FAMILY TIP SHEET

Social Media and Body Image

How do teens' experiences on social media influence their body image? Today's teens not only have the ability to share their thoughts, their photos, and their videos, they also have 24-hour-a-day access to feedback from others. On social media, teens also have access to an unending stream of other people's pictures and posts — and let's not forget, often the most carefully selected and flattering snapshots of their peers. Developmentally, it's no surprise that teens are lured by the appeal of peer feedback and the opportunity for social approval. But social media create unique challenges for parenting, particularly related to body image.

- **Ask your teens how they decide which photos of themselves to share.**
  A perfectly curated online identity looks effortless. But in reality, people are intentional about what they share, and quite a bit of thought and effort goes into portraying a certain image. Invite your teens to think about a difficult day or day they felt unattractive — did they share it online? Why or why not? Can they recall a time when a friend shared a less-than-perfect photo? Consider opening up about your own process about what you post or don't post. What motivates all of us to share, or not to share, certain snapshots of our lives online?

- **Encourage your teens to view photos and comments online with a critical eye.**
  There are two major ways social media can impact body image for teens. First, because teens see so many flattering pictures of others online, they may start to believe that everyone else always looks beautiful and perfect. The second way is through the feedback that teens individually receive about their photos. They may begin to believe what people say about them, or even develop insecurity when no one comments. Counter the perception that everyone else is always camera-ready by explaining how photos don't tell the whole story, may have been digitally altered, or simply may be taken out of context. Help your teens deal with online comments by asking questions about both the photos that they view and the feedback that they receive.

- **Praise your teen for things other than his or her looks.**
  It may seem obvious, but you need to help balance the feedback teens receive online. It can be intoxicating to receive likes and positive reinforcement in response to a flattering picture. Try to focus your feedback on other aspects of your teen's identity — skills, hobbies, and interests. Encourage them to curate a positive digital footprint online by presenting an identity that is balanced and highlights their whole character.

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Sexting & Nude Photographs

Although there are very real, serious consequences associated with sexting, it's important to also focus on the motivations behind it and the risks associated with the behavior. Understanding the phenomenon can help us prevent kids from using poor judgment and engaging in self-destructive behavior. Sexting is increasingly prevalent among kids — no longer something we can assume only happens to other families. Yet, it also confuses and angers many parents who can't imagine digitally sharing something so intimate.

- **Remind your kids that sexting has long-lasting consequences. It's important to communicate that sexting can hurt everyone involved.**

  In many states, sending nude photographs is illegal — particularly when minors are involved. Taking, possessing, or distributing naked images of minors can have significant legal consequences for the sender and the recipient. Second, many schools are still figuring out how to react to sexting, and consequences may range from suspension to expulsion. Regardless of the school's action, students themselves may feel pressure to change schools after such pictures get out, as the social ramifications can be devastating.

- **Remind kids that any private messages can be made public online.**

  Even if your kids insist that they completely trust the recipient, once they press Send, they lose control of the message. Help kids think through the "what-ifs": A recipient loses his or her phone; a friend scrolls through another's messages; a parent checks a kid's phone; the recipient changes his or her mind; the relationship circumstances change. Any message or photo can be copied, screenshot, or forwarded. Sexts can be used for bragging rights or even for revenge. Emphasize that there are just too many real risks that they can't control.

- **Explain to your kids that sexting is not a normal or common behavior.**

  Boys tend to believe that other boys are readily receiving sexts from their female peers. We've heard stories about teenage boys keeping naked images on their cell phones that they found online as evidence of "sexts they've received." Often this idea can pressure boys to ask for sexts as a marker of masculinity and sexual desirability. Kids also may be tempted to engage in sexting because they desperately want to experience and "prove" their closeness with others — and they are still learning how to navigate these close relationships and express their feelings appropriately. *Take this as an opportunity to talk about other ways to communicate attraction and closeness.* Explain that it's normal to want to show someone that you care about them — and even to want to impress a crush — but there are far less risky ways to do it than sending a sext. And anyone who asks for one does not have your best interests at heart.

