

Parenting in the Digital Age Workshop Guide

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Start Strong Austin

SafePlace
512-356-1623
www.startstrongaustin.org

Start Strong Boston

Boston Public Health Commission
617-534-5674
www.facebook.com/healthyboston

Start Strong Bridgeport

RYASAP
203- 579-2727
www.myospace.org

Start Strong Bronx

Bronx-Lebanon Hospital
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www.startstrongbronx.org

Start Strong Idaho

Idaho Coalition Against Sexual Assault &
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www.startstrongidaho.com

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Indiana University Health
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www.startstrongindy.com

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Peace Over Violence
213-955-9090
www.youthoverviolence.org

Start Strong Oakland

Family Violence Law Center
510-208-0220
<http://www.myjane.org/>

Start Strong Rhode Island

Sojourner House
401-861-6191
www.hkupwithrespect.org

Start Strong Wichita

Catholic Charities
316-258-9878
www.startstrongwichita.org

Parenting in the Digital Age

Background

Youth today communicate in very different ways than their parents and even their older siblings. Online and digital communication is an integral part of their lives, and a focal point of their social engagement. Youth are joining the social networking scene every day, sometimes without their parents' knowledge or approval. While social networking sites require children to be at least 13 or 14 in order to establish a page, many children are finding their way to the sites anyway. And in many instances, texting rather than spoken conversation forms the basis of relationship communication. As a parent, it can be difficult to follow the latest trends in digital communication.

Young teens look to their parents and the other adults in their lives for guidance as they establish behavior patterns, especially about relationships. However, parents may feel uncomfortable about how to broach these topics or are unfamiliar with how today's digital relationships begin, develop and end through on-line communication. Parents are reaching out to each other and trusted community resources to understand more about the social networking world their tweens live in and how to parent in this digital age.

The following outline for a parent education session is intended as an in-person education session delivered by a trusted, informed community spokesperson. This may be school personnel such as a teacher or guidance counselor; it may be a health professional or it may be a staff member in a community organization. The credibility of the educator is important to parents as they look for knowledge about adolescent development and parenting skills as well as youth social networking practices.

The session includes three sections, each corresponding to one of the learning objectives. The first section and exercises cover knowledge about using technology and the potential concerns for parents. Section two prepares parents as they make plans to talk to their child and offers materials to assist in this conversation. Section three includes parenting information and skill improvement to encourage parents to talk to young teens about the topic of technology and social networks. It is important to include all three elements in your parent education session. Also attached is an evaluation form that can be used for participant feedback.

WORKSHOP GUIDE

This 1 hour and 15 minute parent education session offers information about the use of digital communication, the importance of talking to youth about on-line communication and tips for how to start the conversation with youth. Some parents join the session with advanced knowledge of social networking; others will have less experience. The session leader may want to assess participant experience with technology prior to beginning the session and tailor the content accordingly.

Objectives:

- Increase parent awareness about the use of social networks and other digital communication among middle school youth
- Increase parent's comfort and skill in talking to their teens about digital boundaries
- Increase parent's intention to discuss healthy relationship information with their teens

Materials:

- Role-reversal cards
- "The Social Media Toolbox" info sheet
- "Developing virtual street smarts: Take a Digital Inventory" worksheet
- Chart paper
- Markers

I. ICEBREAKER: (10 min.)

- Welcome parents and thank them for coming. Tell them that the next hour or so will be an opportunity for them to learn and practice new skills to help their teens engage in healthy relationships.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves and say what the term "social networking" meant to them when they were in middle school.

II. INTRODUCTION: FACEBOOK AND BEYOND (5 min.)

- Tell workshop participants that the term "social networking" is everywhere these days. It's the new buzz word.
- When we think of the internet, we think of computers, but now access to the internet includes all kinds of hand held devices such as iPods, iPads Blackberries, and, most importantly, cell phones. The internet, texting, IM-ing, social networks, and chat rooms have all replaced passing notes and spending hours on the phone from years past.
- Today, youth meet, develop relationships and break-up on-line. This can make it even more difficult for parents to know what is happening and how to offer input.

III. FOCUS ACTIVITIES:

A. What is Online Social Networking? (15 min.)

Online social networks allow you to connect with other people through certain web sites or phone services. The following activity will help us get a better idea of what “social networking” tools are available to teens as well as the challenges and opportunities that they present.

