Online
Safety
Guidelines

for Parents/Guardians

Commission scolaire English-Montréal
English Montreal School Board

With the ever-changing landscape of social media, different events have come to light that have impacted our children and youth. To be preventative and proactive, the primary method to reach our children and youth is via modeling (i.e., behave the way we would like them to behave) and having open discussions. The following guides will help you to lead discussions with your child and will equip you with some good-to-know information that may be helpful for you as a parents/guardians:

Role model

> As much as parents/guardians believe their children are not watching them, they are. Therefore, it's important that you role-model appropriate and positive behaviors for your child.

- If mealtime is a designated screen-free time, then that applies to adults as well
- If devices are charged in common rooms of the house, then that applies to adults as well
- Practice taking time away from screens as a family to engage in activities together, such as board game night or taco Tuesday
- Avoid sending emails in anger or frustration. You can even get your child involved by asking how they would handle a particular situation
- Speak positively about your child's teacher, school, and education in general. Children will mimic these attitudes and behaviors at school

How to have a discussion

Opening the conversation

> Dinner time, car rides, and doing ordinary household chores together are perfect opportunities to have difficult conversations with your children. These are moments when children are engaging in another task simultaneously and because conversations are taking place during mundane activities, there is less pressure to have the right answer.

> Be empathetic and nonjudgmental with your child; allow them to lead the discussion and do not interrupt them. Once they have finished, you can provide feedback.

> Remember that conversations should be ongoing. Doing so will let your child know that you care about their well-being and will make it easier for them to open up to you.

> Helping Kids Navigate the Digital World

How to have a discussion?

Positives and negatives of media use

› Highlight that some online activities can be funny or helpful while others can be hurtful or destructive. Ask them how they can tell the difference between the two.

›   Some information that may be helpful for you to know:

• Digital technology can have both positive and negative effects on children's wellbeing, depending on the activity and how much time is spent on that activity (Kardefelt-Winther, UNICEF Office of Research)

   • Video games can challenge minds, help kids develop friendships and build their identity

   • Social networks can help teens build a wider social network of friends and deepen their current friendships

   • The internet can be used to explore news, develop interests, connect with peers and mentors, and find a community of like-minded individuals

• Because the adolescent brain is still learning to control impulses, regulate emotions and assess risks and consequences, adolescents may be developmentally predisposed to take online risks (Ponti, Canadian Pediatric Society, 2019)

   • Using screens can also make it harder for kids to manage their emotions. Screens don't provide emotional cues like facial expressions and tone

   • 29% of teen cellphone owners are often awakened by notifications, meaning both less sleep and worse sleep, which can have effects on general mental health and brain development

Ethical online and offline behaviors

› Discuss what the possible outcomes are for all involved in risky online behaviors.

• Ask the questions: Will someone get hurt? Will there be school disciplinary or legal repercussions? Does it help anyone?

• The same set of principles that govern respectful offline behaviors apply to the digital landscape as well. Therefore, if a behavior is inappropriate offline, it is online too.

› Let your child know that everyone has the right to feel safe at school and certain behaviors whether online or offline can take away that right. Discuss why it is important to do the right thing, even if no one is looking. (Do the right thing tip sheet)
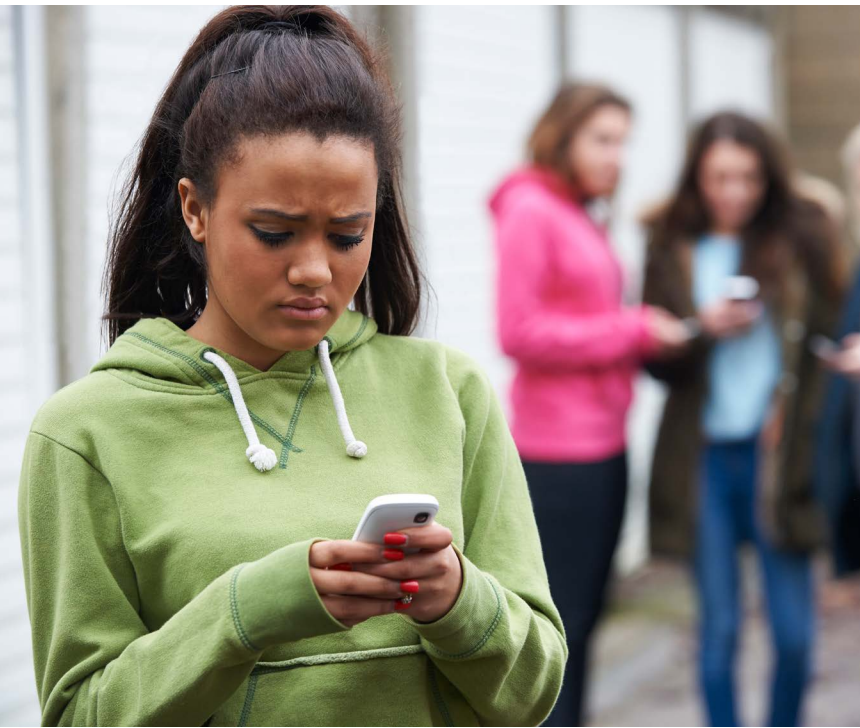
Ethical online and offline behaviors

❯ Open discussions about safe and ethical social networking (Promoting ethical online behaviors with your kids tip sheet) and media violence (violence overview; How do I talk to my kid about violence on TV, movies or games?)

