

# Moving Beyond the Power Struggle: Creating Healthy Communication around Family Technology Use

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Douglas Fagen, PhD

Ambassador, AAP Center of Excellence  
on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

# Disclosures

- I do not intend to discuss an unapproved/investigative use of a commercial product/device in our presentation.
- The views presented in today's lecture are those of the presenter and do not necessarily reflect the official policies and positions of the AAP.

# Objectives

- Introducing the **AAP Center of Excellence '5Cs'** as a framework for family dialogue
- Highlight the goals of parents and teens in the social media conversation
- Describe when technology use is concerning vs problematic
- Introduce a model to help guide conversations, and lower the temperature
- Identify practical tips to help families have open conversations about family media use
- Discuss how parental/caregiver behaviors impact kids' media use

# The AAP 'Five C's: A Helpful Framework

- **Child:** Who is your child/adolescent, their unique strengths and challenges? How does this shape their media use and how they react to it?
- **Content:** What content is high-quality and worth our time? How does negative content affect our thoughts and emotions?
- **Calm:** How does your child calm down strong emotions and settle down for sleep?
- **Crowding Out:** When we use media for too long, what does it get in the way of?
- **Communication:** Regularly talking about your family's digital experiences, supporting critical thinking and problem-solving.

[American Academy of Pediatrics Five Cs of Media Use](#)

# Review of the Five C's: A Helpful Framework

- **Child:** *Who is your child/adolescent, their unique strengths and challenges? How does this shape their media use and how they react to it?*
- **Content:** What content is high-quality and worth our time? How does negative content affect our thoughts and emotions?
- **Calm:** How does your child calm down strong emotions and settle down for sleep?
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# What families are facing today with social media

What it can feel like for  
parents and teens trying to  
discuss social media



# What we are trying to accomplish



# Beginning with Goals & Needs

As a parent, what *larger goals* do you have for your teens, that can help guide the types of conversations that you want to have about social media?



# What Goals Do Parents Have?

What do parents REALLY want for their teen?

- Decision-making skills
- Self-Regulation
- To fit in with their peers; to belong
- Identity - To learn who they want to become
- Learning from their mistakes
- Develop healthy habits
- To cultivate good values



# Needs & Goals – of Adolescents

What developmental needs do your teens have – during adolescence – that impact their relationship with social media?



# Needs & Goals – of Adolescents

- Connection with peers; social relationships
- A sense of belonging
- Greater independence & autonomy
- More freedom, Trust
- Not standing out, or feeling left out
- More respect
- A sense of fairness (parent behavior)
- A sense that their voice matters
- The ability to make their own mistakes

# How Far Apart are our Goals & Needs?

## Parent Goals:

- Decision-making skills
- Self-Regulation
- Sense of Identity
- To fit in with their peers
- Learn from their mistakes
- Develop healthy habits, good values

## Developmental Needs of Teens:

- Connection with peers; belonging
- Greater independence & autonomy
- More freedom, Trust
- Not standing out, or feeling left out
- Ability to make their own mistakes

# A model to open a dialogue with our teens

- 3 Steps:
- **RESPECT**
- **REFRAME**
- **RESTORE**



# Where to Begin: RESPECT

## RESPECT the Teen

- Respect their VOICE and Perspective
- Practice Curiosity
- Respect their Experience – *be willing to learn from them*
- Elicit their Self-Awareness with...
- Open-Ended Questions
- Examine Your Assumptions



# Where to Begin: RESPECT

## RESPECT the Teen

- Look Beyond Behavior to their Goals & Aspirations
- Watch for judgments & what they do to dialogue
- *You are planting seeds - Speak to the Adult Growing Inside*



# Where to Begin: SELF-RESPECT



- Acknowledge your own FEARS & Risks
- Acknowledge the challenge
- Demystify the MYTHS around screen time
- Focus on seeing small mistakes as necessary for learning – yours and theirs
- Acknowledge the pressure and fear – from other parents, media

# Problematic Social Media Use

## The Myth of Screen Time

- The seductiveness of screen time
  - It is what parents see
  - *The data does not support the utility of screen time as a risk factor*
  - It is a very blunt measure: All screen time is NOT created equal
  - Most teens do well, even with significant screen time
  - And... Social media has significant positive impacts as well, particularly for teens from marginalized groups
- To assess risk – you need to look closer...and enter a family dialogue

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# When Is Technology Use a Problem?

