

Tips and Conversation Starters for Families

LEARN TO BUILD HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

For many young people, digital communities are an extension of their offline communities. They may even interact with people in both communities in similar ways, such as making jokes, supporting friends' interests, sharing content, making plans, arguing, and flirting. However, navigating online communities has some unique challenges. It can put formerly private interactions into public spaces. For example, instead of sending each other birthday cards, young people may make public posts to each other's social media accounts. Online communities also give young people continuous access to each other, which can make it harder to respect boundaries.

Help your child navigate online communities in safe and healthy ways by first talking with them about healthy relationships. Whether between friends, casual acquaintances or significant others, healthy relationships are built on empathy and respect. Help your child consider how other people may feel before they share, post, or comment on content online. Give them examples of what respect looks like online: not making mean comments, not posting images of others without permission, and not sharing chats, emails, or other content that was shared privately.

Talk with your child about how to set these and other boundaries in their online relationships. Explain to them that relationships where the other person does not treat them with empathy or respect are not healthy.

START A CONVERSATION ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS:



- How would you define a healthy relationship between friends? Does your definition change if it's a romantic relationship?
- Do you have any friends that message too much? Let's discuss some ways to handle that. For example, you can tell them that I don't want you receiving messages during dinner.
- How do your friends respond when you ask them not to share photos of you online? What do you do if they don't listen?

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REMEMBER TO VERIFY

Many people use their online communities as a source of information. However, not all of the information shared is accurate. It can be hard for anyone, including young people, to know what information they should trust. That is why an important part of digital engagement and building healthy online communities is verifying content before sharing it. When digital citizens know they can find reputable information in a digital community, it helps build trust. Teach your child to ask the five verification questions before trusting or sharing content online:

1. Where did the content come from?
2. Who created the content?
3. When was it created?
4. Where was it created?
5. Why was it created?



START A CONVERSATION ABOUT VERIFYING INFORMATION:

- What's the difference between an opinion and a fact?
- Have you ever believed something you read online, only to find out later it was false? What did you do?
- Do you have any online friends who share a lot of inaccurate information? How do you feel about that?

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LEAD WITH EMPATHY

Online interactions can lack the social cues that help us determine how other people feel when we are face-to-face. Without these cues, some young people may forget that there is another person reading and having an emotional response to the content they share online. Encouraging young people to develop empathy may help reduce bullying online by helping them think about other people's feelings. Start by teaching your child to pause before posting content online. They should ask themselves: "How do I want people to feel about my content?" and "Who could be hurt by this content?" Remind your child that the way they treat people online should be no different than how they would treat them offline.



START A CONVERSATION ABOUT EMPATHY:

- Has anyone ever misunderstood something you posted online?
How did you respond?
- Why do you think people say things online that they wouldn't face-to-face?
- Have you ever read a mean comment about one of your friends online?
How did it make you feel? Did you do anything?

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BE A PROACTIVE DIGITAL CITIZEN

Digital engagement requires action. Young people will not have healthy online communities unless they take positive actions and discourage negative ones. If your child sees someone being teased or harassed online, help them find a way they are comfortable with to offer support. They may share private or public messages of support or a general statement urging people to be kind online. Your child should also bring attention to any information being shared in their online community that may not be reputable or accurate. They can take steps to verify the information and then share the results with the community while still being respectful to the original poster.

Help your child proactively model positive action online. By being kind and empathetic in their everyday online actions, they can help establish that being supportive and inclusive is the norm in their online community. Your child can also work with their friends offline to encourage positive behavior. For example, if a friend shares that they are planning to bully someone online, your child can encourage them to make a different choice.

START A CONVERSATION ABOUT BEING A PROACTIVE DIGITAL CITIZEN:



- What do you do when you see someone being teased online?
- What are some actions you can take to encourage people to be kind in your online communities?
- How would you respond if someone was sharing inaccurate information online accidentally? What if they didn't back down, even after you showed them it wasn't accurate?

Activities for Families

DEVELOPING EMPATHY

When people speak face-to-face, we use social cues such as tone of voice and facial expressions to understand each other. In online interactions, these cues are missing, which can lead to misunderstandings. This activity will help your child pause to think about what other people mean when posting content online.

1. Tell your child: **When reading content that someone has posted online, it's important not to assume the worst. It helps to use empathy. Try to put yourself in that person's position and imagine the point they are trying to make.**
2. Choose a form of online media that allows people to make comments, such as an online newspaper article, or blog, and read the comments that people have posted. You may also use the letters to the editor section of a magazine or newspaper. Have your child consider what tone of voice the comments' authors would have used if they spoke them aloud. Try reading the comments in different tones of voice to see if it changes the meaning.

CHALLENGE



Ask your child what tools people use online to show emotion, such as emojis, memes, and capitalization. Try to use the same sentence to show different emotions by using different online emotional cues. For example, how does the meaning of the sentence "I love your hair" change when it's: a) in all-caps; b) next to a winking emoji; c) shared as the caption of a photo of someone with bad hair?

Activities for Families

FINDING REPUTABLE SOURCES

Sharing information from reputable sources is an important part of building trust in online communities. This activity will help your child learn how to verify the sources and information they find online.

1. Ask your child: **When you see information online, do you ever wonder if it is true?**
2. Tell your child: **It's important to evaluate the source of the information to see if it is reputable and trustworthy. A source is a person, company, or organization that shares information. When you share information online, you become a source, too. If you want to be a trustworthy one, you will try to share accurate information from reputable sites.**
3. Visit a site or platform that you or your child use to find information. Choose an article, blog, or other piece of informational content to view together.
4. Print and use the "Five Ways to Verify" worksheet to evaluate it.

After completing the worksheet, consider helping your child create something to remind them to verify online sources. For example, they could make a poster of the five verification questions to hang in their room or a digital image to use as a mobile phone background image.



Parent Worksheet

FIVE WAYS TO VERIFY

Here are five ways to check that the information you are referencing is from verified sources that you can trust.

ORIGIN

Are you looking at the original piece of content?

SOURCE

Who created the piece of content?

DATE

When was the piece of content captured?

LOCATION

Where was the piece of content captured?

MOTIVATION

Why was the piece of content captured?
