

Parent and Caregiver Conversation Starters

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Use the prompts below to help start discussions with your child around social health, mental health, and personal health and safety.

In this document, you'll find a series of prompts organized by topic. Each topic includes the following:

- ▶ Child-friendly, age-appropriate definition of the topic;
- ▶ “Ask” section with an initial question;
- ▶ “Follow Up” section with additional question(s); and
- ▶ “Go Beyond” section that provides guidance and ideas on how you can continue the conversation to go a bit deeper.

Tips for Talks

Here are some tips for having meaningful conversations with your child:

- ✓ **Be curious** — Ask questions without judgement.
- ✓ **Be open-minded** — Remember what it was like to be a child at their age and what was important at that time.
- ✓ **Listen** — Let them do most of the talking and ask questions that can't be answered with one word.
- ✓ **Relate** — Look for opportunities to relate to what your child is saying and reaffirm their feelings.
- ✓ **Research together** — Sometimes we might not know an answer to a question (and that's OK!). Use this opportunity to model how to find reliable resources online with your child.

SOCIAL HEALTH

Social health is how we build and maintain healthy relationships with others. It includes how we communicate, make friends, resolve conflicts, and show respect and empathy. Good social health helps us feel connected and supported by those around us. This includes our digital/online footprint (what we post, like, share, message) as well.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is about how we think, feel and cope with life's challenges. It affects our moods, emotions, and how we handle stress. Taking care of our mental health means understanding our feelings, managing stress in healthy ways, and knowing when to ask for help.

PERSONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Personal health and safety means understanding and respecting our bodies, relationships and emotions. It includes learning about personal boundaries, consent, and how to make safe and healthy choices. Personal health and safety also means having accurate information and knowing when to talk to a trusted adult about questions or concerns.





Social Health

Ask

Who are the people you are playing games with virtually?



Follow Up

- ▶ How do you determine who you play online games with?
- ▶ What's the difference between friends you know in real life and friends you meet online?
- ▶ How do you interact with people online differently than you might with someone face to face.

Go Beyond

Use this prompt to see how your child chooses friends to play with online and even to begin discussions around how we may act one way in person and in a different way online. Ask them why people may act differently online and in person. This is an additional opportunity to even start discussing beliefs and values and what traits we look for in a friend.





Mental Health

Ask

What kinds of things do you like to do on your device?



Follow Up

- ▶ How do you decide what shows, videos and games you watch and play?
- ▶ How do different online activities make you feel? Are there activities that give you energy? Entertain you? Frustrate you?

Go Beyond

This is a good prompt to get an idea of the kinds of content your child is interested in and why they like specific content. Use this time to connect with your child and share what you like as well. Building a foundation of communication and connecting regularly with your child allows for future conversations that may require more vulnerability or open dialogue. It's also good for your child to reflect on how they feel when they are engaging in different activities online and how this affects their mood or feelings.

Ask

What's an account you follow on social media or YouTube?
How do you decide who you follow online?



Follow Up

- ▶ What do you think influencers aren't sharing about their lives?
- ▶ What do you wish the influencers you follow would share about their lives?
- ▶ What kinds of feelings or thoughts do you have about certain influencers you follow?

Go Beyond

Use this prompt to talk with your child about how influencers can choose to only share the things they want to share, and how it might not be the most accurate depiction of their true lives. This can also eventually lead into conversations about feelings your child may feel when they see certain influencers and what impact it could potentially have on their feelings about themselves and expectations they have about their life.



Personal Health and Safety



Ask

When you see something on social media or online, how do you know it's a reliable source?

Follow Up

- ▶ Why is it important to assess whether something we see, hear or read online is reliable?
- ▶ Let's think of some ways we can determine whether or not something is reliable.

Go Beyond

There's a lot of information children come across on the internet and they aren't skilled enough yet to determine whether it's reliable or not. Use this conversation to talk about how we are influenced by what we see on social media or online and that it's important to be able to realize when something might be false. Also, talk about how what we see online can affect our beliefs/values, and what steps your child can take to find out if something is reliable or not.

Ask

What's a funny video you've seen recently?

Follow Up

- ▶ Sometimes when I'm watching videos, a video I wasn't expecting might come up. What do you do when you see an inappropriate video, picture or pop-up ad while you are scrolling?
- ▶ Do you ever have questions about things you have seen online? What do you do when you have questions about something you saw?



Go Beyond

Sometimes we can't control what might pop up in front of our children. The intent of this conversation is to start and create a safe space to have dialogue between you and your child when they have questions. Use this prompt to encourage your child to ask questions about things they are wondering about. Explain to your child that they can come to you without fear or judgement and use this opportunity to share a relatable example of when you were the same age.