Directions:

- Ask participants if they have ever played the board game “**Scattagories**”
- Explain that the next activity will be “**Social Networking Scattagories**” Tell participants that when you say to begin, you want to them to write down as many “social networking” tools as they can in one minute. Give an example or two of social networking tools, platform or services. You may also want to share the definition of *social networking* included below:

Social Networking (see “**Social Networking overhead**” on page 7)

“Social networking” sites offer people new and varied ways to communicate via the Internet, whether through their computer or mobile phone. These sites allow people to easily and simply create their own online page or profile and to construct and display an online network of contacts, often called ‘friends’. Users are able to build a network of connections that they can display as a list of friends. These friends may be offline actual friends or acquaintances, or people they know or have ‘met’ only online, and with whom they have no other link. Social networking sites are not limited to messaging, communicating and displaying networks. Nearly all sites allow users to post photos, video and often music on their profiles and share them with others.”

<http://www.schools.sa.gov.au/speced2/pages/cybersafety/36277/?reFlag=1>

- These may be tools that their teens use, they use, or tools/services that they’ve read about.
- Give participants one minute to complete the activity. You may want to have the participants work in pairs.
- The person who writes down the most social networking tools/resources wins!

When the minute is up, ask participants to count up the number of social networking tools/resources on their list¹.

- Ask participants to highlight those social networking tools/resources that are the most popular with teens.
- Write down their examples on the left side of a piece of chart paper.

¹ There are thousands of social media platforms and that number grows exponentially every day. According to a report from Alloy Access in February 2010:

Popular websites for Boys 11-12: YouTube, Gaming sites and virtual worlds: quizrocket.com, gamtestop.com, miniclip.com, neopets.com, runescape.com, yugioh.com, club penguin, Piratesonline.com, AIM, addinggames.com

Popular websites for Girls 11-12: Discoverygirl.com, Batanga.com, ccs.com, Miss O & Friends, Delia’s, zwinkycuties.com, geaconstreetgirls.com, girlslife.com, itwixie.com, allykacz.com

Popular websites for Boys 12-13: Habbo.com, candystand.com, Myspace.com, Facebook, Twitter, rumblefighter.com, maplestory.com

Popular websites for Girls 12-13: gurl.com, teen.com, Respect Rx, teen.com, ccs.com, Wee-World, sugarloot.com, zwinky.com

Note: COPPA regulations are that if any activity requires the disclosure of personal information by the under 13 year old participant, then express parental consent is required for that disclosure.

- For each the example, ask participants if they can think of a negative use for that tools/resources
- For each the example, ask participants if they can think of a positive use for that tools/resources

Hand out “The Social Media Toolbox” (page 8-9)

Explain that these social networking tools/services themselves are not bad, it’s how teens use them that can make them harmful. This is especially true for their relationships with their friends, boyfriends or girlfriends.

B. Awareness: What are the numbers? (10 min.)

Preparations: Write up the following statistics on a piece of chart paper or on a Powerpoint slide. Cover the statistics with pieces of white paper so that the question is visible but not the statistics.

Tell participants that we know that teens are using online social networking tools and resources in huge numbers and we also know that these tools and resources have a profound impact on their lives and their relationships.

- Ask the group to guess the percentage answers for each statement below:

How much social networking are teens doing?

- 93% of teens over age 12 go online and of these users, 73% use social net sites; 63% go online daily
 - Teens go online to do homework (94%), 81% go online for information about movies, TV, music groups or sports.
 - 64% of teens have created some content online; 57% have watched a video like YouTube.
- *Pew Research Center on Internet and American Life Project; May 2009.

How is it affecting teens?

- 39% of social network users report some online harassment, however, teens report that bullying occurs more frequently offline.
- Most internet harassment comes from other teen youth
- For some students, online harassment isn’t overly distressing but for a small number, cyber-bullying is extremely serious and is associated with problems that negatively impact their lives, school performance and substance use.

***The Growing up with Media Survey, a national online survey of 10-15 year olds found:**

- 15% reported an unwanted sexual solicitation online in the last year
 - 33% reported online harassment in the last year
 - 9% reported an incident on a social networking site
- *Pediatrics vol. 121 no 2 Feb 2008, M.Ybarra, K. Mitchell

Ask participants if any of the statistics are particularly shocking and discuss

C. Virtual Street Smarts: Take a Digital Inventory (15 min.)

Explain to participants that this activity will help them better evaluate their knowledge of their teen's technology use to determine what they still don't know.

