

Parenting Tweens and Teens in the **Digital World**

Healthy peer relationships play a central role in adolescent development. They help your teen build her/his identity and can be an important source of emotional support. A large percentage of teen relationships (including romantic) are cultivated through the use of technology — particularly around texting and mobile apps. Parental guidance is critical to influencing beliefs and shaping values around the use of social media in the context of teen's developing healthy and fulfilling relationships.

Important ongoing conversations to have with your teen:

- 1** Discuss the important qualities of a healthy relationship (being loving, caring, respectful) and compare this with examples of unhealthy relationships (one person who is persistent, manipulative, or uses guilt and pity tactics). Without a clear understanding of what makes a healthy relationship, youth are more likely to tolerate relationships that put them at risk. For example, it may be easy for a teen to interpret jealousy or constant text messaging as a sign of love rather than seeing it as a controlling/abusive behaviour.
- 2** Discuss ideas for how to get out of an uncomfortable situation. Talk about ways to be direct (i.e. "I don't want to") as well as using subtle excuses (i.e. "My mom needs my help, I have to go now.") to get out of a difficult situation.
- 3** Use stories that arise in the media as an opportunity to identify healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviours (while watching movies, shows or advertisements). Challenge media messages about relationships, and help her/him start to think critically about negative messages and stereotyping.
- 4** Discuss the types of problems that may arise from engaging in sexually explicit conversations and creating or sharing sexual pictures or videos with people online. Once content is sent, s/he loses control of what is done with it. The images/videos can be easily misused (i.e. the recipient may show it to friends, send or post it online), or used to manipulate the other person, for example, to engage in further sexual activity.
- 5** Explain the importance of establishing and respecting personal boundaries when using technology. Both the information your teen has shared and the information others have shared with your teen should be protected and handled with respect (i.e. not shared with others). Emphasize that this continues to apply once a relationship has come to an end.
- 6** Teach your child how to end relationships. Ending a relationship is always a hard thing to do but it's important not to drag it out. Talk to your child about being honest, thoughtful, considerate and to-the-point.
- 7** Be emotionally available and keep the lines of communication open. It is important to remind your child that s/he can always come to you for help without fear of getting into trouble and reinforce that it's never too late to ask for help.

Did you Know...

In Canada, anyone under the age of 12 cannot consent to sexual activity; anyone age 12 or 13 cannot consent to sexual activity with anyone 2 years or more older than them; and anyone age 14 or 15 cannot consent to sexual activity with anyone 5 years or more older than them.

visit protectchildren.ca for more information



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TALKING WITH TEENS

ABOUT HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS