



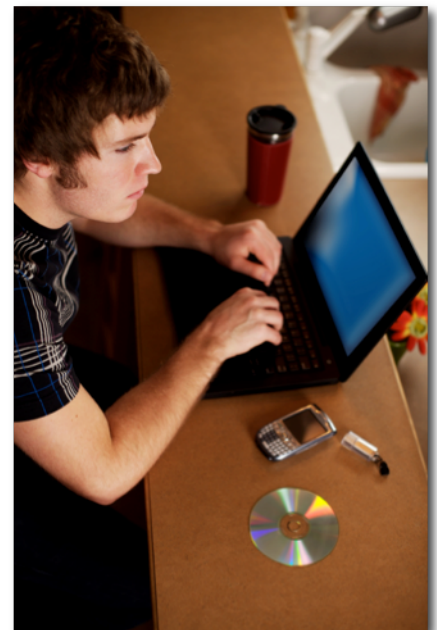
Internet and . . . Teens

Teens are separating from their parents, figuring out who they are, and asserting their individuality. In the media realm, as in other realms, this is when they move from identifying as members of a group (“We all watch *The Simpsons*”) to striking out on their own (“I created my own blog about baseball”). The increasing freedom and privacy is exciting and opens new possibilities for both learning and harm.

What is your role?

Even though they look like adults and demand to be treated as adults, teens *aren't* yet adults. Their brains are still developing the ability to understand the effects of their actions and to connect the present to the future. That's why they still need a caring adult's help to make choices and manage their behavior. Your role is to support your teen's growing independence in ways that are both affirming and protective.

- 1. To support involvement in other activities, work with them on balancing all the things that are important to them.** Help them to prioritize and manage their time, making sure that a healthy amount of sleep, a family meal, and academic and family obligations come first.
- 2. Slowly increase your teen's freedom to decide how to use the Internet.** She will push for it. Remember to move slowly, though—she needs to practice using the Internet in safe, healthful ways before she's proven herself ready to be by herself in that realm, just as she does when learning to drive a car.
- 3. Keep the channels of communication open.** Ask questions that your teen can answer. Sometimes, that will mean asking questions about other teens, or about things you've both seen in the media (“I keep hearing about sexting—what do you know about that? Can you tell me about it?”). Appeal to her mastery and expertise.
- 4. Emphasize that the Web is not private by keeping computers in public spaces.** Your teen will want to go online in private. Let her show that she can monitor his time and activities online, and slowly give her more privacy as she proves herself.



What can you say?

When talking with teens, listen as much as possible. They have ideas of what they'd like and how it could work. Support them in trying things, and offer support when what they try doesn't work. Be there to help guide them through that process.

1. **“I know you have a lot of things you want to do. What ideas do you have for how you can fit everything in? If you can't fit everything, what's most important to you?”** Work together to determine what kind of support she wants from you. Would it be helpful for you to set a timer so she stops gaming at a certain time? Should her cell phone be charged in your room at night so texts don't wake her up? Work on that plan together.
2. **“It seems like you'd like to make these decisions on your own. I want to make sure you're safe. How can we give you some freedom and me some peace of mind?”** Brainstorm with her how she can show you that she is ready for more responsibility—and agree on how you will handle it if something happens that demonstrates that she isn't ready for it yet.
3. **“Have you ever seen someone post something that backfired? Will you tell me about that? How do you think she should have handled it?”** Talking about topics like this with relation to other people can help make it easier for teens to ask questions and share information.
4. **“When you post online, remember that everyone can see it—even the person you're dating, and your teachers, and grandma.”** Talk about the fact that, once they're up, it's hard to take images down. Encourage them to use the “do I want grandma to see this?” test before posting online.

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