

# FAMILY TOOLKIT

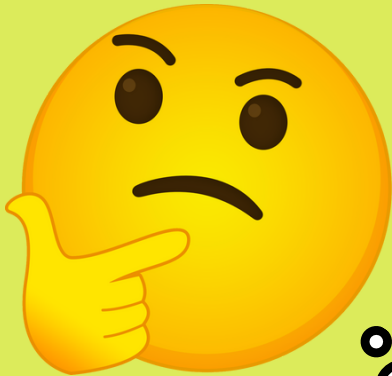
SET YOUR TWEEN UP TO BE SAFE, RESPONSIBLE, AND  
EVENTUALLY INDEPENDENT ONLINE.

Don't just follow your kids online. *Lead them.*



This is  
problematic.  
I should ***Pause***  
Before Posting.

This is  
complicated.  
I should  
***Move It*** Offline.



This is  
bigger than me.  
I should  
**Reach Out**  
to an adult.

- *Support your child*
- *Set examples*
- *Think out loud*
- *Learn from mistakes*



Our fun and engaging activities are designed to bring you and your tween together in partnership as you navigate their burgeoning independence and support them as they figure out the role online interactions will play in their lives.

The activities capitalize on the developmental strengths of tweens and on the fact that deep learning happens through engagement with novel and intellectually stimulating experiences.

**Q: How do I use this toolkit?**

**A:** Anyway that works best for you and your family! You can do the activities in any order you want, and they can be enjoyed over and over again.

Each activity is designed to get the conversation started, work on screen/life balance, or highlight a particular *Thumbs Down*\* skill. They all utilize a particular *Speak Up*\* teaching technique. Throughout the Toolkit we've included developmental insights, ways to modify activities, and various tips and reminders. We hope you and your tween enjoy the *TDSU* activities!

**Don't just follow your kids online. *Lead them.***

\*Curious to know more? Check out the charts at the end of this toolkit!



# Tone Deaf



🕒 5 minutes

***Activity: Help your tween learn different ways to convey emotions online when they can't rely on tone.***

## **Print ads**

**are a great example of how emotions can be conveyed through images, colors, fonts, emojis, and words.**

**See if you and your tween can identify the emotion(s) being conveyed in an ad.**

Don't worry if you and your child come up with different answers. This can be a great illustration of why emotion is so hard to convey in the absence of tone.



# Building the Mindfulness Muscle

🕒 Ongoing

*Activity: When spending time with your tween, take a moment to connect with one another and your surroundings.*

Being mindful when we are interacting online can potentially help prevent miscommunication and foster more enriching exchanges. Here are some ways to build your child's mindfulness muscle and get both of you off your devices!

When we are present in the moment we can acknowledge and accept our feelings.

This allows us to be more intentional.

Intentional interactions have the potential to be more satisfying.

They may also help us avoid misunderstandings.





# Building...

*Continued*

Did you know that it is possible to smell when a storm is coming? Take a walk with your tween and share your observations about the sights, smells, and sounds around you. Ask them what they notice.

Did you know that you can tell when a cake is done just by the smell? The next time you bake with your tween take some time together to notice how the smell of the kitchen changes.

Did you know you can learn to visualize yourself making a throw and actually feel it in your body? If you play catch with your tween, explore with each other what you noticed about how your body felt.



# Text Together For Tone

🕒 10 Minutes

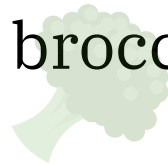
*Activity: Think of some words that describe tone of voice. For example, you might come up with happy, sarcastic, excited, frustrated, sad. Don't tell each other!*

Now you are going to text each other and see if you can guess the tone.

Using the tools available, like fonts, emojis, or message effects, try to communicate the tone.



Need some ideas? We came up with  
"I wish I had that shirt," or  
"I'm eating broccoli."



**When tone can't be communicated via text, it's time to Pause Before Posting, Move It Offline, or ask the Trusted Team for their advice.**



# Demystify Your Digital Life

🕒 Ongoing

***Reminder:*** When you pick up your device in front of your tween, do your writing and editing out loud. Set the expectation that digital communication requires thoughtfulness.



***Speak Up***  
and share your thoughts  
about how you communicate  
online.

**Talk about the**  
***Thumbs Down***  
**skills you are using.**

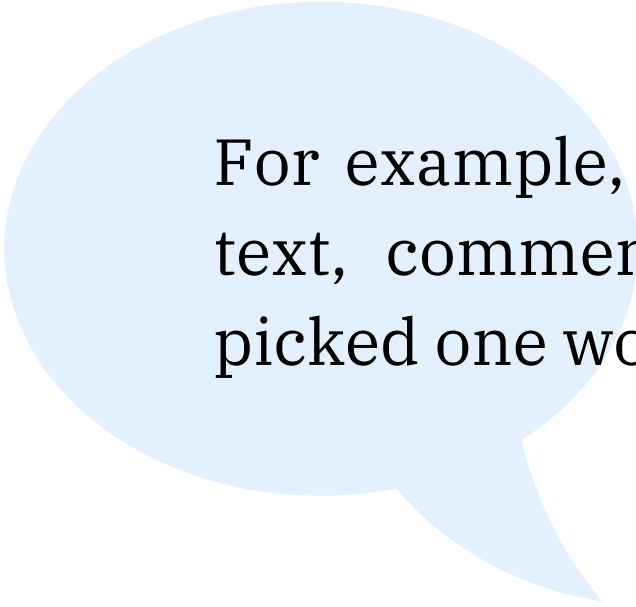
Let your tween be  
the expert! Ask  
their opinion.







