Digital Drama

When it comes to discussing social media, it's important that adults and kids speak the same language. What grown-ups think of "cyberbullying" might be explained away by kids as "digital drama." But it's not trivial. Digital drama brews in the offline world and simmers online when kids feel emboldened to say or do things that they wouldn't face-to-face. Checking in with kids and observing them as they interact with technology can ensure your conversations are productive and helpful.

- **Ask how they are ... then ask again.**

  It may seem simple, but ask your kids how they are doing on a daily basis. Also, watch for telltale signs that they are suffering from digital drama — a change in mood or behavior — as your kids interact with their phone and other devices. They may be absorbing subtle social messages in not-so-healthy ways. Ask lots of questions to determine how your kids view media and interact with technology. What are their favorite tools? Why do they value technology? What are some benefits as well as pitfalls of our 24/7 world?

- **Hit the pause button.**

  If your child is on the receiving end of someone else's hurtful online behavior, encourage him to "take it offline." It may be tempting to continue the conversation online; however, face-to-face can be more constructive. The lack of body language, facial expressions, and tone with online communication easily can lead to misunderstandings. Encourage kids to "walk in another's shoes" to make sure that they are considering all perspectives. At the very least, "taking it offline" will give your child time to process how to act — rather than just react.

- **Read between the lines.**

  With the popularity of photo sharing, kids often receive evidence that they were not included … which then leads to feelings of exclusion. Imagine your child seeing a photo of friends at dinner and realizing that she was not invited. While it is true that no one is included in everything, it is a hard rite of passage for kids to learn — and often they just need a sympathetic ear or an alternative social activity. Unfortunately, some kids use online photos to intentionally tag the kids who weren't invited — a not-so-subtle message of exclusion. In these cases, let your children know that they are supported, and talk about strategies to mend a riff or dispel a fight.

Distraction, Multitasking, and Time Management

Technology isn't going anywhere. But multitasking — specifically media multitasking — is a concern. Some parents feel like kids may benefit from learning how to work around disruptions, since they're going to need this skill for their entire lives. On the other hand, research shows that media multitasking can have a negative impact on school performance.

- **Try an experiment.**

  It's important to develop a strategy to help your kids focus and tune out distractions. If the strategy is successful, it can become a good habit. When you figure out what strategy you want to try (see the tip below for some ideas), propose an experiment. Say: "I've noticed that you get distracted by your phone during homework. I get distracted by my phone when I'm trying to work, too. Let's try an experiment." Then, explain the strategy you would like them to try. You may want to set a specific amount of time for the experiment as well (e.g., "We'll try this for three days" or "We'll try this on Tuesdays and Thursdays"). It can also be helpful to offer to try the experiment together — and doing a joint-experiment gives you an easy entry point for conversations during and after to explore what worked and what didn't.

- **Get some distance from the distraction.**

  Many kids describe how a constantly buzzing cell phone distracts them from their work. But they have difficulty turning it off, for fear of missing out. After discussing it with your child, consider these solutions:

  - **Get some physical distance from your phone.** Leave it in another room or put it in a drawer or box that isn't within arm's length.

  - **Turn it on silent.** And keep the phone facedown on the table.

  - **Take breaks for tech.** After a certain amount of homework time, or after an assignment is completed, take 15 minutes to check and respond to messages.

- **Try self-regulation apps to eliminate distractions.**

  Learning to self-regulate is an essential skill. But kids often need support – and in fact, they often welcome tech solutions that help them manage their time. There are a number of apps designed to help people focus. Some apps let you block certain websites for a set amount of time. With others, you can whitelist and blacklist sites. For example, you can still use Wikipedia to read about mitosis, but you won't be able to get on Facebook. Some teens like such self-regulation apps because they are taking responsibility for setting rules for themselves. They allow teens to stay in the driver's seat, recognizing and managing the benefits and pitfalls of a 24/7 digital life.

Social Media and Body Image

How do teens' experiences on social media influence their body image? Today's teens not only have the ability to share their thoughts, their photos, and their videos, they also have 24-hour-a-day access to feedback from others. On social media, teens also have access to an unending stream of other people's pictures and posts — and let's not forget, often the most carefully selected and flattering snapshots of their peers. Developmentally, it's no surprise that teens are lured by the appeal of peer feedback and the opportunity for social approval. But social media create unique challenges for parenting, particularly related to body image.

- **Ask your teens how they decide which photos of themselves to share.**

  A perfectly curated online identity looks effortless. But in reality, people are intentional about what they share, and quite a bit of thought and effort goes into portraying a certain image. Invite your teens to think about a difficult day or day they felt unattractive — did they share it online? Why or why not? Can they recall a time when a friend shared a less-than-perfect photo? Consider opening up about your own process about what you post or don't post. What motivates all of us to share, or not to share, certain snapshots of our lives online?

- **Encourage your teens to view photos and comments online with a critical eye.**

  There are two major ways social media can impact body image for teens. First, because teens see so many flattering pictures of others online, they may start to believe that everyone else always looks beautiful and perfect. The second way is through the feedback that teens individually receive about their photos. They may begin to believe what people say about them, or even develop insecurity when no one comments. Counter the perception that everyone else is always camera-ready by explaining how photos don't tell the whole story, may have been digitally altered, or simply may be taken out of context. Help your teens deal with online comments by asking questions about both the photos that they view and the feedback that they receive.

