

## Practice Digital Citizenship

The U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has issued an advisory warning about the potential dangers of social media for the mental health of children and teens. Many parents and caregivers are very concerned about this issue. Research results are mixed, however, about how social media affects youth. You actually have a lot of power over how social media affects you. And keep in mind that you can influence your parents' decisions and rules by your own actions. Social media can be both helpful or harmful. It is really up to you.

Consider taking the following action steps to become a responsible digital citizen that uses social media in ways that make your life better:

- Work with your parents and other trusted adults to set up guidelines that work for you and for them
- Invite and accept monitoring of your interactions and posts online
- Be a part of the conversation about logical consequences when you don't follow the guidelines and take responsibility
- Enjoy screen-free moments and experiences - find screen free spaces and times and observe them regularly
- Take advantage of opportunities for independence on and offline
- Be thoughtful about screen time - what makes you feel good and what doesn't?
- Express yourself, and be aware of your digital footprint
- Embrace the adventure!

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As a tween or teen, you are built for taking risks. At the same time, you have the tough challenge of trying to fit in and stand out all at the same time. Often the social experience, including peer pressure and an endless internet of choices, can be particularly effective at blurring lines and making the clearest logic rather fuzzy. You are also often caught in the middle of pushing boundaries and staying on the straight and narrow path of acceptance. You want to be connected to your peers, and that need for connection and belonging can easily trump good decision making.

All this while, your brain is developing in beautiful - and for you sometimes confusing - ways. It's important to honor your development in a respectful way and to appreciate where you are in life. Part of your development is learning to make decisions and take responsibility - and practice makes perfect, so embrace the exploration and even the mistakes.

First of all, unlike height or other markers of development, there is no visual evidence that your brain is changing, and decisions you make can seem perfectly reasonable and rational to you, even when your parents don't see it that way. Hang in there and keep the conversation going - including listening, even when that's hard.

There are lots of benefits to being online - you may find opportunities to:

- Interact socially
- Develop an awareness of the world
- Engage educationally
- Build a foundation for civic participation and social activism
- Make decisions
- Express yourself
- Connect with others (family, friends and new people) in new ways

Watch out for the following common problems related to online activity:

- Developing feelings of fear or anxiety
- Experiencing social isolation or feeling lonely
- Losing sleep
- Lacking focus
- Upset or confused by viewing mature themes and violence
- Experiencing a change in the way you interact with your family/friends
- Withdrawing from time with family/friends





## Here's what you can learn:

Skills you can strive to develop:	This looks like
Self Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Asking questions</li><li>● Practicing patience with yourself</li><li>● Listening to others</li><li>● Noting which experiences online make you feel good and which ones make you feel bad</li></ul>
Awareness of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Practicing patience with others</li><li>● Cooperating with others (even if you prefer a different outcome)</li><li>● Making eye-contact</li><li>● Talk about and practice trust</li></ul>
Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Taking responsibility</li><li>● Advocating for yourself</li><li>● Asking for privacy and using it well</li><li>● Reporting concerns to trusted adults</li><li>● Choosing to be offline or not engaging in an online experience because you predict the outcome will impact you in a negative way</li></ul>
Emotional Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Respecting others' space</li><li>● Approaching exciting and challenging situations calmly and thoughtfully</li><li>● Practicing empathy and concern</li><li>● Learning strategies that work for you to calm your brain and body</li></ul>

