

Parenting for prevention navigating the world online - part 2 dating, technology, and abuse

navigating the world online...

**Technology
should enhance
our lives, not
complicate them.**

wise



Technology is an undeniable component of dating relationships. Teens use online platforms to flirt and experiment with relationships. Practicing romantic relationships online can feel safer than in the real world. Social media helps them feel connected to their partners and lets them show how much they care. Fortunately, research shows that the majority of these experiences are positive.¹ Sometimes what teens see and experience online can be harmful. Without carefully processing these situations, abusive behaviors can become normalized which makes it easier for abuse to exist.

Devices can be used to abuse and harass others. The most common abusive behavior reported is accessing a partner's social media account without permission or behind their backs.² Teens may feel like they have to give their passwords in order to prove their commitment to the relationship. Controlling partners may use social media as ways to start fights about posts they do not like or people they think are too flirty. If your teen breaks up with someone who was abusive, they may still be targeted online. Social media is used to spread rumors, name call, post harmful pictures, and provoke the other partner. This makes it difficult for teens to move on from a breakup, and may be a reason that they stay in the abusive relationship.

Your teen needs to know that you have their back. When talking with young people, it can be helpful to focus on the behavior rather than the use of technology itself. Even if you do not feel like they made the best decisions, you can show support by helping them process what happened without feeling shame or responsibility for the abuse. Abuse is never their fault.

Some things we all can do:

- Encourage honest and ongoing communication instead of limiting access to the online world. Taking away devices may have unintended consequences. Teens will likely find a way to access their online lives with or without permission. Once they have gone behind your back they may be less likely to ask for your help when they need it. Abusers may use teens' natural desire to be connected to further exploit or control them. Try to come up with a solution collaboratively.
- Ask your teens what platform they like the best. Be open and curious about what they like about the platform they are using. Social media platforms are always changing. Have conversations about social media that are not dismissive, judgmental, or punishing.
- Ask them about how they engage with their friends online. There is a digital etiquette that young people consider appropriate for different social media platforms.
- Consider creating screen-free times or places. Decide together what times are appropriate for using technology. Have a conversation about the value of detaching from devices.
- Reassure your teen that it is okay to disengage with people who are hurtful to them. One benefit of online platforms is the ability to block and limit interactions with people.
- Connect with your teen about their online lives, while letting them make mistakes. This can be an opportunity to develop trust and communication around privacy and responsibility. You and your family can decide the best way to create the space that allows your teen to have privacy in exploring relationships with guidance and support from adults.
- Call us to learn more! Our Youth Advocate is available to talk with you about any of these issues.

1 Lenhart, A., Smith, A., & Anderson, M. (2015). Teens, technology and romantic relationships: From flirting to breaking up, social media and mobile phones are woven into teens' romantic lives.

2 Zweig, J. M., Dank, M., Yahner, J., & Lachman, P. (2013). The rate of cyber dating abuse among teens and how it relates to other forms of teen dating violence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.