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Cyberbullying

What makes cyberbullying so toxic, invasive, and harmful? How do teens think about cyberbullying — and how can they help be part of the solution instead of part of the problem? Cyberbullying has been a major buzzword over the past several years, with a distressing number of headlines calling attention to every parent's worst nightmares: school expulsions, arrests, youth suicides. Thankfully, many schools and young people are now taking a stand against cyberbullying, and children are stepping forward to demonstrate empathy and kindness.

- **Build a support network for your children.**

  It can be easy to think that you'll be the one to support your child in times of need. But kids often hesitate to reach out to parents in the toughest of times. Encourage your kids to turn to any trusted adult — teacher, coach, older sibling — if they are on the receiving end of hurtful online behavior. Remind your kids that you understand these situations are complicated, and that you do not want them to handle it alone. Share personal stories of when you needed someone else's support. Sometimes kids worry that parents will overract, so it is helpful toexplain that you'll think through the solution together. Try communicating your commitment to helping them find solutions that feel comfortable, safe, and supportive if and when these situations arise.

- **Encourage your kids to stand up to the bully — or at the very least to stand *with* the victim.**

  In an ideal world, we hope our kids will stand up to bullies — and this is certainly a great message for your kids. If it feels safe, encourage your child to address the bully online or, better yet, offline. Still, it doesn't always feel safe, socially or otherwise, to stand up to cyberbullies. Urge your kids to at least stand *with* the victim by communicating (1) that they do not share the bully's perspective and (2) that they are there for support. For example, a kid might say, "Hey, I just wanted to let you know that I saw what is going on online and I just wanted to tell you that I'm really sorry this is happening to you. I don't feel that way about it and I think it is really mean that people are saying that. If you need to talk to someone or if there is anything I can do, let me know."

- **Be strategic in your support.**

  If you feel that your child or someone you know is being cyberbullied "aka the target," know that there are concrete steps that you can take. First, listen to the victim and be a sympathetic ear. Show the victim how to block bullies online; many platforms have "blocking" features or have a way to report inappropriate use. Encourage the victim to take screenshots and/or print the evidence of the mean messaging. And last, find ways to encourage kindness at your kids' schools or within the community. How can you highlight the positive ways kids are using media and technology these days?

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Digital Footprints and Photo Sharing

Today's social media makes photo sharing easy. Kids love to follow friends' photos, share casual moments visually, and simply stay in touch. However, kids don't always think through what they post. Photos they thought were private can easily go public. Likewise, their choice of photos can affect others as well. Together, discuss the importance of showing respect to oneself and others when sharing photos online.

- **Set boundaries together.**
  Discuss your family's values and expectations around photo sharing. Photos that show illegal behavior (for example, underage drinking or texting while driving) are clearly a no-go. But agreeing where to draw the line on certain other photos — for example, pictures of your daughter in her bikini or your son making a rude gesture to the camera — may pose a challenge. Start by discussing the possible consequences of posting these types of pictures. How will they affect your kids' reputation? Remind your kids that once they post a picture online, it's out of their control — such photos could be seen by a friend's parent, a college admissions counselor, or a future employer. Online content is easily searchable and often ends up in hands of those we didn't intend it for. And it is easily taken out of context. Lastly, it also is permanent, meaning it can resurface at any time.

- **Remind your kids to consider the impact of a photo on the people in the picture.**
  It may not be realistic to expect your kids to get everyone's permission before they upload an image, but it's a worthy goal. When they're about to upload a picture that someone has just snapped, encourage them to stop and ask, "Hey — I'm going to put this on Instagram, is that okay with everyone?" Ask your kid to think honestly if every person in the photograph would be comfortable with the photo going online. If she misjudges and someone asks her to take a photo down, tell her it is her responsibility to remove the photograph. The best way to drive this concept home is to set an example. If you want to upload a photo of your child from a recent family vacation, first ask permission to do so or ask for her feedback. This can also offer a great opportunity to model this type of respect with your child.

