With Power Comes Responsibility

TOP 10 DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP TIPS FOR FAMILIES WITH MIDDLE OR HIGH SCHOOL-AGE TEENS

1. **What happens on the Internet may live forever on the Internet.** What teens do online spreads fast and can last a long time. Silly or not-so-smart comments, photos, and videos can be found long after your teen forgets about them. So remind your teens that a bad reputation could be just a click away and to think carefully before they post.

2. **Nothing is as private as teens think.** Text messages, photos, comments, videos – they can all be copied, pasted, and shared with tons of people in a heartbeat. Make sure kids use privacy settings and that they understand that the best way to protect their secrets is not to post personal stuff. That includes sending their own "sexts" (nude or semi-nude photos or sexual comments) or forwarding any "sexts" that they receive.

3. **Kindness counts.** Teens sometimes say and do things online that they wouldn't in person. Encourage them to communicate kindly, build positive online relationships, and stand up for those who are bullied or harassed. Remind them that posting an embarrassing photo or forwarding a friend's private text without asking can hurt or damage others.

4. **Give and get respect for creative work.** Teens are proud of the videos, photos, music, and other art (and school papers!) they create — and they have the right to have that work respected. They also have the responsibility to respect other people's creative work. So explain that illegal downloading, using technology to cheat in school, and cutting and pasting other people's stuff may be easy, but that doesn't make it right. Make sure they give credit where it's due.

5. **Don't dismiss digital talk.** Don't underestimate the power of texts, IMs, and other digital media to strengthen existing relationships. Teen relationships often move fluidly from online to off. But if your teen seems withdrawn, spends endless hours online, or appears to be hiding something, that could mean that something is wrong with their relationships. If you think this might be happening, ask your teen about it.

6. **Teach your teen not to flirt with people they don't know online.** Flirting with strangers or acquaintances online is risky — no matter how old they are — because the exchange can move from harmless to unhealthy very quickly. Flirting may lead to unwanted exposure to sexual requests. It may also lead teens to believe that they're in a serious, romantic relationship with someone they don't really know. Both situations can make a teen feel harassed, manipulated, or uncomfortable.

7. **Exploration is a part of growing up.** Teens may try out different personas online or exaggerate things about themselves, but this is a normal part of figuring out who they are and who they want to be in the world. But if you see your teen trying out a problematic persona, ask about it. Don't be too quick to worry or judge, but ask questions about why they made the choices they did.

8. **Encourage positive participation.** Help them create, share, tag, comment, and contribute to the online world in positive ways.

9. **Let them know you're always there for them.** Remind teens that you're always available to talk. While you're at it, put in a plug for the school counselor or a friend's parent. Knowing that they have a trusted adult to talk to will be comforting if they ever encounter a situation online (or off) that makes them uncomfortable.

10. **Embrace their world.** Ask your teens to share the sites they visit, the songs they download, and the videos and games they love. It's up to us to join the fun!