Directions:

(*an alternative is to have them break into pairs or do the activity by forming two concentric circles with pairs facing each other)

- Pass out handout: “Developing virtual street smarts: Take a Digital Inventory” (found on page 10).
- Explain that, while we may be familiar with the types of technology available to our teens and the increased presence of internet danger, it is important as parents to think about how our teens use technology on a daily basis.
- This activity is a “digital inventory”. It is intended to help you figure out what you know and what you don't know about your teen's technology use.
- Fill out the inventory to the best of your ability. If there are areas where you are unsure, circle them.

Debrief

- Did filling out this inventory raise any sorts of concerns with you regarding your teen's technology use?
- Were there any areas in which you were unsure of your teen's technology use?
- What things do you think your teen is already doing to be “virtually street smart”?
- What else do you think you or your teen could do to increase their virtual street smarts?

Close

- Explain that you could use this inventory to frame a discussion with your teen about their technology use.

D. Talking about Technology: “Role-Reversal” Role Plays (15 min.)

Everyone will now have the opportunity to role-play some of the challenging technology-based relationship scenarios that may come up as their tween or teen goes through middle school.

Each person will have the opportunity to be the parent, child, and the observer. The parent may want to use the following guidelines when thinking about how they respond to the issue:

Effective parenting requires balance of sensitivity and firmness.

- *Offer information about choices, consequences and responsibility*
- *Prepare, don't scare*
- *Offer problem solving and guidance*
- *Be firm about your expectations*

Directions:

- Divide parents up into groups of three people. One person plays a teen, another is the parent and the third is the observer.
- Explain that each group of three will receive three scenarios. Each scenario should take approximately 2-3 minutes.
- Pass out the role-play cards to each group of three, utilizing the scenarios on **“Role-Reversal” Role Plays** and place them on individual sheets or card. (See page 11)
- Ask participants to begin their role-plays.
- At the end of each role-play, the observer should give feedback to the person playing the parent. They can provide feedback on tone of voice, body language, listening skills, etc.
- Participants should switch roles and then start the second (and third) role-plays following the same process as the first.

Discussion

- Briefly, ask participants to identify which role was easier for them, the parent, the child or the observer?
- Ask participants to share what parental advice they thought was particularly effective?
- Ask participants to identify any particular challenges or hurdles they themselves might have when having this sort of conversation with their child.
- Explain to participants that these conversations don't need to be perfect. What's important is that they are making the effort and keeping the lines of communication open so that their child knows that they support him or her in engaging in healthy relationships, online or offline.

IV. SUMMARY/CLOSE (5 min.)

Remind parents that:

- Healthy teen relationships are the most effective protection against adolescent risk behaviors.
- Healthy teen relationships can positively influence decision making on sexual activity, alcohol or drugs, or abusive teen relationships.
- It can be awkward to bring up scary or uncomfortable subjects with your child, they are counting on you! Even when you think they are not really listening, they often are.

RESOURCES

National Dating Abuse Helpline. Call toll free at 1-866-331-9474 or TTY 1-866-331-8453 or online at www.loveisrespect.org.

What Parents Need to Know about Teens: Facts, Myths and Strategies, David Wolfe, 2007, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health,
[http://www.camh.net/Care Treatment/Resources clients families friends/parents need know teens /index.html](http://www.camh.net/Care_Treatment/Resources_clients_families_friends/parents_need_know_teens/index.html)

“A Parent’s Handbook”, Start Strong Idaho, 2010, www.startstrongidaho.com

Cyberbullying Research Center, www.cyberbullying.us

Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, www.pewinternet.org

American Academy of Pediatrics, www.healthychildren.org

ConnectSafely.org

WiredSafety.org

StartStrongParents.org

Social Networking Overhead

to post on flip chart, overhead or power point slide

'Social networking' sites offer people new and varied ways to communicate via the Internet, whether through their computer or mobile phone.

These sites allow people to easily and simply:

- Create their own online page or profile
- Construct and display an online network of contacts, often called 'friends'

These 'friends' may be:

- offline actual friends or acquaintances
- people they know or they have 'met' only online, and with whom they have no other link

Social networking sites allow users to

- Send messages and communicate
- Display networks of their contacts/'friends'

And nearly all sites also allow users to

- Post Photos
- Video
- and often music

on their profiles and share them with others

The Social Media Toolbox

Table 1 below categorizes the most common social media tools and what they are and aren't generally appropriate for (with the understanding that mission/target audiences take precedence over this):

