

The 5 Cs of Media Use



OLDER TEENS: 15-17 YEARS

The older teen years are a time of increasing independence, building a sense of self, and intense peer group involvement. Media use can be one way that teens explore themselves and others as a healthy and normal part of adolescent development, communication, and peer relationships. This can also be a time in which peer relationships endure rocky times and challenging situations, some of which can be amplified by communicating online. Teens often want to feel a sense of power and control at this age, which can lead to more arguments with caregivers. However, they still need you to be a reliable, consistent, and understanding presence in their lives. For some teens, this phase is when they start to have more realistic visions of their future, which can lead to feeling nervous, excited or disappointed about their future options, sometimes all in the same day! Monitor media use, enjoy movies and shows together, have open-minded and caring conversations, and check in on device and/or social media habits. Give increasing independence as teens show responsibility.

ASK YOURSELF THE 5 Cs WHAT YOU CAN DO

Child

Who is your child, how do they react to media, and what are their motivations for using it?

Make sure your teen knows that you want to understand them. Parents can support their teens by checking in on how they are feeling, how things are going with friends, and whether they want to share any challenges or successes. If your child shares a recent conflict with friends, listen and ask questions to support them, such as "How did you feel?" or "What did you learn from that?". Avoid overly simplistic solutions, such as "Well let's take your phone away then". If your child made a mistake in a situation, help them understand that you support them, that everyone makes mistakes, and it is a valuable learning opportunity. Support their personal reflections about their online and offline relationships and experiences.

Content

What is worth their attention?

The teen years are also a time in which youth have more choices and independence around the media content they choose. Teens may get exposed to content that is quite different than what they had seen as a child, and they may be unsure of how to think about it. On social media, content by other users is generally unrated/unreviewed, so it can range from silly to dangerous. Social media algorithms (programmed rules that decide how content is sorted and recommended to users) decide what shows up in feeds, for better or worse. Help your child process and think through experiences with outrageous, false, or mean videos. As teens are becoming more independent, help them develop digital literacy skills, talk about viral challenges and other more risky behaviors. Encourage them to have more control over the content that they see on their feeds by managing their algorithms using the "I'm not interested" button, word-based content filters, and/or turning off algorithm recommended content.

Calm

How do they calm down emotions or go to sleep?

Parents can support their children by helping them to develop healthy calming strategies like talking to trusted friends/family, mind-body exercises, immersing themselves in experiences that they find helpful and thought-expanding (reading or music or art), taking a walk, creating their own content, playing with pets, or engaging in volunteer work to help others. If teens have depression or anxiety symptoms and struggle to use coping strategies, consider therapy. AVOID: Having phones and gaming devices in the bedroom at night, which is consistently linked with poor sleep. This can be challenging for older teens, so a harm reduction approach (such as plugging the phone in across the room if they use it as an alarm) may be helpful.

Crowding Out

What does media get in the way of?

Phone and social media use can interrupt times when teens want to concentrate, such as during class or homework. Talk through strategies such as using “do-not-disturb” or “focus mode” during these times so they are in control of when devices grab their attention. Checking back with your teen to see how those strategies are working helps this become an ongoing conversation and support rather than a one-time effort. Suggest device-free times during car rides and mealtimes, so that your teen has your full attention. Adequate sleep can be challenging for teens; help your child build a sleep routine and plan for how to ensure media doesn’t delay or interrupt sleep. Be aware of problematic media use, which occurs when media use is compulsive, interferes with friendships, or leads to frequent arguments.

Communication

How can you talk about media to raise a smart and responsible child?

Start conversations with open-minded questions (What’s this like for you? What do you think of...?) and put them at ease by talking about your own stresses with social media. For older teens, consider asking for feedback on how you as a parent are managing your device use when around the family to make it an open sharing opportunity. Watch shows and movies together – these can be great conversation starters for topics like substance use, romantic relationships, or other challenging topics. Parents can support teens by reviewing the [Family Media Plan](#), and including teen input on what rules the family will focus on. Ensure that adults follow the rules as well, as teens at this phase are fine-tuned to recognize adults who fall into the ‘Do as I say not as I do’ rule making approach.

Family Media Plan

Teens will be closely watching parents during this time to see if they follow the rules. Parents should try to avoid ‘do what I say, not what I do’ mentality. Welcome the input of your teen in developing the Family Media Plan and setting up rules to focus on as a family.



Make a Media Plan for the whole family (parents too!).



About Us

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health is dedicated to creating a healthy digital ecosystem for children and adolescents. Social media use starts during childhood and can play a significant role in the relationships and experiences that affect children and teens’ growth, development, and mental health. The Center provides resources and tools for parents, clinicians, teachers, and youth to learn how to better navigate social media and the online world. Visit aap.org/SocialMedia for more information and resources.

We're here to help.

Explore our Q&A portal for answers to your questions about social media and youth mental health.



The 5 Cs were inspired and built upon the work of journalist & author of books about media and children, [Lisa Guernsey](#). The Three Cs were first described in the book *Into the Minds of Babes* (2007) and then *Screen Time* (2012) and *Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens* (2015).

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