## Offline signs for Online Problems – Better Risk Indicators

- Sleep & Eating - Changes
- School: Attendance, Grades
- Peer Relationships - Withdrawing
- Avoiding offline connections
- Mood
- Difficulty logging off, completing tasks
- Exercise & Physical Activity reductions
- Self-Harm Comments & Behaviors
- Assessing Risk begins with knowing your child:
- Pre-existing mental health
- Self-concept
- Self-control
- Vulnerability to Peer Influence

# When Is Technology Use a Problem?

## Problematic Media Use (PMU)

- Problematic Media Use:
- PMU is defined as “risky, excessive or impulsive in nature leading to negative consequences, specifically physical, emotional, social or functional impairments.”
- The science behind PMU is still developing. There is not sufficient evidence to treat PMU as an addiction at this time.



[AAP Center of Excellence resource on Problematic Media Use](#)

# When Media Use is a Problem

How do we want to respond?



# How to Respond when Media Use is a Problem

How do we want to respond: Urgency or Blame?

- Acknowledge the Role of Parental Anxiety & Fear
- Take Perspective
- Take Responsibility
- Widen the Lens – Consider the Family
  - Can you create an opening – to get your teens' perspective?
  - Can they acknowledge any concerns?
- Bring in help – to reduce the temperature
- Don't go it alone -- Seek consultation with a mental health provider
- Planting Seeds – focus on what you can do or say; the things that you can control
- Drop the rope...let go of the contest of wills



# RESPECT

## The Role of Technology in Adolescent Development

Adolescent Development Involves:

- Identity Development
- Social Development & Peer Relationships
- Belonging
- Creativity & Self-Expression
- Social media promises all of these...



# RESPECTFUL INQUIRY – Strategies for Parents

## Centering Respect in the Dialogue

- Ask Questions that don't have 'correct' answers
- Let your child teach you something about social media
- Move past 'good/bad' judgments
- Center **Self-Regulation & Self-Awareness**
- Acknowledge Complexity, Avoid Simple Solutions
- Self-Disclose – Acknowledge that you make mistakes
- Accountability – for all parties

# RESPECTFUL INQUIRY – Strategies for Parents

## Conversation Starter - Examples

- “I don’t know much about this social media platform. Can you show me a little bit about how it works, or what you like to look at on this one?”
- “What are some of the things you’ve enjoyed about having this social media account? What are the downsides? Is there anything you want to change? Why?”
- “Have you noticed times when it’s harder to get off social media. Why do you think so? What helps you get off it?”
- “I understand that what you follow has a big impact on what you see when you are on that app. How do you decide who or what to follow on your profile? Do you ever think about unfollowing accounts when you don’t like the content they show you?”

[Conversation Starters for Teens](#)

# REFRAME

- The Power Struggle: *It takes two....*
- Screen Time Rules
- Willpower
- Competing Interests & Needs
- Secrecy & Nagging
- The Chronic Parental Fears
- *Are you willing to let go of the struggle?*



# REFRAME – We need a New Model

## A Technology Learner's Permit

- The Shared Journey: **Self-Regulation**
- Acknowledge the Affordances of Technology
- Discuss both the Risks and the Benefits
- Technology 'Values' & Family Values
- From Secrecy to Autonomy
- From Freedom to Privileges
- The Decision-Making Sandbox: Risks & Mistakes as part of Learning



# RESTORE

## The Parent – Child Relationship

- The Most Important Shared Value
- The Most Important Protective Factor
- Acknowledge Shared Goals –
- Autonomy, Decision-Making, Self-Regulation
- Parent Modeling of Healthy Use
- Accept & Acknowledge Mistakes – in both directions
- Requires Constant, Ongoing, Evolving Dialogue



# Focusing on Shared Goals & Self-Regulation

Letting go of Social Media as a Problem to Be Solved

- Building Self-Regulation Skills
- Clarifying Family Values – and where social media fits in
- Improving Family Relationships
- Supporting Ongoing Dialogue
- Welcoming – and Learning From – Mistakes
- Countering Screen-Time Myths



# Thank You!

# References

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- Vasconcellos et al., (2025). Electronic Screen Use and Children's Socioemotional Problems: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 151 (5), 513-543. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000468>
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# Resources

# RESOURCES

## AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

- [AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#)
- [Social Media and Youth Mental Health Q&A Portal](#)
- [Family Tip Sheet- Building Healthy Digital Habits](#)
- [AAP Podcast: Social Media and Mental Health](#)
- [Social Media: Enjoy the Upsides and Avoid the Downsides](#)
- [AAP Social Media Tips for Teens](#) (YouTube clip)
- [Social Media and Youth Mental Health: Tips for Teens](#) (Webinar)
- [Talking about Social Media: Pathways for Parents & Caregivers](#) (Webinar)
- [Healthy Digital Habits for Parents & Families I Screen Ready](#) (Tips created by AT&T and the AAP)

# AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health Website

- Upcoming Programs
- Q&A Portal
- Tools and Resources
- Multimedia Resources
- Contact Information
- Newsletter Sign-Up
- Additional Information



