



MANAGING MEDIA WITH TEENS

While they're not going through as much development as tweens, moving to high school at the beginning of this stage – and moving *out* of it at the end – can be stressful.

Helping Teens Navigate Media Confidently

At this age, the goal is to help teens balance independence with informed choices. Rather than focusing on risk, parents can guide teens to think critically about what they watch, share, and create. We can also encourage them to use tools and settings that help them stay safe and balanced online.

There are four main strategies to help kids become resilient to online risks. We can:

Curate our kids' media experiences;

Control who can access our kids and their data;

Co-view media with our kids;

and be our kids' media **Coaches**.

CURATE

Teens engage more actively with media than younger children. They have a wider variety of activities and choose from a wider variety of media works, and are more likely to select media for themselves based on their own needs. Jane Brown's *Media Practice Model* suggests there is a cycle in which teens' own preferences and identities lead them to **select** and **interact** with particular media works. They then **apply** these media works to their views of themselves and the world, possibly **copying** or **rejecting** what they have seen. This leads to a further development of their

identity, which further prompts selection of media works, and so on. Platforms like YouTube can offer them a space to explore interests, learn new skills, and express themselves creatively while still being supported by clear policies and supervision options.

Invite teens to collaborate in creating their own viewing guidelines, deciding together what kind of content is appropriate. Use features like YouTube's Restricted Mode, supervised accounts, or Family Link to give them ownership of their online experience. Make sure they know about good quality sources of information on healthy sexuality like [SexandU](#) (a resource provided by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada) and CBC's [About Sex](#).

They're most likely to seek out mental health information and support at this age. Platforms like YouTube have mental health and wellbeing content in a dedicated surface built just for teens (<https://blog.google/intl/en-ca/products/inside-youtube/new-mental-health-wellbeing-tools-built-just-for-teens/>). When seeking out age-appropriate information on common mental health and wellbeing topics like depression, anxiety, ADHD, and eating disorders, teens will now see a shelf of videos from trusted sources. This makes it easier for them to find credible information that is tailored to their developmental stage of life. Teens may encounter sensitive topics like mental health, body image, or relationships. Encourage open dialogue and help them find credible, age-appropriate sources such as expert-led channels that discuss wellbeing and mental health responsibly: make

sure they know about mental health resources like [Mind Your Mind](#) and counselling services like [Kids Help Phone](#) or [1Click, 1Call](#).

Many online platforms provide a safer experience for young teens by default, so it's important to make sure that kids give their correct age when they register. You can also help them to opt out of having devices in their bedrooms at night: because they often feel obligated to stay in contact with their friends, they may appreciate it if you play the bad guy. If you ever change the rules about when devices are allowed, or take a device away as a consequence of their behaviour, **give them a chance to let their friends know** so others don't think they are "ghosting" them. On YouTube, Take-a-break notifications are set to every 60 minutes, ages 13-17 have them "On" by default. Bedtime reminders are also set for 10pm; ages 13-17 have them "On" by default.

CONTROL

Teens are developing a stronger sense of digital identity. Help them learn how platforms use data and how to review privacy settings regularly.

Review the privacy and data collection settings on their devices and apps. Remind them to do this any time they get a new device or download a new app. YouTube gives users and families tools to adjust privacy, comment, and recommendation settings and to manage watch history, ad personalization, and data privacy. Explore together how privacy and recommendation settings work such as how clearing watch history on YouTube resets recommendations. Encourage teens to think about what they want their online 'footprint' to say about them: you can show your child how to set the visibility of their videos and to adjust settings like watch and search history. Help them understand how to manage private and public interactions online. Help them think about how

they want future audiences to see them and start to build an "online resume" that highlights their hobbies, volunteer work, creativity, and so on. Support teens in creating positive online presence through things like curating playlists or uploading videos that reflect their passions, creativity, and community impact. On YouTube, comments and community features can be positive spaces for sharing ideas when used respectfully, but teens may choose to turn them off either for all of the videos they post or for specific videos on YouTube Studio. Teens can also report inappropriate comments by selecting the three horizontal dots next to the comment, then the flag icon, and then choosing the reason for reporting it.