- **Encourage your kid to talk face-to-face with a person who posts an unflattering photo.**
  Online photo sharing is a part of our world today, and opting out is unlikely. Even if your kids choose not to share photos online, their friends might upload photos of them. But it can be difficult to ask others not to post or to take down photographs. If your child is struggling with what to say, you can offer the following as an example, "Hey, I already untagged myself from the photo you put up, but I was wondering if you would be okay with taking it down. It's not my favorite picture and I'd rather if it wasn't on [Facebook/Instagram/etc.]. I'd really appreciate it." It may be helpful to have the conversation offline, face-to-face, so that it doesn't end up further perpetuating a digital problem.

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Privacy, Surveillance, and Self-Disclosure

Online privacy is tricky. The information that we put in digital form can now be readily accessed by unintended viewers, whether because of an oversight in selecting privacy settings, the vulnerability of "secure" online data, sharing passwords that grant others access to personal accounts, or simply because a friend's eyes wander to read personal text messages. Work together with your kids to be vigilant about keeping private information private.

- **Underscore that any digital information has the potential to go public.**

  Information posted online or shared digitally (a picture, a status update, a text message) is searchable, easily copied, and often permanent. Even if your kids set strict privacy settings, there is the chance that a friend could copy/paste, take a screenshot, save, or forward something your kid didn't want to get widely shared. Or, a curious onlooker may simply steal a glimpse at their screens and read private messages. Password sharing with friends, while often done causally, leads to serious privacy issues and should be avoided. Make sure your kids know that it is their responsibility to set privacy settings thoughtfully and to keep passwords private - but also remind them that anything shared digitally might be seen by unintended audiences.

- **Together, set privacy settings on all social media accounts.**

  On a daily basis, you and your children probably use different apps and sites. Together, explore how varied privacy settings and privacy policies are. Discuss how companies use their members' personal information, and urge your children to be responsible and use "friends only" privacy settings. Many social media platforms default to mostly "public" settings — requiring users to set privacy controls. And many sites frequently require updates, which reset all settings back to the default. Not only will these opportunities help safeguard you and your children, but you will get insight into how and why your child participates in the digital world.

- **Be patient and take the time to understand all the features.**

  While companies don't always make it easy to understand their privacy settings and privacy policies, take the time to dig in. Be wary of "social sign-in" (like using your Facebook or Twitter login to sign onto other sites), because that entitles third parties to collect data from your accounts. Set privacy settings for each and every type of content — profile information, posts, comments, and photos. And learn what individual features do, like tagging and blocking, to help you and your children manage and control your presence online. If your kid's school provides devices, it may have the right — and responsibility — to monitor all content on the machines. Make sure your children know that they can't assume their digital life is private from you or from anyone else.

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Sexual Imagery on the Internet

We want to help our kids develop healthy perspectives about sex, and not let the media be their only source of information. On the Internet, even innocent searches can lead to sexual imagery or pornographic content. So, it's important to talk early and often to make sure your kids get the messages you care most about communicating.

- **Figure out what you want your kid to know.**

  Identify your own personal concerns: What are you most worried about with respect to sexual imagery on the Internet? Why? How might the Internet interfere with your goals for your child's healthy sexual development? What alternative messages do you want to make sure they receive?

  It may be awkward, but it's important to talk to your kid about:

  - your key concerns regarding his or her exposure to age-inappropriate sexual images and messages
  - why you have these concerns
  - what you hope for your son or daughter with respect to intimate relationships, now and for the future

  At the same time, you can encourage your kids to view media messages critically. Point out that sex often gets everyone's attention, so in the media sex is often used to sell something. It is important that your children understand that scripted sex is not reality. Pornography is extreme and not representative of the vast landscape of human sexuality; plus it can convey an exploitive and degrading perspective.

