Children's Center
A place where healing begins

Tips and Resources for Navigating the Tech World with your Pre-teen and Teens

Caring for children in the age of technology is challenging! We've gathered some resources and created some recommendations to help as you navigate this process. Every family has different values and expectations, so we ask that caregivers review any material before sharing it with your child. This allows you to assess whether it's appropriate for your child specifically, see how it connects to your values and expectations, and gives you a chance to prepare for conversations that may come up. If the message doesn't align with your values, it may still be beneficial to share it and discuss the ways it does and doesn't align. You are the expert on your child and should explore what topics, content, and messages are important for them. We hope that the information included here is helpful regardless of where your child and family are at in using and discussing technology.

We encourage every caregiver to have an agreement about phone, social media, and internet use with their child. If you don't already have one, this is a great way to start a discussion. Simply the process of creating an agreement has benefits, and it will give you common ground to start with if you need to address concerns in the future. The Family Online Safety Institute and Common Sense Media have good templates for creating an agreement and additional resources below may be helpful in having these conversations with your child. Some benefits of creating and maintaining an agreement include:

- It creates an opportunity to clarify and affirm personal and family values.
- Caregivers get to communicate their concerns and expectations to their child. Although phones and technology are deeply integrated in our lives, the norms and expectations about using them vary across settings, communities, families, and individuals. Those expectations often aren't explicit. Kids do well if they can! Starting with clear expectations and information gives them the foundation to be safe and successful.
- Kids get to share what the internet, social media, and/or their phone means to them. We know that this technology is a significant source of identity and connection for kids in this generation. How they use and feel about the internet, social media, and their devices is different than the adults around them. Expressing curiosity and empathy about its importance in their lives sets the stage for collaboration and can help caregivers understand how to continue to support your child.
- The process of creating an agreement builds collaboration and problem-solving skills. Phones and technology can be a great mechanism for kids to practice gaining progressive responsibility. A good agreement should outline next steps including consequences for if the agreement is broken and how the child might gain more responsibility. Having a set timeline for when you will review the agreement can be a great way to check in about how things are going and consider any changes.

These conversations can be really challenging, and the issues associated with social media, phones, and the internet often feel overwhelming! There are some great guides and resources for caregivers that can help you think about these topics and prepare for conversations. **We want kids to have an open dialogue with their caregivers so they feel like they can ask questions, address concerns, and share the fun parts of this aspect of their life.**
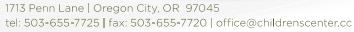
- The FTC has created some resources around online safety and their [Net Cetera booklet](#) is a great general guide for talking to kids about being online.
- The Family Online Safety Institute has a [video series and tool kit](#) about how to be a good digital parent.
- The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has a site called Netsmartz with a lot of great information. Each of their "Topics" pages has a "How to Talk About It" section, including ones on [sexting](#), [cyberbullying](#), and [social media](#).
- Common Sense Media has a [good blog post](#) with additional resources on how to talk to kids about sexting.
- The [New York Times has a great guide](#) going over consideration for screen time, family media use, and limiting kids tech use.
- If your child ha their own device or spends unsupervised time on the internet, it's time to talk with them about porn. [Amaze has a good overview](#) to help you decide if it's time to have that conversation and [other resources](#) to support you in navigating those conversations.

The culture of technology continues to change quickly. Kids are savvy, and not everyone using these spaces is safe or making good decisions. Porn and other inappropriate content is easy to come across without intention. **We encourage every caregiver to consider using parental controls and content monitoring programs as part of the plan to support and protect your child.** There are a wide variety of options out there and some platforms have content filtering options built in, as well as mechanisms for reporting inappropriate content.

- Find out what apps, sites, and devices your child likes to use (or is interested in using) and how they use them. Thorn for Parents has a great [guide for ongoing discussions about digital safety](#) starting with this curiosity.
- Familiarize yourself with those apps, sites, and devices and the options they may provide. Protect Young Eyes (a faith-based organization) has a [pretty comprehensive review of apps](#) based on their risks and features, as well as a [guide to parental controls available on different devices.](#) Common Sense Media also includes reviews of apps and websites along with movies and games in their [database of content reviews](#).
- Explore other parental control and content monitoring options. There are many different types of programs for different devices with a variety of features, ranging from free to expensive. Tech Radar has [an article reviewing the best parental controls](#) and Common Sense Media has a [good overview of options](#) that are organized based on your goals.
- Once you decide what strategies to use, include them in your family agreement. Although kids often express that these systems feel invasive, many of these programs filter/monitor content and create alerts so caregivers can do less reviewing content directly. Regardless of the tools used, we encourage caregivers to set the expectation that kids' devices can be accessed by the caregiver at any time.

There is also a lot of creative content and resources directed to kids about these topics. One of the challenges facing kids using technology is that their brains aren't fully developed! **Since the skills of**

forward thinking and understanding other people's perspectives are still being learned, it's extra important that adults teach kids about the potential outcomes of their actions. When these skills aren't matured, the lack of face-to-face communication and often anonymous feeling of being on the internet makes these spaces especially risky.

- Common Sense Media has short videos with teens talking about different issues including responding to hate speech, managing friendships and boundaries, risks of sexting, and dealing with drama. Each one has a guide to prompt a reflective conversation after watching.
- NCMEC's Netsmartz has a lot of great educational content. This simple tip sheet promotes good decision making by outlining five things to think about before sending an image or message. This page summarizes what to do if you have sent a sext or someone is sharing your picture.
- Common Sense Media has a great infographic walking through the decision making of whether or not to share a picture.
- This NCMEC video You Can't Take It Back explores the consequences of cyberbullying and their video Your Photo Fate goes through all things that could happen to a picture after you share it, along with a nice discussion guide.
- As you teach responsible decision making, it's also important to educate kids about the behaviors of others (adults and peers) that may put them at risk. Thorn created an awesome animated video using cats to explain what sextortion is.
- There are a lot of resources created for kids of different ages and developmental stages. For kids who are younger or earlier on in their development, NCMEC Netsmartz runs a website for kids with videos, learning games, and activities about online safety. The websites referenced all have the option to sort articles and content based on the age it addresses or is created for.
- ReThink has a free app that detects content that may be offensive or bullying and prompts the teen in the moment to rethink their decision before posting, promoting stop and think skills that can help teens manage impulsivity.

It can be really hard to be a caregiver addressing these issues with a child, and it also can also be really hard to be a kid navigating these issues! Outside of these types of resources we've suggested, don't forget the resource of your community. Discussions with other caregivers about the concerns they're dealing with and how they've addressed them is an important way to continue the conversation.

Website Resources
www.fosi.org
www.commonsensemedia.org
www.missingkids.org/netsmartz
parents.thorn.org
www.protectyoungeyes.org
www.rethinkwords.com
www.amaze.com