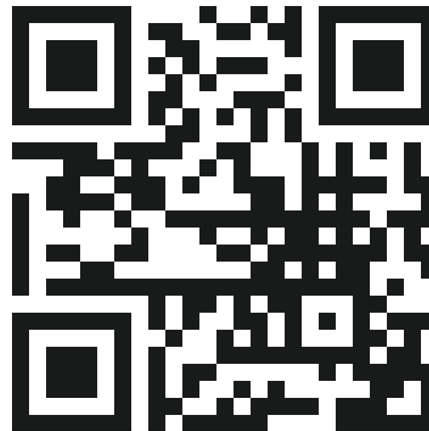
# Question & Answer Portal

- **Interactive Q&A Portal:** a two-way communication channel that allows clinicians, educators, parents/families, youth, and others to submit questions about social media and mental well-being
- Our Center team, including our Co-Medical Directors, review all questions and develop prompt evidence-based responses that will be emailed to users
- **Searchable by age** and includes all previously asked questions and responses made to date
- Questions so far range in topic from school policies on digital devices to how to support young children's behavior related to digital media to how to support teens expressing body image concerns

## Get Your Questions Answered on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

Whether you're a parent seeking guidance about your child's relationship with technology, an educator in search of resources for your students or a physician navigating how to support your patients' mental health as social media becomes more of a prevalent force in their lives, our expert staff and physicians can help.

Ask Your Question



# RESOURCES: The 5 Cs of Media Use

The 5 Cs is a mnemonic that can be used to talk to parents about kids and screens. The 5 Cs are: **Child, Content, Calm, Crowding Out, and Communication**. Along with this approach, we've created a series of five age-based handouts to give to parents at well-child visits.

## [The 5 Cs of Media Use \(aap.org\)](#)

- [CoE 5 Cs Infancy.pdf \(aap.org\)](#)
- [CoE 5 Cs Toddlers Preschoolers.pdf \(aap.org\)](#)
- [CoE 5 Cs School Aged Children.pdf \(aap.org\)](#)
- [CoE 5 Cs Young Teens.pdf \(aap.org\)](#)
- [CoE 5 Cs Older Teens.pdf \(aap.org\)](#)



[5 Cs User Guide for Clinicians](#)

[5 Cs User Guide for Parents](#)

## RESOURCES: Conversation Starters for Teens

[Questions and prompts](#) developed for parents to use with their teens to gather input, make decisions together, and have conversations about technology

Includes ideas about when and when not to have these types of conversations

Conversation starter topics include:

- Setting initial boundaries around technology and digital media
- Checking in on unwanted content
- Media and technology interfering with sleep
- Prompts to encourage reflection around relationships with media
- And others!



# Building Healthy Relationships with Media: Essential Skills for Children 10 and Younger

- Suggested activities and printable activity cards offer fun ways for families to develop healthy media habits from a young age
- They focus on ways to build balance, critical thinking, self-regulation, and safety skills
- Activities like Pop-up Ad Whac-A-Mole and Scam Finder engage young minds and create digital literacy skills
- Can be used in tandem with the conversation starters for families with children of all ages



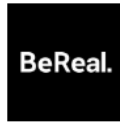
# Glossary of Digital Media Platforms & Dictionary of Common Digital Media Terms

- The [Glossary of Digital Media Platforms](#) provides detailed information about social media, video sharing and gaming apps commonly used by children and teenagers.
- Familiarize yourself with available default privacy settings, screen time management, feed customization options, messaging and friend controls, as well as parental controls.
- Explore our [Dictionary of Common Digital Media Terms](#) for easy-to-understand definitions of popular technical words and phrases.

# Glossary of Digital Media Platforms



Apple



BeReal



ChatGPT



Discord



Facebook



Instagram



LinkedIn



Messenger Kids



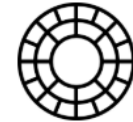
Pinterest



Snapchat



TikTok



VSCO



X (formerly Twitter)



YouTube



YouTube Kids

**\*Includes a Dictionary of Common Digital Media Terms**

# Tools to Help Families Develop Healthy Digital Habits

## The Good and Bad of Social Media



The connection between social media and mental health is complicated and personal. Everyone responds to social media differently. Here are a few ways to think about how social media impacts kids and teens.

## Online Health and Safety Resources



Explore these resources, provided in collaboration with the Best Practices Workgroup of the Kids Online Health and Safety Task Force, to promote the online health and safety of children and adolescents.

## Family Tip Sheet- Building Healthy Digital Habits



Here are some research-based tips from pediatricians that can make a big difference for your family. Also available in [Spanish](#).

## AAP Family Media Plan

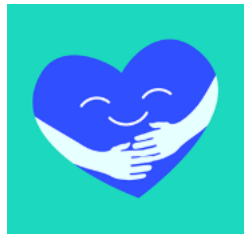


Use the AAP Family Media Plan to help you and your children set media priorities that matter most to your family. Create your family media plan here.

