

# The 5 Cs of Media Use



CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
Social Media and  
Youth Mental Health

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

## YOUNG TEENS: 10-14 YEARS

The early tween and teen years are a time of growing independence, changing bodies, exploring identity, and building a solid sense of self. During this phase, adolescents begin to place increased importance on relationships with peers, which can feel to parents like they are losing connection. Puberty brings changing bodies and strong emotions, comparisons with other kids, and trying to figure out who they are and where they fit. A central question for the early adolescent age range is “Am I normal?” This phase of development is also one in which adolescents can feel that they are “on stage” and that everyone is looking at them, so small social missteps either online or offline can feel devastating to them. It’s an important time to establish regular conversations about their digital lives – who they are and what they interact with online.

### 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?*

To understand your child’s unique digital life, and how they are navigating their experiences, listening is crucial. This means being present with your child and being available in moments they are ready to share. This may mean putting away your own phone – even in brief moments like car rides. This gives you insight into how they are coping with school, friends, mood, bullying, or are stressed about world news. Understand that comparison in media is a developmentally normal activity, reassure your child that everyone’s body and journey through puberty is unique, and that there is no single ideal body type online or offline.

#### **Content**

*What is worth their attention?*

Use [Common Sense Media](#) to check ratings and reviews of video games, movies, apps, and TV and pick ones with positive social and identity messages. In this age range, you may want to ask your child to be part of this process. Social media accounts technically can’t be created until kids are 13, so encourage kids not to lie about their age; help them find alternates like messaging apps (e.g., iMessage, Messenger Kids, Kinzoo). For young teens using social media, talk about the fact that inappropriate content might be recommended to them or appear in their feeds, and help them recognize false or mean videos, or idealized body images. In this time of growing exploration and independence, youth may feel more emboldened to explore dangerous or inappropriate content. Questions like “Have you seen anything lately that seemed weird or scary?” may lead your child to open up.

#### **Calm**

*How do they calm down emotions or go to sleep?*

The early teens years often include a wide range of emotions. Because devices and video games are such an easy distraction, many teens say they use them to escape negative feelings. Support your child in exploring other healthy coping strategies (like talking to trusted friends/family, mind-body exercises, deep breathing, taking a walk, creating art or music, playing with pets.) If you are concerned about how they are coping, talk to your child’s pediatrician about finding a therapist. **AVOID:** Having phones and gaming devices in the bedroom at night, which are consistently linked with poor sleep.

## Crowding Out

*What does media get in the way of?*

If your child has a phone, teach them to set “do-not-disturb” or “focus mode” during school, homework, and bedtimes so they are in control of when devices grab their attention. Set device-free times such as car rides and mealtimes, so that your teen has your full attention. Sleep is critical during the early teen years, ensure your child’s media use doesn’t disrupt or disturb 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?*

Early teens often fear that sharing challenging situations involving media with their parents will lead their parents to take their devices away. Listen and provide support when kids are distressed due to small social missteps. 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. Have check-ins with your child about how they are feeling navigating their peer relationships online and offline. Do they feel safe? Supported? What has been enjoyable? What has been challenging? How are they navigating using technology for connection and communication?

## Family Media Plan

During this stage, it’s essential to involve your child in choosing and implementing rules to empower their sense of ownership. Parents can support tweens and teens by reviewing the Family Media Plan, and including their input on what rules the family will focus on.



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](https://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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