** Though you may be tempted to focus solely on negative consequences, remember that youth are hardwired to defend against negative messages or scare tactics. It is important to educate them on the risks; however, it’s just as important to emphasize what they should do, like resisting peer pressure, making good decisions for themselves and never encouraging others to put themselves at risk.

If you think your child is experiencing signs or symptoms of anxiety or depression related to social media use, talk to your child’s doctor or a behavioral health provider.

Additional Resources

Below are links to websites and articles they can be helpful in starting a conversation with youth about social media use.

- [Know! Parent Tips](#)
- [Common Sense Media](#)
- [Crisis Text Line](#)
- [Be Present Ohio](#)
- [On Our Sleeves](#)
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)