**SAMHSA**
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

# SOCIAL MEDIA, ONLINE SAFETY, AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

## BEST PRACTICES AND RESOURCES
### FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Parents have a critical role in supporting the social and emotional development of their children. But other adults also play a key role in protecting children from unhealthy media use or risky exposure. A successful approach includes caregivers, pediatricians, teachers, coaches, and other trusted adults in a child's life.

The SAMHSA-funded National _Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health_ (Center of Excellence) provides information and educational resources for youth, parents, educators, and others who help youth navigate social media. The Center of Excellence has developed a number of resources that provide timely guidance for youth on how to use digital media and manage their presence online.

## STRATEGIES
### FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

1. Build a family media plan.
2. Balance time with and without devices.
3. Talk about social media.
4. Set a good example.
5. Optimize your family's online experience.

**LET'S CHAT!** Parents and caregivers can engage in conversations with their children related to digital technology and social media use.

These resources encourage parents and caregivers to have open and collaborative communication about their child's online use and family expectations because children are more likely to follow rules when they have the opportunity to provide input and discuss their concerns about online safety. And close relationships between parents and their children are associated with fewer online risk-taking behaviors in children.

- **Normalize Having Boundaries:** Talk about ways to prevent technology from crowding out healthy behaviors, such as sleep, and quality time with family, using developmentally appropriate language to help limit device and online platform use.

- **Pick Good Content:** Ensure children are engaging with age-appropriate content with appropriate parental monitoring of media use, given the plethora of content available online.

- **Teach Non-screen Ways to Manage Emotions and Boredom:** Devices are often used to manage stress or boredom, and finding appropriate alternatives is important to help limit online media use.

- **Parents Should Talk About Their Own Media Use:** "I sometimes have a hard time not checking my phone or feeling the need to respond to texts or emails. I'm working on how to be better about my own boundaries. Let's help each other find a good balance."

- **"Sharenting"—Thinking Before You Share Content Online:** Parents can think about how to appropriately share content on social media that includes their children, including sharing their pictures. Discussing this with children teaches them about consent and privacy, which may help them be a more responsible social media user as a teen and into adulthood.

- **Teach Safety Skills:** When kids are young, we talk to them about street safety, swimming safety, and other rules that come with exploring the world. There are also safety rules for the digital world.

- **Checking in on Unwanted Content:** As you probably know, your social media platforms track your search and viewing patterns. They try to get to know you, and an algorithm decides what to put in your feed. Parents can ask: "How is the algorithm working for you at this point? Is there content we don't want to see? Can we look at ways to reset your algorithm?" Another aspect of social media use is protecting our privacy. "Have we looked at the privacy settings on all of your accounts? How are things going with those settings?"

---
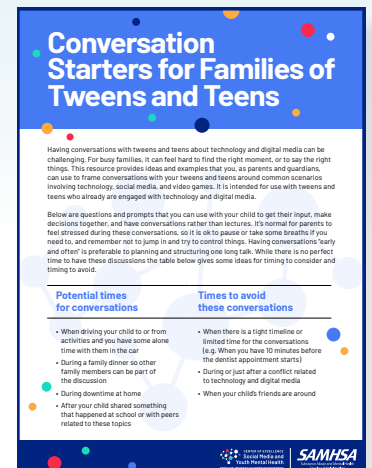
**RESOURCES!** For more information and additional SAMHSA resources, check out:

*Kids Online Health and Safety Task Force*

*Parent and Caregiver Resources | SAMHSA*

To learn how to get support for mental health, drug or alcohol issues, visit *FindSupport.gov*.

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat at *988lifeline.org*.