- **Pay attention to your tone.**

  It is important to remember that how you talk to your teen regarding this subject is just as important as what you discuss. Your tone and body language will communicate as much as your words! Think of two or three adjectives that describe how you hope you'll come across to your child when talking about sexuality. Then, keep those words in the front of your mind as you enter the conversation. Humiliating, shaming, or using scare tactics on your child regarding their sexual curiosity is both damaging and counterproductive. Your child's interest and exploration of sex and their own sexuality is both natural and normal. By making your son or daughter feel ashamed, you will lose the opportunity to help him or her navigate future challenges and develop his or her own values.

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- **Take that first (difficult) step.**

  A great way to start the conversation is by simply asking your child if any of their friends have had conversations with their parents about pornography or sexual imagery on the Internet. You can say, "I know it can be awkward to talk about at first, but there are some really important things I want you to know." If you are nervous, write down what you want to say or practice when no one is around. Remember that no matter how the first conversation goes, this isn't meant to be a one-time discussion; you can (and should!) revisit or continue the conversation later if you forgot to include something or want to reemphasize a particular point. You've already fought half the battle just by taking on the conversation. Just by starting a conversation, you have communicated to your child that this is on your mind and that you're clued-in, aware, and concerned.

If you or your teen comes across any material that sexually exploits minors, you do have a duty to report it. You can report it to your local authorities or contact the CyberTipline for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. You can contact the center 24 hours a day at 1-800-THE-LOST or report an incident online at **www.cybertipline.com**.

FAMILY TIP SHEET

Distraction, Multitasking, and Time Management

Technology isn't going anywhere. But multitasking — specifically media multitasking — is a concern. Some parents feel like kids may benefit from learning how to work around disruptions, since they're going to need this skill for their entire lives. On the other hand, research shows that media multitasking can have a negative impact on school performance.

- **Try an experiment.**

  It's important to develop a strategy to help your kids focus and tune out distractions. If the strategy is successful, it can become a good habit. When you figure out what strategy you want to try (see the tip below for some ideas), propose an experiment. Say: "I've noticed that you get distracted by your phone during homework. I get distracted by my phone when I'm trying to work, too. Let's try an experiment." Then, explain the strategy you would like them to try. You may want to set a specific amount of time for the experiment as well (e.g., "We'll try this for three days" or "We'll try this on Tuesdays and Thursdays"). It can also be helpful to offer to try the experiment together — and doing a joint-experiment gives you an easy entry point for conversations during and after to explore what worked and what didn't.

- **Get some distance from the distraction.**

  Many kids describe how a constantly buzzing cell phone distracts them from their work. But they have difficulty turning it off, for fear of missing out. After discussing it with your child, consider these solutions:

  - **Get some physical distance from your phone.** Leave it in another room or put it in a drawer or box that isn't within arm's length.
  - **Turn it on silent.** And keep the phone facedown on the table.
  - **Take breaks for tech.** After a certain amount of homework time, or after an assignment is completed, take 15 minutes to check and respond to messages.

- **Try self-regulation apps to eliminate distractions.**

  Learning to self-regulate is an essential skill. But kids often need support – and in fact, they often welcome tech solutions that help them manage their time. There are a number of apps designed to help people focus. Some apps let you block certain websites for a set amount of time. With others, you can whitelist and blacklist sites. For example, you can still use Wikipedia to read about mitosis, but you won't be able to get on Facebook. Some teens like such self-regulation apps because they are taking responsibility for setting rules for themselves. They allow teens to stay in the driver's seat, recognizing and managing the benefits and pitfalls of a 24/7 digital life.

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Digital Drama

When it comes to discussing social media, it's important that adults and kids speak the same language. What grown-ups think of "cyberbullying" might be explained away by kids as "digital drama." But it's not trivial. Digital drama brews in the offline world and simmers online when kids feel emboldened to say or do things that they wouldn't face-to-face. Checking in with kids and observing them as they interact with technology can ensure your conversations are productive and helpful.