- **Praise your teen for things other than his or her looks.**

  It may seem obvious, but you need to help balance the feedback teens receive online. It can be intoxicating to receive likes and positive reinforcement in response to a flattering picture. Try to focus your feedback on other aspects of your teen's identity — skills, hobbies, and interests. Encourage them to curate a positive digital footprint online by presenting an identity that is balanced and highlights their whole character.

Family Media Agreement: K-5

I will ...
stay safe.

- ☐ I will not give out any private information, such as my full name, date of birth, address, or phone number, without my family's permission.
- ☐ I will keep my passwords private and only share them with my family.
- ☐ I will tell a trusted adult if anyone online makes me feel uncomfortable, sad, or unsafe. I will recognize that my safety is more important to my family than anything else.
- ☐ _____
  _____

think first.

- ☐ I will communicate kindly when I use the Internet or my cell phone. I will not tease, embarrass, or bully others.
- ☐ I know that the Internet is public, and I will respect myself and others when I'm using it.
- ☐ I will not pretend that I created something that's not actually my own work.
- ☐ _____
  _____

stay balanced.

- ☐ I know that not everything I read, hear, or see online is true.
- ☐ I will respect my family's decisions for what I'm allowed to watch, play with, or listen to, and when.
- ☐ I will continue to enjoy the other activities – and people – in my life.
- ☐ _____
  _____

In exchange, my family agrees to ...

- ☐ recognize that media is a big part of my life, even if they don't always understand why.
- ☐ talk with me about what worries them and why, before saying "no."
- ☐ talk to me about my interests and help me find stuff that's appropriate and fun.

X _____   X _____
signed by me   signed by my parent or caregiver

common sense education

Family Media Agreement: 6–8

I will . . .

stay safe.

☐ I will not create accounts or give out any private information – such as my full name, date of birth, address, phone number, or photos – without my family's permission.

☐ I will not share my passwords with anyone other than my family. I will ask my family to help me with privacy settings if I want to set up devices, accounts, or profiles.

☐ If anyone makes me feel pressured or uncomfortable, or acts inappropriately toward me online, I'll stop talking to that person and will tell a friend or family member I trust about it.

☐ _____

_____

think first.

☐ I will not bully, humiliate, or upset anyone online or with my phone – whether through sharing photos, videos, or screenshots, spreading rumors or gossip, or setting up fake profiles – and I will stand up to those who do.

☐ I know that whatever I share online or with my cell phone can spread fast and far. I will not post anything online that could harm my reputation.

☐ Whenever I use, reference, or share someone else's creative work online, I will give proper credit to the author or artist.

☐ _____

_____

stay balanced.

☐ I know that not everything I read, hear, or see online is true. I will consider whether a source or author is credible.

☐ I will help my family set media time limits that make sense, and then I will follow them.

☐ I will be mindful of how much time I spend in front of screens, and I will continue to enjoy the other activities – and people – in my life.

☐ _____

_____

In exchange, my family agrees to ...

☐ recognize that media is a big part of my life, even if they don't always understand why.

☐ talk with me about what worries them and why, before saying "no."

☐ talk to me about my interests and embrace my world, including helping me find media that's appropriate and fun.

X _____ X _____
signed by me   signed by my parent or caregiver

Family Media Agreement: 9-12

I will ...
stay safe.

- ☐ I know that there are scams online that I can avoid. Therefore, unless I am filling out a trusted form with my family's permission, I will not give out my private or financial information.
- ☐ I will read the privacy policies of any social network sites or apps that I want to use, and I will pay attention to the types of information these companies can collect about me.
- ☐ I know that I have a choice in the kinds of relationships I have online. I will stop talking to anyone who makes me feel pressured or uncomfortable, or acts inappropriately toward me.
- ☐ _____

_____

think first.

- ☐ I will model kind behavior online. I will not bully, humiliate, or upset anyone online or with my phone – whether through sharing photos, videos, or screenshots, spreading rumors or gossip, or setting up fake profiles – and I will stand up to those who do.
- ☐ I know that the photos and videos I post, and everything that I write about myself and others online, can be saved and shared without my knowing. Therefore, I will not post anything online that I wouldn't want my family, teachers, college admissions officers, or future employers to see.
- ☐ When I use, reference, or share someone else's creative work online, I will give proper credit to the author or artist. I also know that I have a right to receive credit for any original work that I share online.
- ☐ _____

_____

stay balanced.

- ☐ I know that not everything I read, hear, or see online is true. I will consider whether a source is credible. As an author, I will also contribute information thoughtfully and honestly.
- ☐ I will be open with my family about how I spend my time with media and show them that I use it responsibly.
- ☐ I will be mindful of how much time I spend in front of screens, and I will continue to enjoy the other activities – and people – in my life.
- ☐ _____

_____

In exchange, my family agrees to ...

- ☐ recognize that media is a big part of my life, even if they don't always understand why.
- ☐ talk with me about what worries them and why, before saying "no."
- ☐ talk to me about my interests and embrace my world, including helping me find media that's appropriate and fun.
- ☐ let me make some mistakes and help me learn from them.
- ☐ respect my privacy and talk to me if they have concerns.

X _____   X _____
signed by me   signed by my parent or caregiver