SURF SMART

A HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS OF PRE-TEENS & YOUNG TEENS

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WHY DO WE NEED A HANDBOOK ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

For parents, the world today is a much different place than the one they grew up in (this can probably be said about every new generation). However, social media has significantly altered the social landscape and many parents worry about the safety and mental health impacts of social media on their kids.

The Surf Smart Handbook aims to bring youth and adults together in the social media world by providing guidance on how to better connect with your tech-obsessed teens, how to help them stay safe on social media, and how to be more aware of what they are doing online.

SOCIAL MEDIA CONCERNS

You are right to be concerned. The Canadian Mental Health Association found that students between grades 7-12 who spent more than 2 hours per day on social media reported higher levels of depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. The link between social media and depression is more pronounced for girls than for boys. Youth who spent more time on unplugged activities, such as in-person social interaction, sports, exercise, homework, and print media, were less likely to report these issues.

"Facebook depression" (a term introduced in 2013 by the American Academy of Pediatrics) describes the impact of social media use on the mental health of youth. The negative comparisons youth make between themselves and others on Facebook significantly impact their self-image and life satisfaction.

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SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOT ALL BAD

Social media also has positive aspects. It can be the path to a connected future. It is particularly helpful for isolated youth, who can find a sense of belonging they may not be able to find face-to-face in their community.

Some research shows positive aspects of pre-teens and young teens using social media. For some, it improved the quality of their friendships and face-to-face interaction and helped them make connections and build their social networks.

The negative aspects of social media may seem to outweigh the positive aspects for many parents. Some think it's quite harmful for their kids. However, social media apps and websites are simply tools, which can be quite beneficial if they are used properly.

Teens see social media sites as places to hang out; much the same way previous generations would go to the mall or a park. Teens' developmental needs match well with what social media has to offer: developing friendships, figuring out their identities, and establishing social status by being "in the know".

It makes no sense to entirely forbid teens from using social media. Ultimately, they will find a way and have friends who will support them in gaining access. Therefore, parents need to help educate youth, themselves, and each other on the proper use of these tools.

Parents can help their kids to make intelligent choices when they are online and to understand both the positive and negative aspects of social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS A REFLECTION OF THE PEOPLE WHO USE IT

By itself, social media is neither bad nor good. Social media is a tool for us to do what we, as people have always done - tell stories and communicate with each other.

While the sense of anonymity that goes along with social media can create more opportunities for anti-social behavior without consequences, it can also create more opportunities for youth to explore the world around them and to develop their own identities when they Surf Smart.

THE NEW ADOLESCENT, ANXIETY & IDENTITY TRAFFIC

Dr. John Duffy suggests that teens today participate in fewer "adult" activities because of their fixation on smart phones and other distracting devices. Compared to 20 years ago, teens drink less alcohol, date less, have sex later, and less frequently, spend less time with their parents or guardians, drive less, are home more (including weekend evenings), and are alone more frequently.

Parents no longer control the narrative and the flow of information to their kids. Teens are flooded with adult information and have a heightened awareness of adult issues: political disruption, scandal and deceit, violence, and mental illness. Kids are overwhelmed with information about the maladies of the world and they are self-diagnosing and treating themselves in an effort to stay afloat in all of the noise. Unfortunately, many of the coping strategies readily available to teens - drugs, video games, social media, fast-food and Netflix – can be harmful.

On social media, youth often maintain multiple identities. Duffy refers to this phenomenon as identity traffic - whereby teens spend an extraordinary amount of time online figuring out where they fit into the world and crafting and maintaining multiple identities online and in real life. There may be an identity they present to their friends at school, one they present to their parents, and one for social media.

Youth today are never truly off the grid and free to hear themselves think. Their phones are with them constantly. The negative things they see and hear about themselves online, either through comparison to others or through the way they think others see them, repeat themselves in their minds even when the phone is off. It's all pretty exhausting!

ONE TEEN EXPLAINS HOW KIDS NAVIGATE THE "ONLINE SELF" VS. "REAL SELF"

By Sydney Alexander, age 17

It seems that as I grow up, the more I notice the effects of social media. It's not just hindering our ability to communicate with one another, but even our desire for real connection with other people. You can see this as we have learned to advertise certain aspects of our lives while keeping others in the dark. We've learned how to show the world how happy we are, while the sad aspects of our reality are hidden…

A parent might expect you to act one way: dressing modestly, using clean language, and speaking with respect to those around you. But as I have come to notice with my own friends and even occasionally myself, it's very easy to show several different faces of who you are to different audiences when you have the comfort of a screen.