# Demystify...

*Continued*



For example, as you draft an email or text, comment out loud on why you picked one word over another.

Contemplate if what you are writing would be better communicated offline.

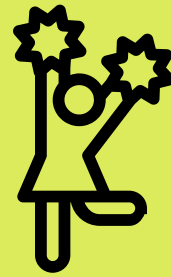


You can also consider out loud if you should wait to post or send something.





# Go Team!



Ongoing

*Activity: Ask your tween to be on your Trusted Team.*

**If you have a social media account, ask your tween to follow you. Invite them to talk to you about your posts. Let them be the expert and help you! Model for your child how to welcome feedback in order to learn and grow.**



By making the *TDSU* approach a family affair, you are letting your child know that responsible social media use is a priority.



# Move It Offline

🕒 5-10 minutes

*Activity: Create a script with your tween for moving Complicated Communication offline.*

**How will your child move a conversation that feels complex or deals with sensitive subject matter or emotional content offline? Help them come up with some concrete ways to deal with Complicated Communication.**



Scripting helps our kids learn problem solving skills for scenarios that could be uncomfortable, anxiety-producing, or just new to them.





# Move It...

*Continued*

Some scripted responses you could try out with your tween are:

Can we discuss this in person?

HEY, THIS FEELS LIKE SOMETHING WE SHOULD CHAT ABOUT.

CAN I CALL YOU?

I'm getting confused.

Can we FaceTime?



# Fire Drill



🕒 10-15 minutes

***Activity: Work with your tween to come up with concrete ways to handle a group text that becomes problematic.***

## Decoding Development:

Tweens are learning to exercise their voice, but it doesn't always come easily. Sometimes they need to practice in order to feel confident.

**How will your child remember what to do when a text chain becomes mean-spirited?**

**Help them come up with a concrete plan.**





# Fire Drill...

*Continued*

Make it fun- see if you can create an acronym together! For example, teach your tween

## CHAT:

**C**hange the topic

**H**old up, guys! (point out that things have become mean-spirited)

**A**sk the Trusted Team if they aren't sure what to do

**T**ake it offline



# TDSU-Libs



 5 minutes

*Activity: Help your tween build their emotional vocabulary.*

## Decoding Development:

A rich emotional vocabulary helps your child label what they are experiencing.

Labeling reduces uncertainty about emotions, which can have a calming effect.

When your child is less activated, they are better able to regulate their emotions and do things like Pause Before Posting.





# TDSU-Libs...

*Continued*

How many different feeling words for each sentence can you come up with?

I was \_\_\_\_\_.

My friends threw  
a party for me.

TODAY IS MY FIRST  
DAY OF SCHOOL.

I'M SO \_\_\_\_\_.

My teacher called  
on me today.

I felt so \_\_\_\_\_.



# Let Your Tween Be Your Tour Guide!

🕒 10 minutes

***Activity: Ask your child to help you explore some of the social media platforms that they either use or are curious about themselves.***

**Download one of the platforms and take a tour of it with your tween.**

**Even if they don't have their own social media accounts, you might be surprised at how much they know! Let them be the expert.**

Consider viewing the social media platform through the *Thumbs Down* lens.





# Build Your Trusted Team



🕒 10 Minutes

***Activity: Decide with your tween who to invite to be part of the Trusted Team. Ask the Team to participate in a group chat or follow your child on a social media platform.***

**The people on your child's Trusted Team understand that learning is a process during which mistakes happen. Encourage them to reach out if they see that your child has not yet mastered when and how to disengage from social media. This is a great opportunity for you to reinforce the skills that your child is working to learn.**

Decoding Development:

Children learn best  
when they feel  
supported by adults  
and friends that they trust!



