

SUPPORTING HEALTHY MEDIA EXPERIENCES FOR KIDS

Young children and teens have very different needs from adults, and experience different risks online. Teens and younger children also have distinct needs and concerns from one another that parents need to consider.

Tips for supporting healthy media use in the home

Parents and other caregivers play an essential role in supporting healthy media use. One of the most important factors is what's called **shared media engagement**. You can see the MediaSmarts tipsheet [Co-viewing with your kids](#) for more details.

- Make sure that you are selecting the appropriate app or platform for your child's age. Many platforms require users to be **13 years of age or older**. For younger users, apps like YouTube Kids can provide a more age-appropriate experience. Even on those apps, though, it's still important to keep an eye on what your kids are watching and have an ongoing conversation about their media lives.
- When kids are interested in getting a new app or signing up for an online account, **go through the Parent or Safety Centre and the settings with them**, to make sure they know how to do things like limit who sees what they post and flag or report harassment and inappropriate content.
- Make sure that kids give their **real age** when signing up for a service. Many apps and social networks have **safety settings and defaults** for kids between ages 13 and 17: for instance, YouTube has autoplay turned off and privacy settings on "Private" by default for kids this age.

Factors to keep in mind when prioritizing kids' media health

Children under two should spend **as little time with screen devices as possible**, except for video-chats with people they know offline and reading e-books with an adult or sibling.

Be aware that some apps and games aimed at **older kids** are designed to **encourage longer time spent on them**, and also to nudge them towards things like spending money. **Screen time limits** and **talks about how to manage time and money** make sense at this age. Take advantage of tools like YouTube's bedtime and take-a-break reminders.

Tweens' and teens' media use is heavily social, and they may feel like they have to always be available to their friends. **Talk to them about prioritizing their own health** by making sure they get enough time for rest and reflection and learn to use the tools that are available to them to manage their digital use.

- If you're comfortable with your child using a service before they are 13, **make an account for the two of you to share** until they're old enough to make their own. (Some services, like YouTube's Supervised Experience, also allow parents or guardians to create a supervised account that's linked to their own account. This way, parents can select content settings that work for their family, and showcase suitable content for kids to explore.)
- **Create household rules together.** MediaSmarts' research has shown that kids with household rules about internet use are less likely to do things like post their contact information, visit gambling sites, seek out online pornography and talk to strangers online. For more on making and using household rules, see the MediaSmarts tipsheet [Family online rules](#).
- Some platforms have **specific safety resources for content creators**. For example, YouTube has a Creator Safety Centre with resources available for creators to navigate challenges they face. Go through these with your kids if they start posting their own content so they can learn how to secure their accounts, deal with the sudden rise in attention a successful channel can bring and access support networks if they need them.
- Media **content** can also have an effect on kids, especially if it involves their identity (like representations of gender or diversity) or their body image. When you're co-viewing, don't be afraid to **use the Pause button** so you can talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable.

Tips for choosing and encouraging healthy media experiences

Media experiences can be positive for children over two, but parents and caregivers need to choose experiences that support their growth and development.

Between three and about 10, kids can benefit a lot from media experiences that:

- involve **active** thinking and **open-ended play**, instead of just drills and quizzes;
- **engage** them in the activity without unnecessary distractions or bells and whistles;
- provide **meaningful** content and activities that are relevant to their lives and interests; and
- encourage **co-viewing and interaction with family members** or other people they already know offline.

Parents of **tweens and teens** may have less control over their media lives, but we can still guide them by encouraging or allowing more time for certain activities. Prioritize screen experiences that are:

- **educational**, particularly ones that let kids explore their interests and hobbies;
- physically **active**, so that screen use doesn't replace getting up and moving around;
- **creative**, like coding or making music, videos or animations; and
- genuinely **social**, where kids actually interact with other people rather than simply scrolling and Liking others' posts.

Over decades, MediaSmarts' research has shown that children and teens want their parents to be involved in their media lives. It's up to us to help them get a good start and make sure that media plays a healthy role as they grow.