On Instagram we often see peoples' beautiful accounts with smiling families and savoured moments. And although that may be the case for some teenagers, most of us have what is called a "spam" account, or "finsta." Of course, this isn't the case with everyone, but for the most part these accounts are created to show a more "raw" self – someone who doesn't need to follow parents' rules. The real, or "rinsta" account has become more of an advertisement for the public: a place for your very best pictures, and poetic captions full of humor and happiness–the account your parents can follow.

This duality obviously transfers over into our actual lives. We go to school all day, and it becomes easy to "be" that other person we have created on social media–slipping in bad language, sneaking immodest clothes to school, anything really. When we get home from school, due to the fact that many families spend less and less time together, teenagers can easily put on that Instagram smile and do as they're told in that short time with their families…

So what can parents do to help their kids be real and merge their online persona with their "real life" face?

First, parents need to set an example of being real. Show us how to be online without filtering photos and only showing our families smiling on vacation or dressed up for holidays. Let people see the real you…

Next, everyone needs less screen time–parents included. We get it; you don't want us glued to our phones. But don't just tell us to get off our phones and then turn on the TV. You don't have to provide a show or entertainment for us. Instead, we should have time together that means something…

Show an interest in us. Talk to us. We are not going to share the important stuff with you if you won't listen to the "little stuff." Because here is the secret: It's all "big stuff" to us…

Listen To Us. Parents need to learn how to listen to their children without it becoming a lecture, or them giving advice. Sometimes we really just want to be heard by you. We need to feel like our parents really are on our side.

Finally, we need more affection. I don't know many kids who get enough hugs, high fives, goodnight kisses, or whatever your family likes to do. Research shows that kids are less anxious and emotionally happier when their parents are affectionate with them. Our brains literally change as a result of affection.

Source: Why Kids Are Leading Double Lives – Educate Empower Kids

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE TEEN BRAIN

To better understand youth, our relationships with them and their relationships with each other online, it helps to start with the adolescent brain.

All humans have an area of the brain called the **amygdala.** The amygdala is responsible for immediate reactions such as fear and aggression. It is the center of the "fight, flight, or freeze" response to perceived threats in our environment. This area of the brain develops quite early and is responsible for helping humans survive in dangerous environments.

Sometimes, depending on how practiced the brain is at responding with fear, the amygdala can get overstimulated and create neuro pathways to stimulate a fear response when the person is not actually in danger. For example, someone who has experienced significant trauma in childhood may have a heightened fear or aggression response to something that others would not feel threatened by, such as a loud noise.

There is another area of the brain that neuroscientists agree is responsible for moral reasoning. The **prefrontal cortex** controls reasoning and helps us think about the consequences of our actions before they happen. This is the "moral compass" that most adults possess and teens often seem to lack. In fact, this area of the brain continues to develop into early adulthood (21-25 years of age).

Adolescents are MORE likely than adults to:

- Act on impulse
- Misread or misinterpret social cues and emotions
- Get into accidents of all kinds
- Get involved in fights
- Engage in dangerous or risky behaviour

Adolescents are LESS likely than adults to:

- Think before they act
- Pause to consider the consequences of their actions
- Change their risky or inappropriate behaviour even when it is pointed out to them.

We have all seen mature adults lose their cool or act in anti-social or socially inappropriate ways on social media. Imagine navigating the world of social media with a brain that isn't ready to stop, think and edit before it presses send! Add a dash of hormones and a sprinkle of anxiety and we can sometimes end up with an emotional stew. This is the world of the modern adolescent.

Despite their increased awareness of mental health issues and problems, the adolescent brain, by its very nature, doesn't always know what to DO with that information.This is where parents and other adults come into play. They can help adolescents to understand the ways their minds are working in relation to social media, and to bring some reasoning into those inevitable disagreements about social media.