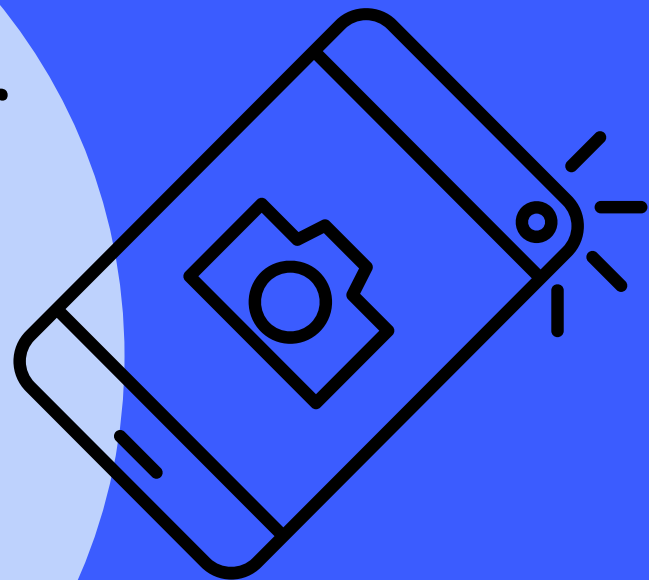
# Get Permission Before Posting

🕒 Every so often

*Reminder: Children are influenced by what you do.*

**Before sharing  
or posting a photo, ask your  
tween if they mind.**

**However your  
child answers, respect  
their decision (for real!).**



*A Thumbs Down skill is knowing how to avoid Problematic Posts, which includes posting photos without approval.*



# Digital Detox



🕒 Up to you!

*Activity: Pick a day that you and your tween pledge to do a digital detox- meaning no devices for a full day (or if that is unrealistic, pick an amount of time that feels achievable)!*

**At the end of the detox,  
reflect with your tween:**

**What did you do with your  
time instead of being  
online? Did you have  
FOMO? Did you feel  
disconnected? Did you  
feel relieved?**

You and your tween might  
come away with a new  
sense of the role that  
social media plays  
in your lives.





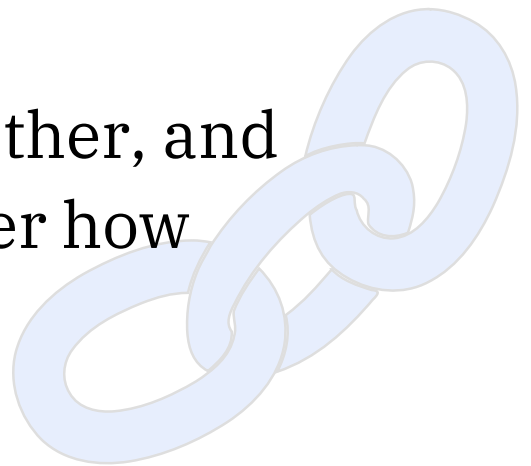
# Digital...

*Continued*

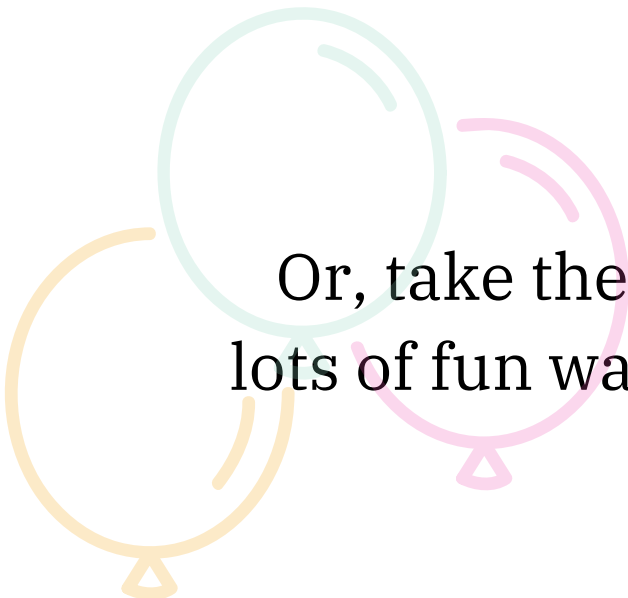


Make it a competition!  
Kids vs. adults- and the winners get to  
pick what's for dinner that night.

Or maybe you are in it together, and  
it's a chance to bond over how  
tough it is.



Or, take the opportunity to think of  
lots of fun ways to distract each other.





# Scavenger Hunt



🕒 5 Minutes

*Activity: Scroll through an online review platform with your tween.*

**Search for a post  
that is coming across as  
mean-spirited.**

**Perhaps it was written in the  
heat of the moment.  
That's ok, everyone  
makes mistakes.**

Take advantage  
of  
Teachable Moments!





# Scavenger...

*Continued*

**Let's focus on what we can learn:**

- How could this post have been written differently?
- Pausing before posting gives us time to reflect on tone, intention, and possible consequences.



# Sit Back and Scroll

🕒 10 minutes

*Reminder: Demystify your digital life.*

**While hanging out with your family and scrolling through your favorite social media platform, why not comment out loud on any posts that you think could be misinterpreted.**

**Ask your tween what they think.**

Let your child be the expert! See how well they are integrating the *Thumbs Down* skills.



# Be the School Principal

🕒 5 minutes

***Activity: Have fun role-playing with your tween! Take turns pretending to be a school administrator reading the posts below. Has the school's digital use policy or code of conduct been violated?***

***My teacher  
is so dumb.***

Can you  
believe what Alex  
did today?

