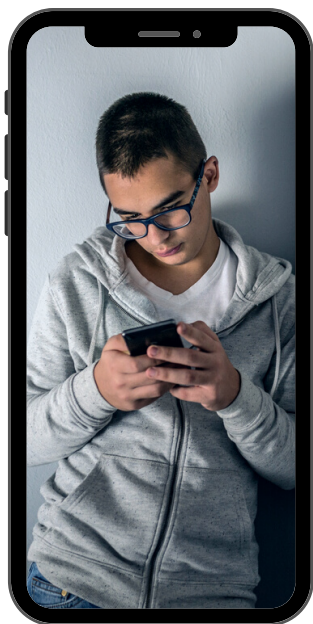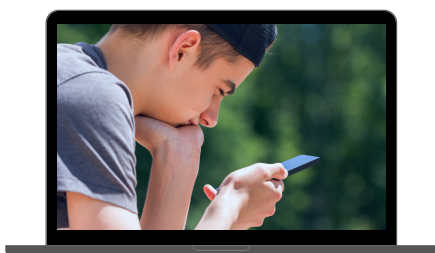# SURF SMART

A HANDBOOK FOR PRE-TEENS & YOUNG TEENS GETTING STARTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

This handbook was created thanks to the collaboration of the Pictou County Organizations

Schools Écoles **Plus**

Central & East **PICTOU** Community Health Board
nova scotia health

PICTOU WEST Community Health Board
nova scotia health

PICTOU COUNTY MENTAL WELLNESS ROUND TABLE

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This handbook is not going to give you instructions on the technical aspects of using social media. It is going to provide you with some information and tips on the human aspects of using social media. If you are going to use social media, it's important to Surf Smart – to keep yourself safe while learning and connecting online.

There are lots of good things about social media. But there are also some risks, and some things kids and teens should be careful to avoid.

WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media can help young people:

• Connect with family and friends
• Volunteer
• Be creative
• Make new friends with similars interests
• Communicate with teachers and other students

WHAT'S NOT SO GOOD ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA?

The flipside is that social media can be used to hurt you (bullying) and can lead youth into dangerous situations. It's easy, especially when you are first getting started, to share more online than you should. Young kids especially might not realize what can happen if they are not careful about what they post online or who they connect with.

Without thinking, many young people have:

• posted photos of themselves online or used their real names on their profiles
• revealed their birthdates and interests
• posted their school name or the town where they live
• been contacted online by someone they didn't know in a way that made them feel scared or uncomfortable
• received online advertising that was not appropriate for their age
• lied about their age to get access to websites

These are things you should avoid on social media.

Parents, older youth, and other trusted adults can help you learn to Surf Smart so you don't put yourself or others into situations where someone could get hurt.

It's important to remember that social media images, texts, and messages are developed by people for a reason. Often you don't know these people or anything about them. But they are trying to get a message across – about someone or something. If you think about the reason behind what they are saying or doing, it can help you figure out if you should believe what you are seeing or reading. And then you can decide if it's worth your time to connect or learn more.

People often post exaggerations or lies about their lives on social media, showing a perfect life, and pretending everything is fun and beautiful.

You should ask yourself:

Is this real?
What could be going on behind the scenes?

For many people, social media is a business and it's all about making money. Influencers and advertisers are using the internet as a way to make money and to influence what people think and believe. Even YouTube videos and Facebook posts are connected to making money (you've all seen those ads popping up!).

You should ask yourself:

How does social media help someone make money? Are they trying to get me to think a certain way?
To buy a certain product?
To like or dislike certain groups of people?

Effects on the body: When you are online, you are being physically inactive (except for your fingers and thumbs). Your body needs movement throughout the day, including sports and other recreation. When you are online, you are spending less time doing healthy, real-world activities.

You won't get enough sleep if you stay up half the night scrolling through social media. If you don't get enough sleep, it makes it harder to be your best the next day, and to manage the emotional ups and downs of the day.

Effects on the brain: Social media also affects your emotions and your mood. Sometimes what you find on social media can be uncomfortable or scary. Imagine if the 15-year-old asking to be an online "friend" is really a creepy, unsafe adult! Teens who do not Surf Smart may find themselves in unhealthy and even dangerous online relationships for which they are not prepared.

Seeing how many "friends" other people have and photos of them having fun can make youth feel bad about themselves or feel like you aren't good enough. You might not even realize this is happening. Some youth find themselves comparing themselves to others a lot, which can lead to feeling stressed and depressed. This can impact your self-esteem and impact your body image. The best people to compare yourself to are those you look up to because of who they are, not because of how they look.

Being sneaky about using social media is stressful. If you are hiding your use of social media or how much time you spend on social media from your parents, you might feel stressed and be always watching to see if anyone is looking at your phone or other devices. You might isolate yourself from the people closest to you because you don't want them to know what you are doing. But these are the people you need the most if you find yourself in trouble on social media. Avoid the stress of trying to hide your online activities by sharing what you are doing with a parent or other trusted adult so they can help you surf smart and be safe.

HOW TO SURF SMART

Trust Your Instincts: When you hear a little voice in your head saying "maybe this is not a good idea," or you have a feeling in your gut that something is wrong, listen to these instincts. Avoid chat rooms or conversations that feel risky or uncomfortable. You can log off, close a browser window, or navigate away if something online doesn't seem right or makes you feel uncomfortable.

Don't Invite Everyone to the Party: Social media such as Facebook, texting and instant messaging are great tools for planning parties. The downside is that there is no way to control how many people will get a party invitation. Invite your friends to the party but be careful about what you put online. You don't want to have unexpected guests show up and ruin the fun.