COMMON STRESSORS YOUTH ENCOUNTER ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Insecurity related to the "online lives" of others: Youth compare their lives with their friends' lives online (their best, most shareable moments) and may feel inadequate. Seeing how many "friends" others have and the photos of them having fun can make youth feel bad about themselves or like they don't measure up. One media psychologist calls this effect of social media "compare and despair", when teens spend much of their time observing images of their peers (both known and unknown to them) and engaging in constant comparison.

Social Currency: Likes, comments, and shares on social media attribute value. They become a recorded transaction of a person's value that is published for others to view and evaluate. Self-worth becomes based on a quantified impression of what others think of us. Kids who take social media too seriously have a lot of emotions tied up in the likes and comments they are getting on social media.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): Youth experience social anxiety when they think they are missing social connections, events, or information. When access to social media and phones is denied, youth can experience physiological stress, irrational withdrawal symptoms, and social anxiety.

Online Harassment: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of social media greatly increased, and at the same time the mental health of youth as a population declined. There was also an increase in teen suicide, especially among girls. Online harassment is on the radar in schools, where teachers identify cyberbullying as a big concern. Rates of online harassment are higher for women/girls, 2SLGBTQIA+, Muslim, Black or other socially marginalized groups.
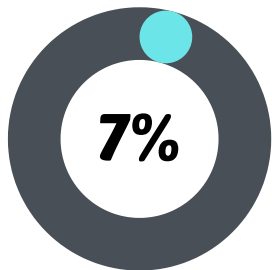
TOP 3 ONLINE THREATS

Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying is any aggressive, threatening, or mean-spirited activity conducted via electronic communication (email, social media posts, text messages, etc.). One of the biggest problems with cyberbullying is that the threat is constant. There is no safe place away from social media. Threatening images and messages stay there and often snowball, creating constant psychological pressure that can lead to depression and anxiety.Cyberbullying has resulted in skipped school, ruined friendships and in some tragic cases, death by suicide.

Online Predators: Adults who use the internet to entice children for sexual or other types of abusive exploitation are considered online predators. When it comes to online enticement, young girls make up the majority of victims. The majority of online predators are male.

Exposure to Inappropriate Content: Inappropriate content is one of the most common online threats that kids encounter. This includes everything from offensive language and hate speech to graphically violent or sexual images.

WARNING

CANADIAN CYBERBULLYING STATISTICS
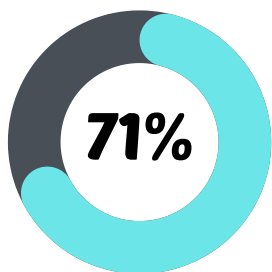
7%

CANADIANS WHO EXPERIENCE CYBERBULLYING
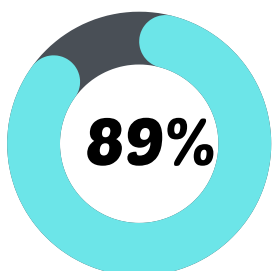
This figure goes up to 17% of young adults ages 18-24.

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1 IN 10 CANADIAN ADULTS WHO LIVE IN A HOUSEHOLD WITH CHILDREN ARE AWARE OF A CASE OF CYBERBULLYING AGAINST ONE OR MORE OF THESE CHILDREN.

71%

GIRLS ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO BE THE VICTIMS OF CYBERBULLYING THAN BOYS.

71% of adults who knew of a case of cyberbullyinh or luring against a child reported that the victim was female

89%

TEACHERS WHO BELIEVE CYBERBULLYING IS THE LEADING SAFETY ISSUE IN CANADIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Teachers viewed traditional forms of harassment and bullying as less pressing matters.

THE MAIN EFFECTS OF CYBERBULLYING ARE:

- Depression and anxiety
- Reduced feelings of self confidence and self worth
- Sleep difficulties
- Physical issues
- Increased suicide risk
- Eating disorders and substance use disorders

NOVA SCOTIA CYBER-SAFETY ACT (2013)

In 2013, the Government of Nova Scotia established a Cyber-Safety Act and a Cyber SCAN investigative unit within the Justice Department, the first initiative of this kind in Canada. This legislation allowed victims and their families to seek a court protection order. It could ban a person from contacting the victim, talking about them online, or using any means of electronic communication. Courts could also order computers, smartphones, or tablets to be confiscated.

The Nova Scotia Supreme Court struck down the original legislation of the Cyber-safety Act, in 2015. That law was declared of "no force and effect" for violating the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including infringing on the freedom of expression.