# Resources: The Good and Bad of Social Media

The connection between social media and mental health is complicated and personal. **Everyone responds to social media differently.**

To move beyond the popular narrative, the Center of Excellence reviewed the latest research on social media. This infographic was developed to help youth and those who work with youth, **understand both the benefits and risks**, so they can make informed decisions about when to start using social media and how to set healthy boundaries.



[The Good and Bad of Social Media: What Research Tells Us](#)

## The Good and Bad of Social Media: What Research Tells Us

The connection between social media and mental health is complicated and personal. Everyone responds to social media differently. Here are a few ways to think about how social media impacts kids and teens.



### Potential Benefits

**Social Connection:** Teens can engage with friends and family online.



### Potential Risks

**Cyberbullying:** Teens may experience or witness bullying, harassment or aggressive behavior online.

**Identity, Self-Expression, and Self-Affirmation:** Youth can share their interests and activities through texts, videos and images, which can help them better understand who they are.



**Body Image and Disordered Eating:** Social comparison is common, especially on image-based platforms. Image-altering filters and profiles that focus on disordered eating or "thinspiration" can lead to negative self-esteem and impact how teens think about their appearance.

**Community Support for Young People's Identities:** Social media can be used as a safe space to gain social support, learn through each other's stories and find validation through shared experiences.



**Harmful Content:** Despite platforms' best efforts to prevent it, harmful content like pornography, child sexual abuse material, self-harm depictions, violence, exposure to discriminatory language or accounts selling illegal substances can be found on social media.

**Interest-Driven Exploration:** Teens, as they develop more independence, can pursue new ideas and hobbies online or follow educational, health-related or inspirational accounts.



**Unwanted Contact:** Teens may receive unwanted contact from strangers or from companies trying to sell them things.

**Empowerment and Civic Engagement:** Teens can use social media to learn more about causes they care about, engage in activism and connect with communities on and offline.



**Sleep:** Sleep is essential and can be negatively impacted when teens postpone bedtime so that they can continue to use social media for entertainment or feel pressure to be responsive to friends. The use of mobile devices during bedtime can make it harder to fall asleep and to get deep, restorative sleep that teens need.

**Fun and Entertainment:** Whether watching funny videos, playing online games or keeping up with music and pop culture, social media can help teens relax and have fun.



**Digital Stress:** Constant access to a wide array of social content designed to keep teens online as long as possible can be overwhelming. Teens may get anxious about likes and engagements, have fear of missing out (FoMO) when away from their device or struggle against expectations to always be available.

For more information on what research tells us about the impacts social media has on youth and what teens can do, check out our website: [Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#) and browse previously submitted questions on our [Question and Answer Portal](#).

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Social Media and  
Youth Mental Health  
FROM THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Full list of references can be found at <https://bit.ly/centEXm>

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

# Using Motivational Interviewing to Discuss Family Media Habits

This series of brief videos, based on concepts from the [5 Cs of Media Use](#), offers healthcare providers guidance on using motivational interviewing (MI) as a tool to engage in meaningful conversations with families, build trust, encourage reflection, and guide families toward healthier media habits.



Pam Pietruszewski, MA  
Motivational Interviewing Trainer

Video

## Video 1: Provider Pause

Imagine, as a healthcare provider, walking into a room and finding your teenage patient on their phone. Your initial reaction may be to tell them to put it down, but what if you took a moment to pause instead? In this video, Pam Pietruszewski, Motivational Interviewing Trainer, shows how taking a deep breath and being curious can change how we connect with teens.



Video

## Video 2: Listening for Change

Now that we have had a chance to pause, in this video, Pam Pietruszewski, Motivational Interviewing Trainer, helps healthcare providers pivot from reacting (potentially with frustration) to listening for change. She explores questions providers can ask teens such as, "What type of content do you like viewing on social media?" to hear their values and listen for what drives their choices.



Video

## Video 3: Working with Young Children

In this third video, Pam Pietruszewski, Motivational Interviewing Trainer, offers suggestions for open-ended questions that providers can ask when a caregiver is concerned about a young child's online activity, and dives into concepts like double-sided reflections to help families express their motivations and move forward.



Pam Pietruszewski, MA  
Motivational Interviewing Trainer

Video

## Video 4: Working with Tweens and Teens

In this final video, Pam Pietruszewski, Motivational Interviewing Trainer, discusses how motivational interviewing (MI) techniques, such as open-ended questions and reflective listening, can help providers guide teens in recognizing the impact of social media on their schoolwork, sleep, and overall well-being. MI encourages teens to explore their own motivations and brainstorm strategies to make healthier choices.