Use privacy settings: Privacy settings are meant to protect your identity and personal information. Get your parents, trusted adults, or older youth to explain how to use privacy settings. You can set your privacy settings so only friends can see what you post. Do not share your passwords with ANYONE (even your friends, because sometimes friends don't stay friends).

Do not "friend" strangers: If you don't know them, don't friend them. This is the best way to avoid risks. Ignore messages from people you don't know. Do not send inappropriate photos or engage in sexual conversations with strangers or even people you know.

Avoid questionnaires: You may be tempted to sign up for "free" giveaways, competitions, or online quizzes. These can be scams that will try to trick you into giving away personal information or allow hackers to try to mess up your computer or device.

Act quickly if you think you are getting into trouble online: Tell a parent or an adult you trust about any harassing or bullying messages you receive. Or if you think something you posted may be hurting someone else.

Pause before hitting 'enter': What you post online can be used against you. If you post that your family is leaving town on vacation, you may find your house robbed when you return. Photos, videos, and comments made online can't be taken back once they're posted, even if you think you've deleted them. All your online posts, comments, likes, and shares become part of your digital footprint. If these posts or comments are not positive, they might cause problems years from now, such as when a potential employer includes social media in a background check. Take a moment to think about who will see your message or image before you hit enter. Once it's posted, you can't take it back.

Follow the WWGS (What Would Grandma Say) Rule: If you follow this rule, you will not share anything on social media that you wouldn't want parents, teachers, future bosses — and grandma — to see.

It's a good idea to THINK about what you are going to post. Your post may be seen not only by the person you send it to but by many other people as well.

Is it Truthful?

Does it Help?

Does it Inspire?

Is it Nice or Necessary?

Is it Kind?

If in doubt, don't post it.

BE KIND ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Be kind online, as you should be kind in person. Treat other people they way you would like to be treated. Do not gossip, spread rumors, bully others or try to hurt someone's reputation. Sending a mean text or image, even as a joke, can be very hurtful. Or it could be taken as a threat and you could find yourself in trouble with the law. Nova Scotia has laws related to cyberbullying (online bullying) and these laws are being enforced to protect victims of online bullying.

Practice good "netiquette". Netiquette is good online etiquette, or good manners. If you are feeling angry or upset, you might type something quickly that you will want to take back later. One way of having good netiquette is to always be positive in what you post. Another way is to check with friends before posting or tagging photos that include them.

BE A GOOD DIGITAL CITIZEN

Like all technology, social media can be used to do positive things. It is not just a way to pass time or be entertained.

Try something new like creating a website, photo blog, or Youtube channel. Many teens have started online petitions, art tutorial channels, photography pages, fashion and make-up classes, and self-help blogs. These are great opportunities for you to find and use your voice in ways that are meaningful and will touch other people. You can learn technical skills, be an active digital citizen, and build an online community.

See yourself as an agent for change. Youth around the world have started online social movements, created non-profits, and spread awareness about important issues like diversity and climate change. You can help change the world for the better!

Look for opportunities to use technology to help others. Using apps and websites, find ways to serve your community or start a service project of your own. For example, you might connect older people who need errands done (grocery shopping, dog walking) with youth who are willing to help with these errands.

FOLLOW PEOPLE WHO INSPIRE YOU TO BE CREATIVE

There are lots of ways social media can inspire users to be healthy, happy, and creative. You can see people cooking and eating delicious and nutritious food. You can see people creating art - music, writing, painting, dance, and other forms of art. You can see people outside in nature, learning and sharing information about the natural world, climate change, and the environment. Whatever you are interested in, there are people online who can inspire you to try something new, follow your dreams, and speak up about things that matter to you.

Be Real: Using social media should be about showing who you really are and being proud of who you are, instead of showing a fake version of yourself.

Be Responsible: A person with feelings is sitting somewhere reading and reacting to what is being posted. That is why it is so important to take responsibility for social media posts. WORDS HAVE POWER, especially written words that can't be taken back. Social media accounts are not like a journal. They are not there to rant, mock, or complain. Or at least they shouldn't be.

Be Safe: An unsafe adult can easily create a profile to make themself appear to be a harmless "friend". You should NEVER share personal information with strangers, including your birthday, address, or location. NEVER arrange to meet a stranger in person that you have only met online. You never really know who is on the other side of the computer screen.

Be Kind & Be You

Be Creative: Whether online or offline - read, draw, paint, write, create, build, etc. This helps you to be true to yourself, find worth in your own beliefs and talents, and explore your own thoughts and interests. Use social media to help you find and explore your genuine interests and passions. When you do, you will find you are more real both online and offline.

Adapted from Social Media and Teens: The Ultimate Guide to Keeping Kids Safe Online (educateempowerkids.org)

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

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

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

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

Pictou County Rainbow Community
Phone: 902-301-4789
Website: pcrainbowcommunity.ca

Pictou County Roots for Youth
Phone: 902-695-2775
Website: pcrootsforyouth.ca

SURF SMART

SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY FOR KIDS & YOUTH

1 **BE KIND**
Say nice things because you never know who will read what you say, or how it will impact someone's life.

2 **BE SAFE**
Know who you are friending and talking to.

3 **BE ALERT**
Do not share personal information with strangers, and don't share passwords with anyone.

4 **BE MINDFUL**
Do not gossip or share inappropriate images online. The things you say and do online have real-world consequences.

5 **BE CREATIVE**
Write, draw, paint, dance, sing, play an instrument. Show the world your creative self.

Scan Here for the Parent & Guardian Handbook