A new **Intimate Images and Cyber-protection Act** was introduced in 2017 to deal with actions that are maliciously intended to cause harm to victims. It creates civil remedies to prevent the sharing of intimate images without consent and cyber-bullying, balancing freedom of expression with public safety

The act gives the CyberSCAN unit, which was created by the former legislation, authority to support and help victims navigate the process for getting images or posts removed. It can also resolve disputes and negotiate and mediate for victims, and continues to provide public education.

WHAT IS CYBERBULLYING?

There are several factors that qualify a communication as cyberbullying:

→ The communication is carried out electronically, that is by email, text message, or online such as through social media.

→ The communication causes, or is likely to cause harm to another person's health or well-being.

→ The person responsible for the communication maliciously intended to cause harm to another individual's health or well-being.

→ The person responsible for the communication was reckless, that is, didn't think about or care if the communication might cause harm to another person's health or well-being.

For a communication to qualify as cyberbullying, it can either be directed to the person being harmed or it may be about that person.

EXAMPLES OF CYBERBULLYING

• Revealing sensitive personal facts or confidential information
• Threatening or intimidating another person
• Communicating in a way that is grossly offensive, indecent, or obscene
• Harassing another person
• Making a false accusation
• Assuming the online identity of another person
• Encouraging another person to commit suicide
• Criticizing or disparaging another person because of a prohibited ground of discrimination
• Encouraging another person to do any of the above

SOURCE: : CYBERSCAN - GOVERNMENT OF NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA

To talk with someone at CyberScan call: 1-855-702-8324
cyberscan.novascotia.ca

Instagram

Minimum age: 13 years

Users can snap, edit, and share photos and short videos. Privacy settings allow content to be private or public. The platform allows sharing and commenting. As long as the account is private, no one can view or comment on a post. Risks include sharing inappropriate content among friends and sharing location publicly by using the location tags.

WhatsApp

Minimum age: 16 years

A widely popular messaging app, WhatsApp allows users to send text messages, audio messages, videos, and photos to one or many people with no message limits or fees. It limits access to only those people in your contact list. But people in a group chat who aren't on your contact list can communicate with you.

Snapchat

Minimum age: 13 years

A popular photo-sharing app, Snapchat lets users share pictures and videos for a preset length of time. Content will self-destruct when that time runs out. But keep in mind, people can still take screenshots and save the content. It gives a false sense of permanent deletion. The Discover feature may allow kids to have access to inappropriate content.

Facebook

Minimum age: 13 years

This widely used social media app lets users share pictures, videos, and comments. It also has an instant messaging feature. Facebook helps teens catch up with friends, family and events.

Twitter

Minimum age: 13 years

A microblogging site that has the option to keep 'tweets' private or public. It can help teens keep up with their friends and favourite celebrities. Even though Twitter has the option to delete a tweet, the posted content could have been copied or stored.
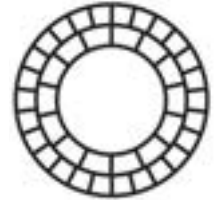
BeReal

Minimum age: 12 years

This is a new photo-sharing app that shows a more authentic representation of a person's day-to-day life. It's social media but without the airbrushed fictional curated edge.

VSCO

Minimum age: 13 years

This is a photography mobile app that allows users to capture photos in the app and edit them, using preset filters and editing tools.

Social media sites provide tools for parents and youth on how to set privacy settings and other safety measures. Some recent safety upgrades on Instagram, for example, include an education hub for parents, supervision tools, automatic private accounts for young users, and a "Take a Break" feature that discourages endless scrolling.

It's important to note that even though kids under 13 aren't technically allowed to use social media sites like Instagram, younger kids can work around the system by using fake birthdays and a parent's email address to create an account on popular social media sites. And that's another reason parents of pre-teen kids need to be talking with their kids about social media.

Source: Kids and Social Media: Online Safety Tips Every Parent Should Know (norton.com)

HELPING YOUTH TO SURF SMART

Social media is here to stay. We need to find ways to help our kids and each other navigate through it. It's important to talk with your kids about how to use social media wisely. Many kids are not being informed about social media apps by their parents. They are learning from friends, peers, older siblings, and other influencers, who may or may not be good influences.