We can't be friends with  
them anymore.

I'M SO SICK OF  
SCHOOL.

I WISH I  
COULD BURN IT  
DOWN, LOL.

**Decoding Development:**

**Tweens are developing the ability to see things from a different point of view. Take advantage of this emerging strength to help them avoid Problematic Posts!**





# Text With Your Tween

🕒 Every so often

*Reminder: Let your child know that they are a part of a community that will help them learn.*

**Starting a text conversation with your child is a great way to show them how to be a part of a Trusted Team.**

It gives you an opportunity to model that it's easy to ask for clarification when you are confused about tone, context, or intent.

You can also set an example by showing your child how to handle sensitive subject matter, emotional content, or anything that feels complex by moving the conversation off-line.

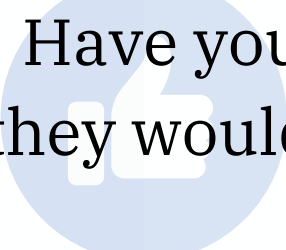
**A  
Thumbs Down skill  
is knowing how  
to handle  
Problematic Posts  
and Complicated  
Communication.**



# What Would YOU Like?

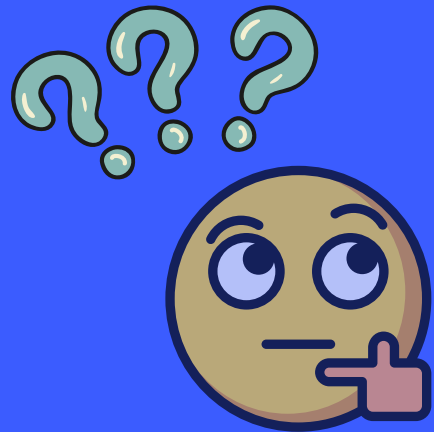
🕒 5 minutes

*Activity: Scroll through a social media feed with your tween.*



Have your child point out the posts that they would "like." Ask what they like about them. Be curious!

**Do you have a quiet child?  
Try saying something like:  
"Tell me more about that."**



**Remaining silent is also  
powerful- it can give your child  
the time they need to figure out  
what they want to say!**



# Mental Health Day



🕒 Every so often

*Reminder: Social media can impact mental health. Normalize talking about it.*

**If you find  
yourself scrolling  
through your feed while  
hanging out with your tween,  
take the opportunity to narrate  
how posts are making you feel.**

**You might feel inspired or  
amused, but some might make  
you feel badly about yourself.**





# Mental Health...

*Continued*

Share your thoughts out loud.

Let your tween know what you plan to do about any feeds that leave you feeling depleted, anxious, or judged.

Help your tween see that this can easily happen to anybody and feeds can always be unfollowed.



# Create a Reach Out Plan

🕒 10-15 minutes

*Activity: It isn't enough to just teach your child what the 3Ds are-they also have to know what to do when they encounter one!*

Who are the trusted adults your child will reach out to if they come across a 3D? Talk with your child about how they will reach out. Will they text a screenshot of what they encountered? Will they have a conversation in real life? Will they make a phone call? This isn't about establishing a rigid rule, but rather to brainstorm the possibilities.

**Having a plan can reduce stress and make it easier to take action! In addition, by taking the time to work with your child on a plan, you are showing them that you take the 3Ds seriously and that they are not alone in this.**



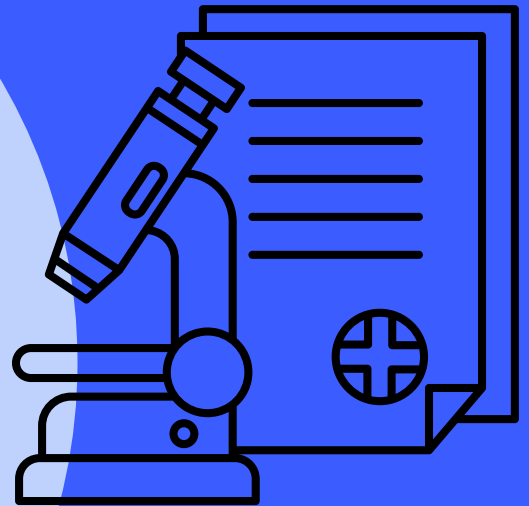
# Reset Using Research

🕒 10 minutes

***Reminder:** Empower your tween to self-regulate when interacting online by harnessing the power of neuroscience.*

**Engaging in online interactions when emotionally activated can lead to poor judgment.**

**Give your tween some concrete tools they can employ to manage their emotions.**



There are so many good mental health resources online. Check out @nicoleneuroscience and @thebrainhealthdoctor.