- **Ask how they are ... then ask again.**

  It may seem simple, but ask your kids how they are doing on a daily basis. Also, watch for telltale signs that they are suffering from digital drama — a change in mood or behavior — as your kids interact with their phone and other devices. They may be absorbing subtle social messages in not-so-healthy ways. Ask lots of questions to determine how your kids view media and interact with technology. What are their favorite tools? Why do they value technology? What are some benefits as well as pitfalls of our 24/7 world?

- **Hit the pause button.**

  If your child is on the receiving end of someone else's hurtful online behavior, encourage him to "take it offline." It may be tempting to continue the conversation online; however, face-to-face can be more constructive. The lack of body language, facial expressions, and tone with online communication easily can lead to misunderstandings. Encourage kids to "walk in another's shoes" to make sure that they are considering all perspectives. At the very least, "taking it offline" will give your child time to process how to act — rather than just react.

- **Read between the lines.**

  With the popularity of photo sharing, kids often receive evidence that they were not included … which then leads to feelings of exclusion. Imagine your child seeing a photo of friends at dinner and realizing that she was not invited. While it is true that no one is included in everything, it is a hard rite of passage for kids to learn — and often they just need a sympathetic ear or an alternative social activity. Unfortunately, some kids use online photos to intentionally tag the kids who weren't invited — a not-so-subtle message of exclusion. In these cases, let your children know that they are supported, and talk about strategies to mend a riff or dispel a fight.

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Video Games and Violent Content

When it comes to video games, it's important to remember that not all games are created equal. Today, there are a ton of age-appropriate games that are engaging, stimulating outlets for kids to have fun. There are also many well-designed games, packed with educational content. (You can check out a few of our favorites here: www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/10-most-violent-video-games-of-2015-and-what-to-play-instead)

- **Learn about the games *your* kids are playing.**

  If you find that your kid is glued to a new video game, take the time to learn about what they're playing *before* you react. There are many different kinds of games, and understanding the ins and outs of a game will help you decide whether the real issue is the content of the game or simply the quantity of the game. Within some games, there are different settings that can be turned on or off to determine the level of violence a player sees. Scholars tend to agree that some kids may be especially vulnerable to the effects of media violence. Consider your kid's temperament, and pay attention to how they react after playing games with violence. If you know your kid has a tendency to identify with violent characters, try to find some nonviolent substitutes to keep him or her occupied.

  Hint for parents of kids under 7: Younger kids can't consistently distinguish between fact and fantasy, which makes exposure to media violence especially problematic. Whatever you decide about violent video games for your older kids, it's a good idea to keep violent games out of younger kids' play routines — at least for the early years.

- **Analyze the building blocks of the games.**

  Professor James Paul Gee looks at how some good video games include learning principles such as identity and production, risk taking and system thinking. Building off of the diet metaphor, you may want to ask yourself questions about how and why a particular game might be appealing to your child: How does it appeal to kids' imaginations? Are they put in the driver's seat? Is it age-appropriate and aligned to interests? Can kids create and experiment? Are there social components? What is the overall story? How is the design engaging? (Doesn't have to be big bucks to be appealing!)

  - http://www.jamespaulgee.com
  - http://www.skatekidsonline.com/parents_teachers/Good_Video_Games_and_Good_Learning_Updated.pdf

- **Take advantage of "teachable moments."**

  Help your kid reflect on the violence he or she sees in video games or in other media. Ask, "What are other ways that character could have solved his issue without violence?" Use the opportunity to talk to your kids about different options for appropriate ways to resolve conflicts. Distinguish video game consequences from real-life consequences by asking, "How do you think that situation would have played in out real life?" Make sure to explain the real-world consequences of violence, so your kids get that racking up bonus points for aggressive behavior is a far cry from the reality of aggressive acts in the real world.