Parents should be aware of what their kids do online. However, snooping can alienate youth and damage trust between parents and youth. Banning social media, taking away phones, arguing, and damaging trust and honesty is likely to be very hard on our relationships with our kids. The key is to stay involved in a way that makes them understand that you respect their privacy but want to make sure they're safe.
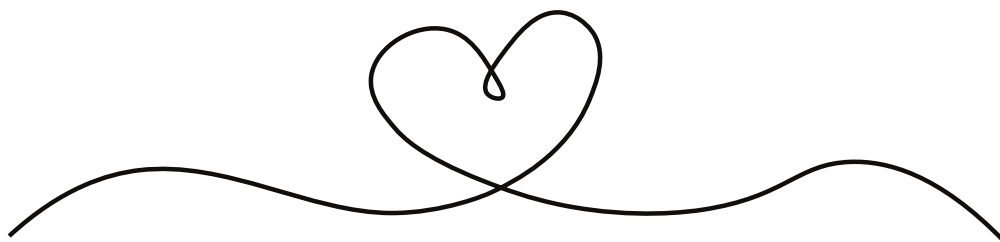
WHAT PARENTS OR GUARDIANS CAN DO?

Drop the disdain. Your child did not create the social media world. As far as they know, things always been this way. When parents roll their eyes at youth making TikToks and talking about social media, we send a message that we don't understand their world and don't think it's important. But to youth, it's very important. So make a TikTok with your teen! Learn the dance moves! Let them show you their favourite content they've created. You might be surprised at their creativity, their sense of humor, their leadership, and their empathy for others.

Take time with your children. Spend time learning from and playing with youth online. Let your teen teach you about their tech and ask them how they feel about it. This builds trust so they will come to you if they have problems. Many youth will come to internalize self-discipline in order to avoid disappointing a trusted adult.

Put limits on time spent online. Set limits but do so with an understanding of your teen's impending adulthood and the need to feel capable and responsible for themselves. Anything over 2 hours per day seems to be a problem. Make that your hard and fast limit.

Teach problem-solving and choice in an age-appropriate way. A sense of autonomy can be an antidote to anxiety. Your teen wants to be independent. Help them to achieve that in a responsible way.

Build a strong value system. Teach your kids about what really matters so when they show up online, they do so in a way that is rooted in respect and compassion for themselves and others.

Audit your own social media use. Be mindful of how you feel while using social media. How do you feel if you use it less? Do you have time for other things in your life that are important?

Model good behavior online. Seeing adults engage in anti-social activities online is detrimental to youth.Behave online as you would like your teens to behave. Set a good example for them.

Raising kids who will someday become responsible, capable adults, they will need to function in a technology saturated world. We need to help them navigate this turbulent terrain, by using your home as a training ground.

Parents can use tracking apps and parental control apps, but these essentially amount to us spying on our kids, which at its core is unhealthy and fundamentally disempowering. Instead, we need to talk openly with our kids. We need to get rid of the fears and judgement that we, as parents, put on social media so we can listen better to our kids. Kids need to be heard and to feel safe being honest with their parents and others who care for them.

NETIQUETTE – AN ACTIVITY TO HELP TEACH KIDS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA ETIQUETTE

Teach your kids that words, especially written/typed words, have power.
Write your child a heartfelt note. Ask them to read it and think about the words inside.

• Does it make them feel good? Does it make them feel loved?

Remind them that it is the same with social media. The words that we post make people feel, and we want to make people feel good. Challenge your family to make their social media interactions more positive. Set a goal to post only positive things for one week. Encourage family members to share uplifting, informative, or humorous examples. Follow up after one week and discuss the positive impact your kids were able to make among friends and family.

Raising kids who will someday become responsible, capable adults, they will need to function in a technology saturated world. We need to help them navigate this turbulent terrain, by using your home as a training ground.

Positive Vibes Only

Source: Social Media and Teens: The Ultimate Guide to Keeping Kids Safe Online

THE ECHO APPROACH

To support your pre-teens and teens to Surf Smart, try the ECHO approach.

Education for you: Search online for current articles about teenagers and social media. Ask another teen to show you their phone and latest apps. Try out some of the apps. Talk to other parents of teens and swap experiences.

Education for your teen: Talk about real-life mistakes other kids and teens have made. Set up a system to monitor your child. Work with your child's school to make sure students are learning about the use of social media.