- Behaving ethically means acting in honesty, fairness, equity, and respect. It is the respect for people's feelings, the respect for their individuality and culture, and the respect for their privacy and property and possessions.

❯ If your child plays multi-player video games, discuss the importance of not engaging in racist, sexist or threatening game play (Why parents should be on the lookout for racist and sexist messages in video games; Understanding the rating system of video games)

Online Credibility

❯ Ask your child what digital/media literacy means to them
(What is media literacy and why is it important?)

- Digital literacy is more than the ability to identify misinformation or avoid "bad guys" online; it means being able to participate meaningfully in online communities, interpret the changing digital landscape, and unlock the power of the internet for good.

❯ Highlight that anybody can post anything online and sources are not always fact-checked.

- The volume of media available today is unprecedented and can be overwhelming, making it difficult to assess the credibility of information and news stories. The speed in which a story can go viral and the abundance of sources makes it tough to determine its credibility. Youth consume a large amount of media, which makes it particularly challenging for them to determine a source's credibility (Learning the landscape of digital literacy)

- Internet algorithms are very good at showing us information that we might like to read. This has both positive and negative effects. It can facilitate the speed at which we find information, but it can also expose us to stories that confirm our beliefs and biases. Therefore, we think that we are choosing to consume certain media, when really it was predetermined for us.

  - Reality check
  - Verifying content
  - Observation online challenge
  - Digital literacy videos

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Unhealthy online relationships

Unhealthy online relationships

❯ Teach your child to recognize the signs of an unhealthy online relationship. Examples include control, isolation or humiliation (Where to begin and what to discuss?)

❯ Similarly, emphasize the characteristics of healthy relationships, both online and offline. Highlight that in healthy relationships there is no sense of pressure to do things that you don't want to do, such as taking explicit pictures or engaging in risky behaviors (Communicating safely online: Tips for parents and trusted adults)

  • There are plenty of other ways to show that you care for the person you are in a relationship with

❯ Discuss what friendship is and what it is not.

  • Friendship is based on mutual respect (value each other and consider each other's feelings), honesty (friends are truthful and sincere about what they say to each other), trust (friends can rely on each other to not share secretes with others), and kindness (they are helpful and thoughtful)

  • Friendship is not based in threats, violence (friends to hit, punch, push, or slap each other), the spreading of rumors (or telling of lies about each other), or guilt (true friends don't make each other feel bad to get what they want)

Making responsible choices

❯ Emphasize the need to make good choices for themselves and not follow what others are doing when they *know or feel* something is not right.

  • Talk to your child about building and maintaining a positive digital footprint. Discuss the permanency of digital life (privacy and digital footprints)

    • Screenshots, selfies, and tagging are part of daily life for many students. With such intense documentation flooding the digital landscape, online users must understand the consequences of what they share (or what is shared about them). Deleting a post or untagging a photo doesn't erase it.

Being safe online

Being safe online

- › Create a list of cellphone rules together (template 1; template 2)
- › Set media free times (e.g., mealtime) and media free locations (e.g., bedrooms)
- › Charge devices in common rooms of the house overnight.
- › For young children:
  - • Remember, 13 years old is the age of eligibility for a social media account.
  - • If your child wants an email account, create a shared family email account first
  - • Preview any websites, apps, or games that your child wants to use
  - • Turn on parental controls on search engines and modify setting on phones (Tips to set-up your kid's iPhone)
  - • If your child wants a social media page, have them manage a shared family page
  - • Use a simple model of phone that does not have Internet access (Helping our kids use their smartphone safely)
  - • Co-view their favorite shows with them (Co-viewing tip sheet)

Teachable moments

- › It's okay to make mistakes; use your own mistakes as teachable moments, especially situations that you wish you would have handled better with your children. The important aspect is to repair the relationship. Once some time has passed you are better able to articulate your feelings, ask your child for a "do-over".
- › Teachable moments also apply to situations where your child made a mistake. It's important for them to repair the relationship with a friend, peer, or teacher. You can practice their apology together or you can come up with acts of service that demonstrates their remorse.
  - • Especially online, meaning can get misconstrued, so it is important to clearly articulate an apology or show empathy about a past situation.

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