  In general, it's wise to monitor consumption of content that is heavy on violence, profanity, and sexism. Tune in to how your kid reacts after playing these kinds of games, and make adjustments that make sense for your family. Counteract the message that violence is useful and rewarding by discussing the disconnect between video games and the real world. And, as with a healthy diet, make sure that their consumption is balanced with other activities that reinforce positive interactions and reward pro-social behavior.

Advice by age

Rule of thumb when it comes to different ages: visually graphic things can be especially disturbing to younger kids while more realistic situations are more disturbing to older kids.

- **2- to 4-year-old** kids often see cartoon violence. But keep them away from anything that shows physical aggression as a means of conflict resolution, because they'll imitate what they see.
- **For 5- to 7-year-olds**, some of the cartoon rough-and-tumble, slapstick, and fantasy violence can actually makes kids thinks it's okay and funny to see these sanitized versions of violence. Violence that could result in death or serious injury can also be too scary, so it's better to keep these types of exposure to a minimum.
- **8- to 10-year-olds** can handle action-hero sword fighting or gunplay as long as there's no gore.
- **For 11- to 12-year-olds**, historical action — battles, fantasy clashes, and duels — is OK. But close-ups of gore or graphic violence (alone or combined with sexual situations) aren't recommended. Keep in mind that this age is exposed to A LOT of socially aggressive tween shows that involve lots of mean acts that are supposed to be funny. Kids are more apt to learn behaviors from those main characters they are exposed to, so it warrants the need to check on what types of messages those main characters are giving.
- **Kids age 13 to 17** can and will see shoot-'em-ups, blow-'em-ups, high-tech violence, accidents with disfigurement or death, anger, and gang fighting. Point out that the violence portrayed hurts and causes suffering, and limit the time they're exposed to violence, especially in video games.
- **Most M-rated games aren't right for kids under 17.** The kid down the street may have the latest cop-killer game, but that doesn't mean it's good for him. The ultra-violent behavior, often combined with sexual images, affects developing brains. Just because your child's friend is allowed to play violent games or watch violent movies doesn't mean they're OK for your child.

FAMILY TIP SHEET

Young Children and Digital Footprints

- **Think long term.**

  Posting photos of your kids creates a digital footprint — a kind of electronic paper trail — that forms your kids' identities in a world they haven't chosen to enter. Someday your preschoolers will grow up, and they might not want documentation of their diaper days hanging out online for their friends to find! Once you post a photo online, you lose control over it. Someone could easily copy the photo, tag it, screenshot it, save it, or otherwise use it — and you might never know. Do a quick mental exercise before you share: Imagine how your child might react to the photo in 5, 10, 15, then 50 years. One of the most exciting aspects about parenting young kids is that the possibilities are endless; they can literally become anyone or anything. Make sure you're not sharing something that could limit the possibilities for them in the future, or which they might resent in the future. While sharing is fun in the moment -- and getting "likes" might certainly brighten your day — you don't want the immediate thrill of posting something laughable or venting about your kid's embarrassing habits to interfere with his life in years to come.

- **Share smart — and safe.**

  If you decide to share photos or videos of your kid online, make sure you're sharing safely. Set your privacy settings to "friends only" or, if the platform allows, specify a particular audience who can view your album. Without privacy settings, your family photos might end up on the screens of strangers. Avoid geotagging a picture (linking it to a location), which might unintentionally alert others to where your kid is hanging out. And, determine how to keep information like birthdays, street signs, and school names out of your pictures. Some parents even come up with ways to talk about their kids on social media without linking to their kids' real names, by using made-up nicknames or code names. Also, it's important to remember that by posting images up on certain social media accounts, you are essentially giving that organization licensing rights to that image. As of July 2015, Instagram's policy includes the statement, "you hereby grant to Instagram a non-exclusive, fully paid and royalty-free, transferable, sub-licensable, worldwide license to use the Content that you post on or through the Service …"

- **If your kid voices a preference, listen up.**

  If your kid is already thinking about her digital footprint and the kind of digital identity she wants to portray, give her an extra pat on the back — and listen carefully to her requests! If she asks you not to post a picture, it should certainly give you pause and you should think twice before going against her wishes. The picture will form her digital identity. Plus, leading by example is key: If you respect her wishes, she's more likely to practice a similar respect for others when she has her own profiles in the future.