Table 1: Social Media Categories and Uses		
Category (Example)	Generally appropriate for...	Generally NOT appropriate when...
Aggregators  (Digg)	Increasing the reach of a blog or other often-updated public site	Used to promote a static website
Audio Sharing (BlogTalkRadio)	Broadcasting interviews, discussions, tutorials, etc. Can be one-time or series.	You have time-sensitive updates
Blogging  (WordPress)	Telling a story, i.e., narrative writing (about a finite event or an ongoing issue/project)	There aren't resources or content to post regularly
Content Syndication  (RSS)	Sharing Web site content with others, highlighting often-updated site content	Used to promote a static website
Microblogging  (Twitter)	Providing real-time updates; obtaining feedback; interacting at conferences, etc.	There aren't resources to participate regularly (as in posting and responding)
Photo Sharing  (Flickr)	Engaging with stakeholders and building community (e.g., for a specific event)	There aren't resources to post photos of your work

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<p>Social Bookmarking  (Delicious)</p>	<p>Sharing multiple links with stakeholders (see Aggregators too)</p>	<p>Used to promote a static website.</p>
<p>Social Networks  (facebook)</p>	<p>Engaging with stakeholders and building community; obtaining feedback</p>	<p>There aren't resources to participate regularly (as in posting and responding)</p>
<p>Video Sharing  (YouTube)</p>	<p>Broadcasting events, interviews, tutorials, etc.; building community</p>	<p>The content could be expressed in a podcast (aka "talking head syndrome")</p>
<p>Virtual Worlds  (Second Life)</p>	<p>Using the platform to interact and build community</p>	<p>There aren't resources to participate regularly</p>
<p>Widgets  (embedded videos)</p>	<p>Distributing real-time content; creating interactive interfaces</p>	<p>Used to promote a static website</p>
<p>Wikis  (Wikipedia, PBworks)</p>	<p>Collaboratively writing documents among a core group of individuals; crowdsourcing</p>	<p>There aren't resources to manage content</p>

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<http://www.newmedia.hhs.gov/socialmedia101.html>

Developing Virtual Street Smarts: Take a Digital Inventory				
WHAT	WHERE (Example: living room, bedroom, public library)	WHEN (How often, at what times of day?)	WHY (What is your teen using it for?)	BE SMART
Computer				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate computer in public space, like the living room. • Security software can limit which sites teens access.
Cell phone				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With smart phones, teens can do just about everything a computer does from a mobile device.
facebook				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to teens about limiting personal information on their profile, such as age, location, and telephone number. • Remind teens that conversations with friends over facebook are public.
Chat rooms				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult predators might pose as teens. Warn teens about using un-monitored chat rooms.
Email				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind teens that any sort of written communication leaves a trail.
Photo sharing (e.g. flickr, facebook)				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photos or videos intended for a single person can be leaked to hundreds of other people through posting on youtube or social networking sites.
Blogs and internet diaries				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blogs are also a written record that anyone can access, unless strict privacy settings are set up.

“Role-Reversal” Role Plays

Instructions: *place each scenario on a different sheet or card, so that they can be handed out to each small group for exercise “Talking about Technology: Role-Reversal Role Plays.”*

Scenario 1:

Parent: You just found out that your child has a folder full of provocative pictures on the family computer. You don’t know whether or not he/she has posted them or sent them to his/her friends so you decide to ask them.

Teen: A couple of months ago, you took some silly pictures of yourself when you were home alone and bored. You put them all in a folder and planned on erasing them but you erased the wrong folder. Now your parent found them.

Scenario 2:

Parent: You just received a mass text from your child that was meant to go to his/her friends only but they included you by mistake. In the message, they are talking about threatening another student at the school and they seem serious about it.

Teen: A guy/girl at school will not stop flirting with your Boyfriend/Girlfriend. You went to your friends for advice but they just suggest you beat them up and you don’t really want to take it there. The last straw is when they made a comment on your partner’s Facebook page so you send a mass text to let everyone know how angry you were.

Scenario 3:

Parent: Your child quits his/her sports team suddenly and when you asked him/her why he/she just said, “It wasn’t for me”. When you call the coach of the team, he/she tells you that he/she has been the subject of some online hazing.

Teen: You were trying to fit in with a couple of the star players on the sports team at your school that you think are really cool. They ask you to post a trending topic on twitter about one of the unpopular girls at school and help them make fun of her. When you decline, the group talks about you on twitter instead of the girl.

