

RESPONDING TO SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS: GUIDANCE FOR CAREGIVERS

Viral challenges and misinformation are often shared on social media sites where users can interact with, share, and see content created by strangers. Not all challenges or misinformation are shared with malicious intent, but some do have harmful effects. It is important to note, the more attention drawn to viral challenges, the more likely children and youth are to engage in them. General discussions about the dangers and appropriate usage of the internet and social media could be helpful for preventing students from engaging in dangerous or risky behavior.



FOUR TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES

Social challenges pose no threat and often are prosocial. Examples include dance challenges.



Solidarity challenges involve individuals performing a social good. Examples include the "trashtag challenge" and "ice bucket challenge."



Uncivil challenges are considered rude or involve the destruction of physical property. Examples are the "cheese challenge" or "devious licks" challenge.



Dangerous challenges put an individual's physical self, psychological health, or life in danger.



Some schools encourage student participation in social or solidarity challenges to foster a positive school climate. It is important to note that uncivil and dangerous challenges make up only a small percentage of challenges, but they require attention because of the potential harm they cause. Schools and caregivers must respond to these challenges carefully to prevent unintended consequences of further publicizing a potentially harmful challenge.



TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

- Monitor advisories on the latest social media trends and challenges.



- Talk to children about risks related to social media.



- Establish limits related to social media use.



- Encourage children to partake in challenges for a good cause and to avoid dangerous, risky challenges.



- Model positive online behavior and the safe use of social media.



- Support children's engagement with in-person activities, such as clubs or sports, to provide positive social connections.



- Review resources to aid in these discussions with children.



RESPONDING TO SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS: GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

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TIPS FOR EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

- Monitor trends that may impact the school or community.
- Limit the spread.
 - Don't share a reactive statement, as that may increase curiosity and encourage more students and caregivers to seek out the harmful content.
 - If a message to the community is warranted, it is best to make statements about the general dangers of internet and social media.
 - Individually address these situations. It is not recommended that staff engage in classroom discussions or statements that will prompt students not affected to seek out the harmful content.
- Engage in strategies to prevent panic.
 - Educate students about the risks associated with online challenges and misinformation without showing them explicit examples.
 - Have discussions with students on topics surrounding peer pressure, mental well-being, and online safety.
- Understand that students with disabilities are more likely to experience both the negative and positive effects of social media platforms.
 - School-based lessons focusing on kindness and inclusion for online and in-person behaviors should be encouraged.
- Consider implementing an evidence-based internet safety curriculum such as the MBF Child Safety Matters Program and the MBF Teen Safety Matters Program.