Remind teens to tell a parent or trusted adult if someone makes them uncomfortable. Help them recognize the "red flags" that suggest someone online – whether it's a person they met online or someone they already know offline – may be acting in an inappropriate way:

- flattering them, especially about how they look
- asking about times and places where they could meet or could communicate online in private
- introducing sex or sexual topics into the conversation
- sharing or offering to share sexual images, either pornography or pictures of the sender
- asking them not to tell their parents or friends about a conversation or about the relationship.

You can give them some ways to leave a conversation quickly if any of them see any of those, like telling the person that you're calling them. It's also important that they know to tell you if an adult they know offline asks to contact them in a private online space, and to never meet up with someone they've met online without telling you first.

CO-VIEW

Though their independence is increasing, teens are more likely than parents to say they're interested in shared online experiences! (Davis, K., Dinhopf, A., & Hiniker, A. (2019, May). "Everything's the Phone": Understanding the Phone's Supercharged Role in Parent-Teen Relationships. In *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 1-14).)

Teens' views of gender roles are particularly influenced by media. While they are not passive recipients of media messages, they do often draw on media for "scripts" to follow in relationships. Make sure you're aware of what they're watching, playing and listening to and be ready to talk about ways that they depict romantic relationships and gender stereotypes. Watch and discuss together from educational series to creative tutorials. Co-viewing can open conversations about representation, relationships, and online norms. Talking about gender roles can help youth to resist pressure from their partners and peers to do things that are inappropriate.

Kids this age often start to watch horror and other disturbing content on purpose, and are also likely to see upsetting material without looking for it. The more they understand about how media are made, are better able to deal with the experience, but they also need to know they can still come to you if they see something that makes them upset.

Encourage awareness of influencer and branded content. Teens can learn to recognize sponsorship disclosures and understand why transparency matters online.

COACH

Don't assume that kids don't need guidance once they're in their older teens! The end of the teen years is when social media has the most impact on kids' happiness. (Orben, A., Przybylski, A. K., Blakemore, S. J., & Kievit, R. A. (2022). Windows of developmental sensitivity to social media. *Nature communications*, 13(1), 1649.)

Teens are conscious of "real world" issues and are typically interested in helping to find solutions, so ask them how their favourite creators have made a difference online (or offline). Talk about what things are seen as normal, or are rewarded, in their online spaces. Do they agree with them? If not, what can they do to change them?

Teens still need to be able to judge risk and to recognize factors that make them more likely to engage in risky behaviour. Don't start with the assumption that all teens are risk-takers or are unable to make good decisions: this can affect how they see themselves and lead them to take more risks than they would have otherwise. If they know a safe way to do something they want to do, teens will usually prefer that to a riskier way. (Defoe, I. N., Semon Dubas, J., & Romer, D. (2019). Heightened adolescent risk-taking? Insights from lab studies on age differences in decision-making. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 6(1), 56-63.)

Discuss consent and respect online. Teens should know it's never okay to share someone else's image or information without permission. Reinforce that help is always available through reporting tools or trusted adults.

Even in the teen years, household rules still make a difference in how kids behave online. These rules should be less about specific routines and procedures and focus more on values and general principles like “be kind to other people online” and “think twice before sharing a photo with anyone.” It’s also important to watch out for the “over-correct”: relaxing rules and then, after something goes wrong, putting in stricter ones. This will increase conflict with kids and make them less likely to respect the rules.

Teens are also incredibly conscious of hypocrisy, so it’s as important as ever to make sure that your media use is setting a good example for them.

Additional Resources

FOR PARENTS

[Break the Fake: Critical Thinking vs. Disinformation](#)

[Break the Fake: How to Tell What’s True Online](#)

[Building Your Brand: Establishing a Positive Presence Online](#)

[Communicating Safely Online](#)

[Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#)

[Dealing with Fear and Media](#)

[Family Guidelines for New Tech Devices](#)

[Protecting Your Privacy on Commercial Apps and Websites](#)

[Talking to Kids About Casual Prejudice Online](#)

[Talking to Kids About Gender Stereotypes](#)

[Talking to Kids About Hate Online](#)

[Talking to Your Kids About Pornography](#)

[Talking to Your Kids About Sexting](#)

FOR TEENS

[Communicating Safely Online](#)

[Dealing with Digital Stress](#)

[Digital Citizenship: Ethics and Privacy](#)

[Digital Citizenship: Using Technology for Good](#)

[What Should I Do If Someone Sends Me a Sext?](#)

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