



MANAGING MEDIA WITH TWEENS (10-13 YEARS OLD)

Two big changes happen at this age: the beginning of adolescence and (for most kids) starting to use phones and social media. While younger kids use digital tech, for tweens it is often an essential part of how they develop and grow. This is also when kids begin exploring creative tools like making videos, coding, gaming, and expressing themselves — which can be powerful opportunities for learning and community-building when done safely.

Helping Kids Build Safe and Smart Digital Habits

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

Kids this age often start exploring more open platforms beyond child-specific environments. It's important that when they do, they use supervised or age-appropriate versions such as supervised experiences on YouTube, where safety and privacy protections are built in. Many social networks 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. If they really want to use a particular social media app, create a shared or parent-managed account they can use until they turn 13.

They are often more interested in the wider world and may use media to learn about current issues or events. This curiosity is a great opportunity for discovery as they may follow educational channels, DIY tutorials, or creators who share their interests in music, science, or art. A third use the internet to access news, though hobbies (67%) and entertainment or celebrities (53%) are still more popular topics. (MediaSmarts. (2022). "Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Life Online." MediaSmarts.)

It can be helpful to co-create guidelines for media use together. Encourage kids to make choices that align with their interests and values. Use parental controls to filter age-appropriate content while letting them explore safely. This ensures they are developing the digital skills they need to manage risks. Encourage them to follow educational and inspiring creators who align with their passions.

Because they are still building their general knowledge, kids this age often have more knowledge than they're able to interpret. They are more likely to see misleading content than any other age group: 59% say they see it every day. (MediaSmarts. (2022). "Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Digital Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship." MediaSmarts.)

They are becoming more skeptical of what they see online, but are still learning how to judge whether it's reliable or not. Because kids this age are starting to look for information about healthy sexuality, provide them with good quality sources like [SexandU](#) (a resource provided by the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada) and CBC's [About Sex](#).

Tweens do still want to control what they see online and avoid being exposed to upsetting content. Help them to do that by showing them how to use filters themselves and to use search terms and content settings like YouTube's Restricted Mode, supervised experiences, playlists and trusted educational channels risk. Parents can model how to pause, report, or skip content that doesn't feel right. Make sure Autoplay is turned off so they have to choose each video they watch. (To do this on a computer or TV, look for Autoplay at the bottom of the watch page and select Autoplay OFF. On a mobile device, tap the three horizontal dots and tap Autoplay OFF.)

At this age, social comparison starts to matter more. Encourage your tween to follow creators who promote positive self-image, diverse representation, and real-world balance and to explore creators who highlight creativity and skill rather than appearance. Working with its Youth and Families Advisory Committee, platforms like YouTube developed content safeguards by identifying categories of videos which are innocuous in a single view, but could be problematic for some teens if viewed in repetition. They then developed ways to disperse viewership of those videos for teens globally to prevent repetitive viewing. These safeguards were initially applied to content that featured social aggression in the form of non-contact fights and intimidation, and to content comparing idealized physical features or body types.

CONTROL

Tweens are aware of online risks like privacy invasions and stranger contact but more often in the abstract sense, having been told of them by teachers or parents instead of peers. This often leads to a disconnect between how risky they think things are and what they actually do. They may take steps to limit who can see what they post online, but aren't yet thinking about possible future audiences like employers. At the beginning of this stage they still think of privacy largely in interpersonal terms and are just starting to imagine possible unknown or future audiences for what they post online.

Kids this age often use many different tools to keep in touch with friends and family, including games, social networks and messaging apps. This means more different ways that people they don't know can contact them, and blocking strangers or "randos" becomes a necessary chore. They need safe spaces to hang out with people they already know, and safe ways of getting to know appropriate new people. Ask them if they know how to prevent people they don't know from contacting them in games, social networks and other online spaces, and how to limit who can see things they post online. If they don't, suggest learning how together.

Tools like Family Link and YouTube Supervised Accounts let parents manage access, screen time, and privacy in age-appropriate ways while maintaining open communication. Review privacy and safety settings together on the apps your family uses and ensure you're comfortable with the default options. On YouTube, you can show your child how to set the visibility of their videos with the YouTube Studio app, and to adjust settings like watch and search history and ad personalization on the Your Data in YouTube page (<https://myaccount.google.com/yourdata/youtube>).

At this age kids may become interested in subcultures and start exploring online communities organized around personal interests like art or coding, or around particular parts of their identities. Online communities based on shared interests, like forums or wikis, give them a chance to develop their identity and to build their skills or knowledge beyond what is possible with offline peers. This is generally healthy, but may sometimes lead to contact with people they don't know offline. Teach your tween to use block and report tools confidently, and to come to you if someone they don't know tries to contact them.