Tips for Talking to Your Young Teen about Relationships

1. **Discuss how to act as a healthy bystander or ‘upstander’ and friend** when young teens observe unhealthy behaviors in their peers
2. **Encourage open, honest, and thoughtful reflection** about healthy relationships and teen dating violence and possible interventions. Allow teens to clarify their values and expectations for healthy relationships. Allow youth to debate those issues and to come to their own understanding, rather than dismissing answers as “wrong”. Communication with your child about relationships is an on-going process rather than a one-time conversation.
3. **An effective parent balances sensitivity with firmness**; adapts to the changes faced by your young teen; talks openly and respects differences of opinion; is strong enough to make unpopular decisions; and doesn’t always get along with or agree with their young teen. Teach – don’t just criticize.
4. **Understand your teen’s development** and how it affects your relationship. Adolescence is all about experimentation. From mood swings to risk taking, “normal teenage behavior” can appear to be anything-but-normal. However, new research reveals that brain development during these formative years plays a significant role in shaping your teen’s personality and actions. Knowing what’s normal is key so you can better understand and guide your teen.
5. **Understand the pressure and the risk your teen faces.** There are new and increasing pressures and expectations, such as sex, substance use and avoiding abuse from peers or dating partners. Teens often voice the concern that their parents don’t take the time to listen and help solve situations that matter to them. Think in terms of reducing harm vs. zero tolerance.
6. **Take a clear stand** against disrespect, abuse of power, any forms of violence, or use of abusive or inappropriate language with a firm and clear message.
7. **Make the most of “teachable moments”** to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships -- using TV episodes, movies, news, community events, learning about friends’ experiences, etc.
8. **Accentuate the positive.** Talks about relationships need not focus solely on risky behavior or negative consequences, but should also address factors that promote healthy adolescent development and positive outcomes (i.e.: academic success, relationships should be fun and fulfilling, supporting etc.)
9. **Be an active participant in your teen’s life.** Encourage your teen to be involved in extracurricular activities. Find outings that you can share with your teen. Explore ways to know more about their friends and interests.
10. **You know that there is no magic pill, no simple method that works every time.** You will make mistakes. The best we can do is help teens make the most responsible choices possible by maintaining a balance between being sensitive to their desires and needs, yet firm in providing guidance and direction.

Relationship Conversation Starters: Talking to Your Young Teen

1. What are your friends' dating relationships like? What are the words that your friends use for dating? What is the difference in these terms and how long do your peers stay together. Do they make a commitment to each other? Are there certain things that boys want that girls don't? Are there things girls want in these relationships that boys don't want?

Actions and Talking points:

- Compare their notions about the roles of males and females.
 - Mutual respect should be a key part of any relationship.
2. What are some examples of someone saying or doing something that crosses your personal boundaries? Everyone has a right to communicate how they want to be treated by others. What can you say and do to communicate your personal boundaries? When does playing or teasing become too much and is no longer fun?

Actions and Talking points:

- Personal boundaries help define your expectations about how you want to be treated in a respectful, non-threatening and comfortable way on your own terms.
 - Everyone has a right to communicate how they want to be treated by others
 - Communicating personal boundaries includes telling others your expectations and expressing when your boundaries have been crossed.
 - Everyone has different personal boundaries and it's important to treat a person how they want to be treated.
3. All relationships are unique. But what do you expect from someone you would go out with? What do you think makes a relationship healthy? What do you think healthy relationships look like, feel like, and sound like?

Actions and Talking points:

- In a healthy relationship there should be respect, safety, support, individuality, fairness and equality, acceptance, honesty and trust, communication and it should be fun.
 - Encourage emotional awareness – the ability to recognize moment to moment emotional feelings and to express all feelings (good and bad) appropriately.
4. For youth who are starting to date or have friends that are, the following question may be appropriate to pursue.

Have you ever seen any kind of abusive behavior between two people who are going out?

Actions and Talking points:

- Compare your teenager's definition of "abusive behaviors" or "violence" to that of your own.
- Look at warning signs from the perspective of a potential abuser. Don't look the other way if you see warning signs in your child. Reach out to help him or her recognize potentially unhealthy or abusive behaviors.

I Will Talk to my Child about their Digital Lives

Date: _____

A. What is one thing that I can do with my child over the next week or two?

B. What are 2 other things that can do in the next couple of months?

C. A reminder to myself about what I've learned:

EVALUATION FORM

Date: _____

1. Was the workshop helpful to you as a parent/caregiver?

Not at all

all of it was new

1

2

3

4

5

2. Do you now feel better equipped to talk to your tween/early teen about these issues?

Not at all

all of it was new

1

2

3

4

5

3. Will the workshop help motivate you to talk to your tween/early teen?

Not at all

all of it was new

1

2

3

4

5

4. Was the material presented relevant to your experiences with your tween/early teen?

Not at all

all of it was new

1

2

3

4

5