Note: Tips here are informed by Common Sense's parenting advice:
http://www.commonsensemedia.org/privacy-and-internet-safety/is-it-safe-to-post-pictures-of-my-kid-online

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FAMILY TIP SHEET

Selfie Culture

- **Take the pulse on their posting.**

  It's easy to watch the way kids pose and pout in front of the camera and panic that their behaviors are a sign of narcissism or self-absorption. But before you jump to any conclusions, consider asking your kids the following questions and listening earnestly to their responses: (1) Why do you like taking selfies? (2) What makes for a selfie that you like? Which selfies don't you like? (3) How do you decide which selfies to share? Where and how will you share a selfie? (4) What do your friends normally do or say when you post a selfie? Have you ever gotten a reaction that you weren't expecting? By taking the pulse on your kids' posting, you can determine whether or not their selfies are really something to worry about and tailor your responses accordingly. If the image they're projecting is concerning to you, explain why; if quantity itself seems like an issue, respond in the same way you would if your kid were spending hours in front of the mirror.

- **Clarify family expectations.**

  Selfies are just one kind of photograph that kids take and share, but they can serve as a useful opportunity to dive into a conversation about digital footprints and what images kids should and shouldn't share online. Are there specific activities that they should never photograph? Is there a difference between what pictures they're allowed to take and which they can share online? When you clarify your expectations, you help kids think through potentially sticky situations before they arise — rather than after an image has already gone viral.

- **Encourage critical consumption.**

  We know that kids are impacted by the content they see on their newsfeeds, but you can help by encouraging them to be critical consumers. Debunk the notion that everyone always looks as perfect and happy in person as they do on social media. Encourage a critical eye with respect to what they see online: ask them why they think a friend posted a particular image online, and what kind of reaction that person was hoping for. Invite kids to think about the kinds of posts that make them feel better about themselves and the kinds of posts that leave them feeling worse. Recognize, too, that the feedback kids give and receive online is often based completely on physical appearance. Make sure that you're focusing on other aspects of your kids' best qualities when you give feedback at home, and help them practice giving their friends positive reinforcement that isn't based entirely on looks.

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Managing Screen Time

- **Start by taking a pulse on your family's media use.**
  You shouldn't be afraid to make — and modify — rules that make sense for your family, but it's helpful to start by getting a realistic picture of what your kids' media use looks like. Lessening screen time effectively starts with becoming aware of when and how your kids are actually engaged with their screens. Take a 24-hour period and track kids' media use (feel free to use to our **media log** to help). What kinds of media are they engaging with? How does media use differ on weeknights versus weekends?

- **Not all screen time is created equal.**
  There's a huge difference between an hour spent shooting zombies and an hour spent learning vocabulary from a smartphone app or composing music online. Think about what kids are doing, in addition to *how long* they're doing it for. And, although there's nothing wrong with a little mindless entertainment, you can maximize your kid's screen time if you consider the 4 C's:

  - **Connection.** It's really important that kids connect on a personal level with what they're watching, playing, or reading. Are they engaged? Engrossed? Maybe even enlightened? Getting into a story line or identifying with characters primes kids for more learning.
  - **Critical thinking.** Look for media that takes a deep dive into a topic, subject, or skill. Maybe it's games in which kids wrestle with ethical dilemmas or strategize about bypassing obstacles. Rote quizzing and simple Q&A-style games may be fun and seem educational, but they may not help kids find deep or long-lasting meaning.
  - **Creativity.** An important feature of many great learning products is the ability for kids to create new content — a new level for a video game or a song, for instance. Kids can feel more ownership of their learning when they get to put their own spins on the experience.
  - **Context.** Help your kids understand how their media fits into the larger world. For younger kids in particular, the discussions and activities surrounding games or movies are key. Being with kids while they play or watch, asking questions about what they're taking away, and doing related offline activities can extend learning.

