

# SOCIAL MEDIA: OVERVIEW FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

## ARE THERE ANY POSITIVES OF SOCIAL MEDIA?

There are some positive aspects of social media, because it helps kids find communities and resources of like-minded people. This is especially important for children that are growing up in a culture where they are different from their peers. It can be easy for them to think there is something wrong with them if they are the only one they are in contact with who looks a certain way or has a certain set of beliefs or values. Online connections are also very useful during periods of isolation such as the pandemic.

## WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVES OF SOCIAL MEDIA?

There are also many negatives for kids growing up with social media. It creates an increasing pressure to be liked and validated, because this validation has become such a public affair. Kids often judge themselves and others based on how many 'likes' they get or 'followers' they have, which gives them the impression that other people's opinions should dictate how they feel about themselves. It's also easy to look at social media and think that other people have perfect lives because that is what they are posting. This leads children to feel negatively about themselves, especially as they reach adolescence and begin comparing themselves to others even more. It's also common for kids to feel negatively about the way they look, because it's hard for them to conceptualize that what they see in airbrushed images is not reality. Another negative impact of social media is that it creates a constant source of distraction which makes it harder for children to be know what they feel and what they care about.

## TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILD USE SOCIAL MEDIA POSITIVELY:

### 1. ESTABLISH TIMES AT HOME WHEN NO ONE IS ON A DEVICE

Have a daily check-in where you are giving your child your undivided attention and focusing on their world, thoughts, and interests. For instance, you could play a game that doesn't involve a screen, or do something together outside. This helps them learn to value this personal connection so they are less impacted by the forms of connection and validation they experience on social media.

### 2. SHOW AN INTEREST IN WHY THEY LIKE SOCIAL MEDIA

Get curious by saying: "Tell me about that game - what do you like about it?" or "What sort of friends do you make on social media?" Even if it doesn't make sense to you why they would want to message people they have never met or talk with friends online instead of in person, showing your curiosity, not your judgement, will help your child feel safe to share their online experiences with you so you that can guide them in these interactions. If your child has a negative experience online, help them brainstorm ways that they would like to respond, so it can become a learning experience in setting boundaries.

### 3. ASK YOUR CHILD HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACTS THEM

You can say: "When you are on a device for a long time, I notice you can become a bit aggressive. I wonder what you're feeling that makes you act that way? I get how important technology is to you, and I also really care about you and I want to make sure you are OK, so if it is impacting you negatively we need to discuss cutting back or using it differently until it doesn't have that impact any more."