# Reset...

*Continued*

**Feeling angered  
by a post or text?**

**Dilate your gaze or look  
outside the window to  
blunt noradrenaline  
release.**

**Feeling anxious  
about something you've  
just seen or read online?**

**Deactivate the amygdala by  
taking a walk, exercising,  
eating dark chocolate, or  
watching a comedy.**

**Feeling insecure  
about something  
you've seen online?**

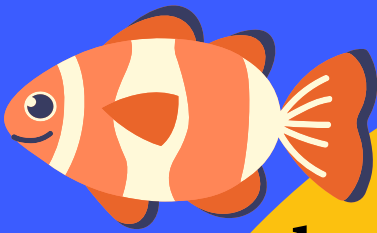
**Write down your strengths.  
This helps you  
think logically  
and overrides your  
limbic system.**



# Make It a Family Affair

⌚ Until your pet or stuffed animal is an influencer!

*Activity: Create a social media account together.*



**Does your family have a pet or a favorite stuffed animal that deserves it's own social media account?**

**Work on it together with your tween! Pick the photos, write the captions and respond to comments together.**

**This is a great way to have fun while teaching appropriate social media use.**







# Accentuate the Positive

🕒 Every So Often

***Reminder:*** *Narrate the positive social media behaviors you see as your child demonstrates them.*

*I noticed you asked to speak to me in person when things got complicated over our last text chain*

I hear you reached out to your cousin to ask about something you wanted to post.  
Great job using your Trusted Team!

I APPRECIATE YOU SHARING YOUR THOUGHTS WITH ME ABOUT HOW TO WORD THE TEXT TO YOUR FRIEND ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO MAKE THEIR BIRTHDAY PARTY

**Kids are more likely to learn and repeat behaviors when they receive positive reinforcement.**



# Serenade Before Sending

🕒 10 minutes

***Activity: Create a song with your tween to help them remember to Pause Before Posting.***

Take a popular or familiar song and rework the lyrics with your tween to capture some of the things they should check before posting or hitting send. We've come up with two to get you started!

**To Happy Birthday: I've read it all through, there's nothing taboo.**

**My message is clear now.**

**I can send it to you!**



**To Row Row Row Your Boat: Check, check, check your post, it might be seen as mean. How would you be feeling inside if you saw this on your screen?**





# Serenade...

*Continued*

**It is easier to learn a new skill when the content is engaging. Songs can be a great way to bring lessons to life for your tween.**

**In addition, singing releases endorphins. So if your tween has been emotionally activated, the act of singing a silly little ditty can help them settle themselves, potentially preventing them from posting or sending something Problematic.**





# Flip the Script

🕒 5 Minutes

*Reminder: Don't always be the first to identify possible pitfalls and their solutions.*

If your tween comes to you asking for a social media account, you might immediately start thinking about all the things that you need to caution them against. Why not give them a chance to demonstrate responsibility, and flip the script. Ask your tween, “What are some of the things we should talk about and plan for before we set up an account for you?”

**Try making your tween a partner in the process. Assume that they want to be safe and responsible when interacting online. Show them you believe in their ability to think critically about their social media use. Demonstrate that you are open to having these kinds of conversations.**



# I Had to be *Taught* These Things?

🕒 10 minutes

***Activity: We may think that interacting online should come naturally, but there's actually a lot to learn! Show your tween that even the most basic skills that they take for granted are things they had to learn.***

Pick something your child does really well (like brushing their teeth or putting on their socks).

Come up with a list of each step it takes to complete that task.



**For example, if you picked putting on socks, the steps might start off with: first, you choose a pair of socks (are you wearing sneakers or dress shoes? Make sure you pick the socks that fit the shoe!)**

**Now you need to find a place to sit (it's hard to put socks on while balancing on one foot!). You and your child can take it from here!**

**1**

**2**

**3**





# I Had to...

*Continued*

**It could be fun to think of all the silly ways such a basic task can go wrong if you are not being mindful. For example, you might grab two left socks.**

**Normalize that mistakes are a part of the learning process.**





# Cringe or Cool?

🕒 5 minutes

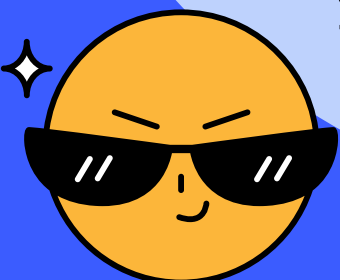
*Activity: Are the emojis you use cringe or cool? Let your tween help you find out!*



Let your tween educate you about what your favorite emojis say about you (hint: they likely say that you are old!).

Do you use the thumbs up emoji a lot? You may think it communicates “ok,” but ask your tween what it really means. How about the red heart emoji? Or the grimacing face emoji?

You may be surprised at what you learn!





# Cringe...

*Continued*

Adolescence isn't easy! Tweens are often overwhelmed by feelings they don't understand, they are navigating social situations that are new to them, and they are stuck between childhood and being a young adult.

Fostering moments where your tween can feel a sense of mastery/competency not only supports their sense of self; it also provides an opportunity for you to relate to their more “grown up” self.

This in turn opens up a type of communication that involves sharing, respect, and a mature back-and-forth, increasing the possibility that they will see you as a resource in the future.