  Keep in mind that regular breaks from technology are also important — they not only make a difference in the amount of screen time, but also help kids get comfortable disengaging and putting devices away.

- **Get to the root of the problem.**
  If the issue you're most worried about is technology displacing other activities, consider not only limiting screen time, but also encouraging more active play during tech-free time. If you're concerned that social skills suffer when all of kids' interactions are digital, make a point to connect offline as a family (no technology during dinner is one way to practice this regularly). If the issue is that kids aren't getting enough sleep at night, consider keeping devices out of their bedrooms altogether or, at a minimum, at night when they're heading for bed. Whether it's because kids become engrossed in binge-watching YouTube videos or a TV show, or because the glow of the screen or the influx of text messages keeps their brains too stimulated to really relax, technology interferes with sleep for many, many kids.

FAMILY TIP SHEET

Kids as Coders

- **Talk to your child's school.**
  Talk to your kid's teacher and school administrators about what types of activities they may or may not be doing around coding. Some schools have actual computer programming classes, while others encourage kids' curiosity about programming through media labs, lunch groups, school clubs, or after-school offerings. At a minimum, some schools are participating in more one-and-done efforts (they are a start!) such as the Hour of Code.

- **Encourage the 4 C's for 21st-century learning.**
  The Partnership of 21st Century Skills (P21) outlines 4 C's — learning and innovation skills that relate to 21st-century readiness: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. So how can you complement what your child is doing at school or at home? Learning to code has many benefits similar to solving a math problem, reading music, or learning another language. Aligned to the constructive theory of learning, it gives kids ample time for trial and error, experimentation, exploration, and failing forward. Seymour Papert (Schwarz, 1999), one of the best-known advocates for teaching computer science and programming in schools, sums this up well: "Anyone who has witnessed a toddler using a computer has probably experienced a sense of awe at that child's facility with what for adults can be an infinitely frustrating gadget. It's one thing for a child to play a computer game; it's another thing altogether for a child to build his or her own game. And this, according to Papert, is where the computer's true power as an educational medium lies — in the ability to facilitate and extend children's awesome natural ability and drive to construct, hypothesize, explore, experiment, evaluate, draw conclusions — in short to learn — all by themselves. It is this very drive, Papert contends, that is squelched by our current educational system."

  The 4 C's for 21st-century learning is presented by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21): www.p21.org/storage/documents/4csposter.pdf

- **Find resources online.**
  There is a plethora of coding opportunities online. From YouTube videos to sites like Scratch to games like *Minecraft*, kids (and adults) can learn the fundamentals through many easy-to-follow online activities. Some present the basics in block format, while others help structure the thinking process. Many of the apps and sites encourage kids to apply these programming concepts to their interests, whether gaming, fashion, storytelling, or artist expression.

*For more examples of coding apps, see our Graphite top picks.

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FAMILY TIP SHEET

Technologies that meet unique needs

When looking for Assitive Technology tools for your own child, do not rely on the idea that one size fits all! Think about the following questions as you consider which tool is best suited for your child's unique needs or challenges.

1. What are the child's specific needs or challenges?
2. What are the child's strengths? How could those strengths be utilized with the AT tool?
3. In what type of environment will the child be using the AT tool? How might different environments or elements within those environments affect the use of the AT for your child?

If you are looking for technologies that have already been reviewed by educators, check out some of Graphite's Top Assistive Technology reviews.

Top Assistive Technology for Speech Difficulties
https://www.graphite.org/top-picks/top-assistive-technology-for-speech-difficulties

Top Assistive Technology for Reading
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