Communicate: Keep the lines of communication open. Talk to your child about school, friends and sports at the dinner table. Actively listen to what they say. Ask open-ended questions that require an answer beyond 'yes' or 'no'. Know who your child's friends are and take an interest in their hobbies and interests.

Help: Tell your teen to come to you when needed. Tell them that if they get into trouble online, you will help them and stand by their side. Teach your child to let you know if they receive inappropriate images and posts, and to never share them with others.

Observe: Watch for changes in behavior. Signs of possible online trouble include falling grades, secretiveness (closing down the computer in your presence, not wanting to let you look at their phone), sleep deprivation signs (dark circles under the eyes, falling asleep at odd times), social isolation and refusal to communicate with you.

MAKE A SOCIAL MEDIA CONTRACT WITH YOUR KIDS/FAMILY

Consider making a social media contract with your kids or for your whole family - a real contract that everyone can sign. The contract is all about integrating digital technology into family life in a meaningful and balanced way that promotes family values. In the contract, kids agree to protect their own privacy, to consider their reputation, and to not give out personal information online. They also promise not to use technology to hurt anyone else through bullying or gossip. They can also negotiate a time limit for time spent online.

In turn, parents agree to respect teens' privacy as much as they can. They can make a real effort to be part of the social media world. Maybe your child will permit you to "friend" and observe them, as long you refrain from posting embarrassing comments or photos.

Signing a social media contract is not the end of the discussion. It's just the beginning! Revisit the agreements about phone/screen usage every few months.

SOME THINGS YOU CAN INCLUDE IN A SOCIAL MEDIA CONTRACT

Limit Alerts. Turning off "alerts" will enable kids to be present in the moment instead of constantly being attentive to their phone or other devices. It can be very hard to interact with someone who is constantly distracted by the alerts they are receiving and what is happening on social media.

Limit Social Media Platforms. Using more than two social media platforms can increase depression and anxiety because it can lead to feeling overwhelmed with all the posts and information. And it's time-consuming to be involved in numerous platforms.

Prohibit Social Media Before Bed. Using social media before bed can cause poor sleep. Encourage your child to have at least 30 minutes without their phone or device before bed, so their mind and body can wind down and prepare for sleep. It may be helpful for your child to keep screens out of their bedroom, so they are not tempted to use them and disrupt their sleep. Good sleep is essential for growth and development and being able to cope with the ups and downs of daily life. You can suggest your kids tell their friends they'll be signing off at a specific time, so they won't be expecting a response.

Set Time Limits for Social Media. It's easy to get trapped into mindlessly scrolling on social media. Talk with your kids about how much time they should reasonably spend on social media. Parents need to set a good example by adhering to limits and sticking to the agreement established by the family.

Social Media Guide Contract (educateempowerkids.org)

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO KEEPING YOUTH SAFE ONLINE

Teach Authenticity. Help kids learn to question their own posts and those of others. People often post exaggerations or lies about their lives on social media, showing a perfectly filtered life, pretending that everything is always fun and beautiful in their lives. Teach your kids to ask: Is this real? Teach your child that social media is a place to show who they really are, not a fake version of themselves.

Teach Responsibility. A person with feelings sits somewhere reading and reacting to what is being posted. That is why it is important to teach kids to take personal responsibility for their social media relationships. Remind your kids that words have power, especially written words! Social media accounts are not like a journal. They are not there to rant, mock, or complain but for connecting and communicating in positive ways.

Teach Safety. A grown man can easily create a profile to make himself appear to be a young girl. Teach your kids that they should NEVER share personal information with strangers, including their birthday, address, and location. Be sure that they know never to arrange to meet a stranger in person that they have only met online. Tell your kids that while it's good to be real, it's important not to over-share. Emphasize the fact that you never really know who is on the other side of the computer screen.

Encourage Creativity. Whether online or offline, encourage your child to read, draw, paint, write, create, dance, build, etc. This encourages kids to be true to themselves, to find worth in their own beliefs, and to explore their own thoughts and ideas --not just what the current culture dictates. If you help them find genuine interests and encourage those interests, it will be easier to be more authentic online because they will be more authentic offline too.

DISCUSSION POINTS FOR TALKING WITH YOUTH ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

A challenging task for parents is identifying the tipping point between a healthy relationship to social media and an unhealthy one. You can do this by understanding how your kid uses various platforms, helping them learn to recognize their own limits, and supporting them in finding a healthy balance of online and offline socializing.