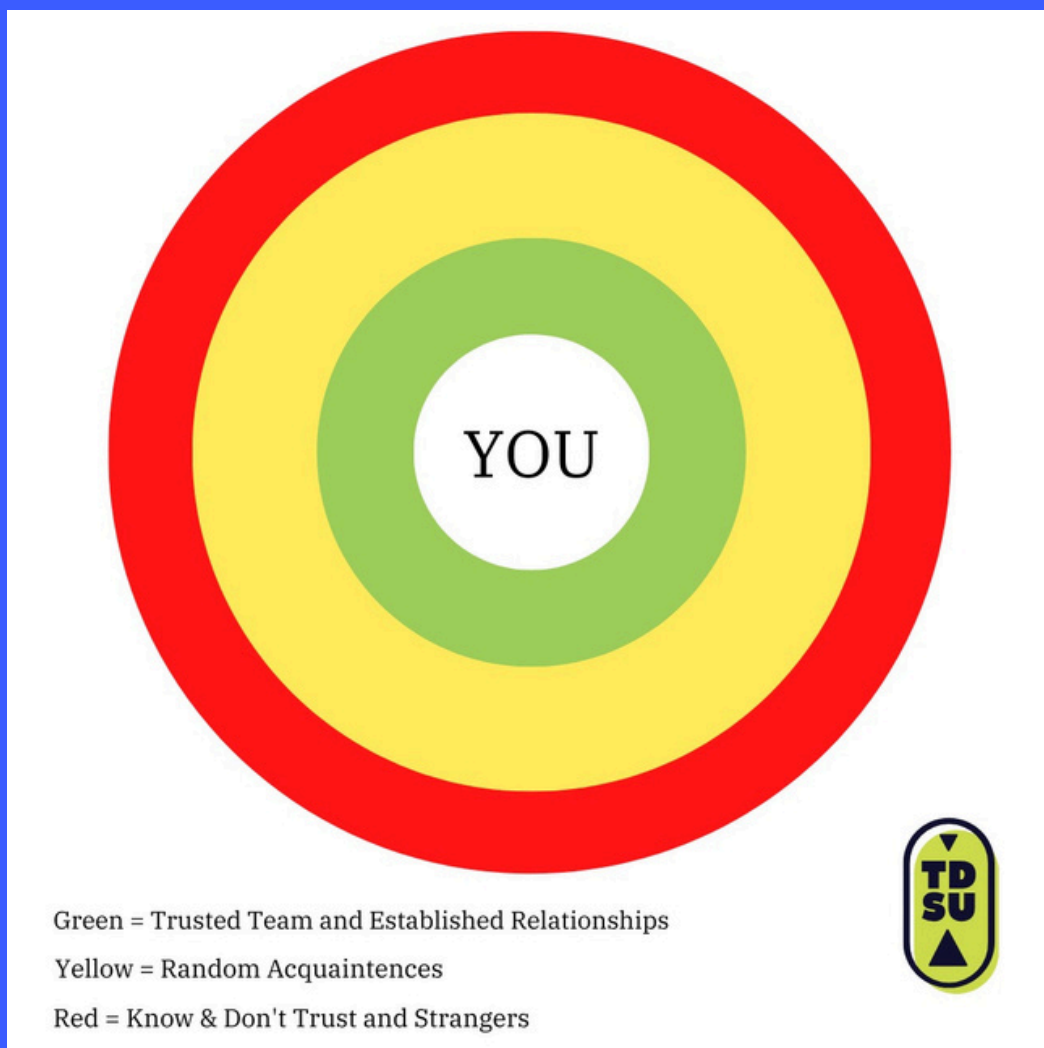


# Circles of Consent

🕒 10 Minutes

***Activity: Access to social media is a privilege, and so is access to YOU. Teach your tween the power of consent. Help them figure out who they will allow into their online lives.***

**Talk with your kids about their Circles of Consent**



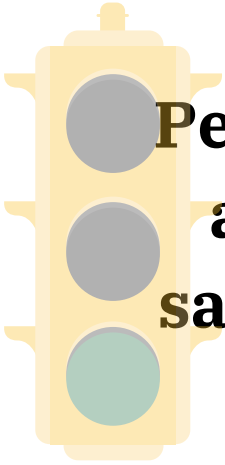
Note: The inspiration for the Circles of Consent comes from @seerutkchawla





# Circles...

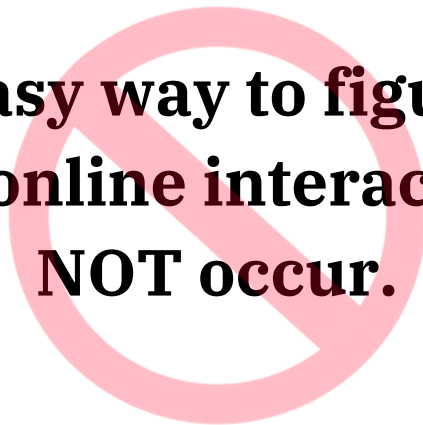
*Continued*



**People in the rings closest to your child are those with whom your child can safely start interacting with online. We call this the Trusted Team.**

**As your child starts to show growing mastery of the *Thumbs Down* skills, you can start to increase their independence and speak with them about enlarging their Circles of Consent.**

**It is also an easy way to figure out people with whom online interactions should NOT occur.**





# #wokeupthisway?

🕒 Varies

*Activity: Help your tween put a realistic spin on those “picture perfect” posts.*

Check out some social media posts with your tween and make a game of imagining what they might look like outside the frame.

