

Supporting Healthy Social Media Habits at Home

Many parents, guardians, and caregivers worry about how social media might impact the youth in their lives. You want to help your child have positive experiences online and avoid harm, but it can be confusing to know where to start or how to talk about it.

This resource offers actionable ways to support young people in building healthy social media habits. What can ultimately make the biggest difference is your attention and care. When parents are involved in their child's online life and have open conversations with them about it, youth can develop healthier online habits (APA, 2023).

Where to Start: Quick Tips for Healthy Device Use

- **Device-free wind-down time:** Sleep is one of the biggest concerns when it comes to youth and social media. Encourage your child to avoid screens before bed as blue light and late-night scrolling can disrupt sleep.
- **Watch for concerning behaviours:** Notice if your child seems upset after using social media, talks about content that sounds troubling, or starts to hide their activity online. Part of identifying these behaviours is communicating openly with your child so that you can identify potential harm and teach them to identify when social media is negatively affecting them.
- **Follow positive content:** Talk to your child about following accounts that make them feel good, rather than those that evoke stress or negative comparison.
- **Privacy and safety:** Ensure your child knows that it is not safe to share personal information like their birthday or where they live, to protect passwords, and to avoid interacting with strangers online (CPS, 2023).
- **Set boundaries and model healthy use:** To help your child set boundaries with their devices and know when to log off, led by example by modeling healthy online habits. Let them see you turn on "Do Not Disturb" when you want to have quality family time, or try to limit your own phone use before bed and encourage them to follow these same habits.

The 5 Cs of Media Use

An easy way to encourage your child to build healthy habits is to think about the 5 Cs of Media Use. Developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2025), this approach helps parents and guardians support youth online.

- **Child** – Social media isn't one-size-fits all. How does your child's *unique personality* shape the way they use it?
- **Content** – What type of content are they consuming online, and how can they substitute negative content with positive alternatives?



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- **Calm** – What are some ways they can regulate their emotions without turning to their devices as a coping mechanism?
- **Crowding Out** – Is social media taking time or energy away from other important parts of your child’s life and well-being, such as sleep, schoolwork, or time with family?
- **Communication** – How can you start more conversations with your child to empower them with education and learn about their experiences online?

Keep in mind that age matters, too. Adolescents are especially sensitive to what their peers think of them, so it’s important to be mindful of platforms that highlight the number of likes or followers your child has (APA, 2023).

Family Activities for Education and Support

A simple activity you can try is creating a “family social media plan” together that covers:

- **Privacy settings**, including what’s okay to post versus what should be kept private
- **Screen-free “zones” or times** in the house (e.g., limit phone use during dinnertime or while doing homework)
- **When to ask for help** – ensure that your child knows they can reach out to you or other trusted adults for further support when social media is negatively impacting their life

We also encourage you to check out our Conversation Cards on social media and cyberbullying. They kickstart discussions about online well-being, helping your child feel comfortable sharing their experiences while learning important information about the topic.

Your Role Matters

Parenting in the digital age can feel challenging, and every family’s experience is different. There’s no single “right” way to guide your child online, but your effort to understand and support them already has a positive impact. Healthy social media habits aren’t about extremely strict rules or being a perfect parent; they are about building trust and connection with your child as they learn to navigate online spaces. Every conversation and example you set helps support your child on their journey.



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References:

American Academy of Pediatrics (2025, May 27). The 5 Cs of Media Use.

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Author: Monique Zizzo