It's also important to teach them to recognize the "red flags" that suggest someone online – whether it's a person they met online or someone they already know offline – may be grooming them for a sexual relationship:

- 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 they 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.

CO-VIEW

At this age, co-viewing may start to move from using media together to talking to kids about their media lives: what they like, what they're excited about or looking forward to, and what worries or annoys them. While just being with them is an important step, this is also a great opportunity to help your kids think critically about the media they consume by asking them questions about it and, sometimes, answering back.

You can start by exploring their online interests together. Co-view things like craft or cooking videos where safety is an issue, and explore online communities like wikis that they're interested in. Ask them to share their favorite online creators. This creates trust and opens the door for important conversations about values, representation, and empathy.

Because kids this age are starting to think more in terms of values and morals, it's important to help them understand that media don't tell us what to think, but do have a big impact on what we think about: these messages come from who the main characters are or who is quoted in a news story who and what are shown as being important, and what things characters do that are rewarded or punished. That's why even the most "meaningless" media like cartoons, influencer videos or video games can still have a big effect on us.

Help your kids understand that everyone else is sharing idealized images of themselves and their lives online. For example: talk about the characters in your kids' favourite shows or games, or their favourite streamers or creators. Do they see certain types of

people (different races, genders, body shapes, abilities, and so on) more or less often? Are different things often associated with different types of people?

COACH

Tweens' increasing ability to see shades of grey means that approaches to media use and "screen time" should now focus on identifying more on less healthful and productive uses of media technology and recognizing the ways in which the design of media tools may promote unhealthful patterns of use. They are conscious of the negative impacts of excessive or compulsive use, but don't always feel able to control it themselves.

While they are becoming more independent from parents, this is actually the age where kids are most influenced by peers and "super peers" – influencers, celebrities, friends-of-friends and so on. They are very conscious of the need to create a specific digital image, carefully choosing (and sometimes editing) photos to that effect. Over a third say they only post things they're sure won't offend or upset other people, and almost as many say that others expect them to only post positive things online. (MediaSmarts. (2022). "Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Digital Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship." MediaSmarts.) At the same time, they are also starting to look for ways to make a positive difference both offline and online and developing digital citizenship skills like learning empathy, respect, and critical thinking. Parents can reinforce positive behavior by celebrating responsible sharing, kindness in comments, and constructive online discussions.

Ask your kids which media activities they feel better after doing, and which make them feel worse. We can help them reflect on which media activities are good or bad for them and in what amounts. They still need external supports and may even appreciate it if adults

in their lives "play the bad guy" and force them to log off. Encourage healthy routines by alternating creative or learning-based screen time with offline activities rather than focusing only on limits.

Taking risks is a big part of what kids need at this age, but they need support and guidance to do it safely. They're prone to take risks as a way of testing boundaries and gain status among their peers, but at this age it's hard for them to think clearly about the possible consequences of what they do online. Talk to your kids about how they use their phones and other devices and apps. Understanding the role those play in their lives can help to avoid conflict over rules. Open, supportive conversations – both before and after encountering online risks – are needed to build resilience. They are likely to bristle if parents seem to be judging or criticizing them or the things they enjoy. It's also essential to help them take stock of the help-seeking resources available to them.

They still need boundaries and to know they can come to you, and they are often relieved when a trusted adult steps in to help solve a problem. Seven in ten still think that their parents know more about technology than they do! (MediaSmarts. (2022). "Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Digital Media Literacy and Digital Citizenship." MediaSmarts.) Rules should include both a general principle (for instance, "Respect people's privacy online") and specific examples ("Always ask before you share a photo of anyone.") Reassure them that you won't overreact if they come to you for help and talk to them about where (and who) they could get help if they can't come to you. Talking to kids after things have gone wrong – and helping them to deal with whatever has happened and find solutions – is also essential to helping them become resilient.

Additional Resources

FOR PARENTS

[Break the Fake: Critical Thinking vs. Disinformation Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#)

[Dealing with Fear and Media](#)

[Family Guidelines for New Tech Devices](#)

[Helping Kids Get a Healthy Start with Phones](#)

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

[Talking to Kids About Advertising](#)

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

[Talking to Kids About Gender Stereotypes](#)

[Talking to Kids About Media and Body Image](#)

[Talking to Your Kids About Pornography](#)

[Understanding the Rating Systems](#)

[Using Parental Controls](#)

FOR TWEENS

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

[Dealing with Digital Stress](#)

[Digital Citizenship: Building Empathy and Dealing with Conflict Online](#)

[Digital Citizenship: Ethics and Privacy](#)

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

[How to Search the Internet Effectively](#)

[What to Do If Someone is Mean to You Online](#)

[What Starts as a Joke Can End Up Hurting Someone](#)

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