Odds are that just outside the frame is something that would bring reality into the fantasy that is being created.



How many photos were taken before they got “the one?”

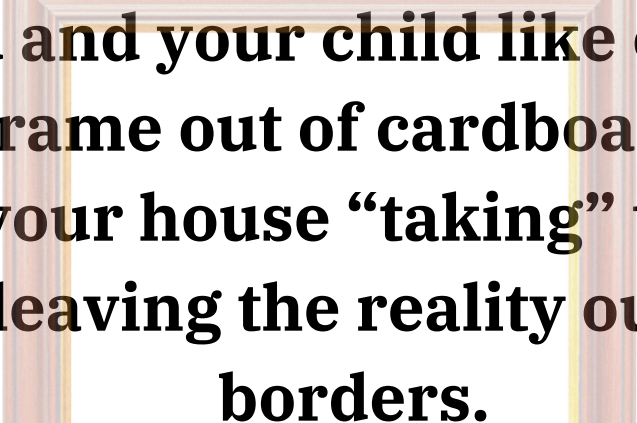
How many light rings did they need to get that perfect glow?



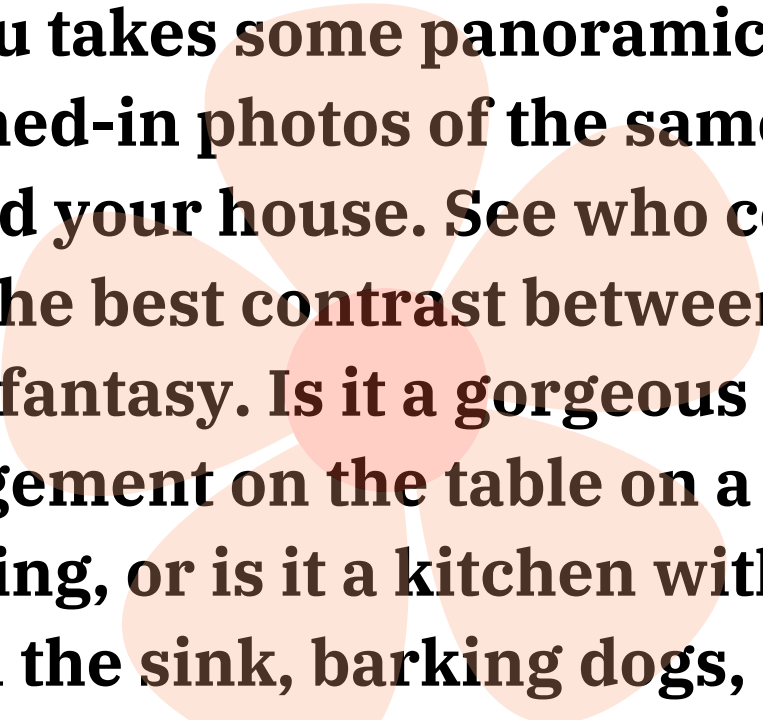


# #wokeupthisway...

*Continued*



**Do you and your child like crafting? Create a frame out of cardboard and walk around your house “taking” the perfect photo, leaving the reality outside the borders.**



**Or maybe you make it a contest! Each of you takes some panoramic and zoomed-in photos of the same scene around your house. See who comes up with the best contrast between reality and fantasy. Is it a gorgeous flower arrangement on the table on a peaceful morning, or is it a kitchen with dishes piled in the sink, barking dogs, and dried milk on the table?**



# Same Lines, Different Meanings

🕒 5 Minutes

***Activity: Teach your tween to reread their texts or posts out loud in several different ways before hitting send.***

When we hear what we've written, we can better imagine how it could be perceived by someone else.

Try putting the emphasis on different words, reading it in a different tone, reading it with no inflection, and reading it while smiling. Does it still make sense to hit "send"?