➡ Logging time spent on social media can be eye opening. Talk with your kids about how much time they are spending on social media. They may not be aware of the how much time they are spending and could use that time to do something that gives them more pleasure.

➡ Ask to scroll through their posts with them. This could be awkward, but actually sit with them and look at the posts uploaded both by them and to them. Discuss what you see together. Ask what someone looking at their posts might conclude if they didn't know them.

➡ Suggest they follow this rule: I will only post what I want my reputation to be ten years from now.

➡ Listen. It can be easy to dismiss social media stress as superficial, but for many tweens and teens, social media is social life.

➡️ Don't judge. For tweens and teens, connecting with their peers is a normal part of child development. For you, it meant hours on the phone. For them, it means engaging in social media. Accept that this is important to them.

➡️ Encourage their offline lives. Fear of missing out (FOMO) can impact kids' self-esteem. The best defense is a strong sense of what makes kids unique, worthy, and valuable. Help kids participate in sports, clubs, drama, volunteer work, or even online hobbies to help them weather the ups and downs of social media.

➡️ Using social media settings. All apps have settings to help you keep a lower profile. You can turn off your status so friends don't know that you're online, mute people to disengage for a while, and go into "ghost mode" so your friends can't find you. Some apps even have features that limit your time or remind you to take a break. Using these settings can help kids take some control over their use of social media, which can help relieve anxiety.

➡️ Ask open-ended questions. You don't need to solve their problems for them. But you can help them think about what is and isn't working for them. Here are some questions to try:

What would happen if you turned off your phone? For an hour? A day?

What are the pros and cons of using Instagram and other social-networking apps?

What would happen if you unfollowed or unfriended someone who was making you feel bad on social media?

PARENTS AND YOUTH CAN LEARN TO SURF SMART TOGETHER

Social media is a world in which people of all ages and identities can connect. When parents and adolescents interact through social media it can help the adults to better understand and appreciate their adolescents' lives. Parents can see the landscape of their adolescent's social group, friends and preferences. Social media interaction within families can lead to positive outcomes for adolescents, such as better relationships with family and increased inclination for teens to share their thoughts and feelings, rather than internalize problems.

There are many ways parents and adolescents can positively use social media together, including as a way to communicate more, playing games. watching videos or TikToks together, showing support to each other through positive comments on photos and/or status updates, bonding and patience through teaching each other about favorite sites, games, etc.

Teens can teach their parents and other important adults in their lives a lot about the use of social media. This can be a good way for parents and teens to co-create family rules and expectations and interact with teens in the role of expert. Navigating the social media world while trying to keep adolescents safe can seem daunting at times. However, when the adults in teens' lives serve as online role models and emotional supports for surfing smart, it can be a place of connection, learning and sharing.

SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES

Petra's Power to See: A Media Literacy Adventure
(Available on Amazon)
In this book, Petra and her dad come face to face with clear and hidden messages in different media such as advertising, social media, movies, and fake news. Petra and Dad will teach you what media is, how it affects us, and how to make wise choices when using media.

Social Media and Teens: The Ultimate Guide to Keeping Kids Safe Online
Contains a sample social media contract on the last page.

Conversations with My Kids: 30 Essential Family Discussions for the Digital Age
(Available on Amazon)
The conversations include using technology for good, social media, overcoming fears, setting goals, healthy sexuality, LGBTQI issues, racism and tolerance, etc.

Screen Time and Digital Media:
Advice for parents of school-aged children and teens Screen time and digital media.
Caring for kids (cps.ca)
Reducing Screen Time (nshealth.ca)
Media Smarts For Parents | MediaSmarts

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Cyberbullying Reporting Hotline
Phone: 1-855-702-8324
Website: cyberscan.novascotia.ca

Mental Health & Addictions Crisis Line (available 24/7)
Phone: 1-888-429-8167
Website: mha.nshealth.ca

Kids Help Phone
Phone: 1-800-668-6868
Text: 686868

Pictou County Rainbow Community
Phone: 902-301-4789

Pictou County Women's Resource & Sexual Assault Centre
Phone: 902-755-4647

Kids First (Family Resource Centre)
Phone: 902-755-5437