

Four essential conversations to have now with your child around technology use:

**Conversation #1:** Social media is great! Remind your child (and yourself) that social media is not good or bad, but it is a tool that can be used in a variety of ways. It is important for your child to know that you recognize the positive aspects of social media and see the value in it. Technology is important to them and we must acknowledge its importance in their lives without devaluing it. Overall the most important thing you can do is create positive, open communication with your child around technology. Asking your child why a certain app/feature/platform matters to him/her will foster a far more productive conversation than asking why he/she wastes time with it.

**Conversation #2:** How to read an image: Talk about how pictures can mean different things to different people. We all believe we read images correctly, but in reality we bring our own judgments, experiences, and expectations to our readings of pictures. Look at a picture together and talk about what your child sees vs. what you see. The goal of this is not to convince your child that you have the right answer; the goal is for your child to understand that people will interpret an image differently depending on their clothes, pose, caption, and the other people in the picture. You can apply this same logic to memes and other "inside jokes" that may mean one thing to a small group, but may not be read the same way by the larger audience of social media. This is a critical skill for all social media platforms and will help your child always be cognizant of the larger (invisible) audience.

**Conversation #3:** Healthy boundaries for *everyone* in the family regarding technology use: Make it a goal that you are all working toward (i.e. limited technological multitasking, no phones at meals, in the car, or during designated family times). If it helps to speak with data to avoid lecturing, download the Moment App as a family and have everyone collect their data for a week; at the end of the week sit together and have everyone talk about what they found surprising about their technology use for the week. We cannot ask them to do what we do not do, so it is important that the adults follow the same rules.

Related to this, talk to your child about how healthy boundaries can look different for everyone; some people begin this process with better self control than others. But think of self

control as a muscle; the more they work on it with your help, the stronger they will be at exerting it when necessary.

**Conversation #4:** How to have a difficult conversation: Most of the "drama" or social challenges on social media happen there because teens don't know how to have hard conversations with their friends. They become upset about something that happened or get annoyed and choose to go on to social media to "vent" or "rant" about the person. Invariably this information gets back to the person and the whole exchange is amplified. When I talk to teens about this they tell me that they don't feel comfortable talking to their friends face to face about this and/or don't know how to talk about it. It is so important to talk to teens about how to have difficult conversations with their peers and this conversation doesn't require us to focus on the technology.

It would be important too to talk about how to be prepared for difficult scenarios that they will encounter online. Data suggest that before they graduate from high school most teens will receive a sext (or a request for one); a questionable image/text that they are asked to forward on to their friends; a text/Snap with inappropriate language (particularly racial, ethnic, misogynistic, or homophobic slurs). While they may not ask for any of this, they will likely see it and it is important for teens to have a plan in place for how they will deal with these *before* they actually encounter them.