**Let your tween be the expert!  
Read your texts or posts out loud to them.**

**Ask them if it's better said in person, or how they might edit what you've written.**





# Countdown to BLASTOFF!!



5 Minutes

*Activity: When teaching your tween to Pause Before Posting, remind them that online interactions need a “systems check” before being sent into orbit!*

**Is your child a future astronaut? Make a game out of Pausing and create a ‘systems check’ for their texts or posts. You might say things like:**

**5! Route is mapped out and the spelling looks good!**

**4! Seatbelts fastened and I’ve read it 4 ways!**

**3! Radio coms are working and there are no 3D’s!**

**2! The weather is clear and so is my message!**

**1! Ready to lift off, and I feel good hitting send!**

**In addition to being easy and fun to remember, this gets the prefrontal cortex to pay attention, forces your tween to take a beat and PAUSE, and allows for more intentionality and thoughtfulness. @melrobbins**



# Good Cop, Bad Cop



🕒 2-5 minutes

***Reminder: Break the habit of interrogating your tween! Push yourself to be the “good cop” and stop asking “Why?”***

**When your child comes to you asking for something, your instinct might be to ask them why.**

**Instead, challenge yourself to come up with more thought-provoking questions in order to get a conversation started.**

**We think an easy way to get started is to focus on When, How, and What questions.**

**“Why?” questions tend to put people on the defensive. In order to get more of a conversation going, reframing questions using other interrogative adverbs might help! You can further enhance these conversations by Demystifying Your Digital Life and sharing your thought processes.**





# Good Cop...

*Continued*

**For example, maybe your tween is asking to get Snapchat. Be curious, and ask them:**

- **When did you develop an interest in getting on Snapchat?**
- **How do you think having Snapchat would benefit you?**
- **What about Snapchat interests you?**







# Pulling a Habit Out of a Hat

🕒 10 minutes

**Reminder:** Help your child (and yourself!) be more thoughtful about why they pick up their device when they do.

Write all the reasons why you could be picking up your device on individual slips of paper.

Were you bored or anxious so you took to your phone for a game of Candy Crush? Rather than working on that math assignment did you hop on TikTok to procrastinate? Maybe you were researching the best ice cream shop in town! Were you reaching out to Grandma to check-in?

Drop them into a bowl, a hat, a bucket - whatever you have on hand! You and your tween take turns drawing them out and see if you can think of a time when you picked up your device for that reason.





# Keep the Connection

⌚ Always!

**Reminder:** If you need to shift your attention away from someone to your device, *Demystify Your Digital Life* and let them know what you are doing.



When someone looks at their phone while you are speaking to them, you likely feel like you've lost their attention.



Imagine how it would feel if they let you know what they were doing?

For example, "I'm expecting a text from my friend. Can you hold that thought while I check? I want to give you my full attention which I can't do if I'm looking at my phone."

Try this with your child the next time you are together!





# Keep the Connection...

*Continued*



## **TDSU Tip:**

**This is something you can do with your child even before they start speaking.**

**Just like you might point out to them things that are blue, you can show them that interacting online doesn't have to create a disconnect between them and the people around them.**





# Windows and Mirrors

🕒 As long as you want!

*Activity: We see the world through windows, and we see ourselves in mirrors. When we have a balance of windows and mirrors in our lives, we expand our view of the world while finding comfort in seeing ourselves and our experiences reflected back to us.*

Use the concept of windows and mirrors to curate your social media feeds and help your tween do the same! Help them identify what speaks to your family values, your child's interests, and their goals. That's likely the easy part!

Now take on the challenge of helping your tween find social media accounts that allow them to peer into worlds they may not be familiar with. Are they a humanities kid and not a STEM kid? Check out some of the great science-based options on TikTok! Maybe your child knows all there is to know about hockey, but has never been exposed to the world of dance. Maybe they'll be intrigued by the athleticism of a ballet troupe you find on Instagram!





# Windows and Mirrors

*Continued*

## ***TDSU Tip:***

**When you show your child how to intentionally curate their social media feeds, you remind them they are in the driver's seat when it comes to their online interactions.**





# Thumbs Down

*Knowing when and how to disengage from social media.*



## What this means

## How to handle this

### Problematic Posts

(p 1, 4, 10, 16, 19, 22, 28, 31, 42, 43, 49)

- Mean-spirited
- Use photos without consent
- Require context or tone to make sense
- Violate school policy

***Pause*** Before Posting or Texting

### Complicated Communication

(p. 2, 8, 12, 21, 23, 28, 36, 42)

- Sensitive subject matter
- Emotional content
- Anything that feels complex

***Move It*** Offline

### 3Ds - It's Bigger Than Me

(p. 15, 23, 27, 38)

- Disparaging
- Disturbing
- Dangerous

***Reach Out*** to a Trusted Adult



# Speak Up

*Using developmentally appropriate, time-tested teaching techniques to teach the Thumbs Down skills.*



## What this means

## How to do this

### Support Your Tween

(p. 7, 10, 15, 23, 24, 31, 34, 36, 44, 46)

Let your tween know they are part of a community that will help them learn.

Build a *Trusted Team*

### Set Examples

(p. 2, 4, 7, 8, 16, 17, 23, 31, 42, 46, 47, 49)

Children are influenced by what you do.

*Model*

### Think Out Loud

(p. 5, 14, 21, 25, 42, 43, 44, 47)

Demystify your digital life.

*Narrate*

### Learn From Mistakes

(p. 19, 23, 25, 29, 34)

Integrating new skills takes time and practice.

Make use of *Teachable Moments*