

TEENS, TWEENS, AND SCREENS

How to Help
Your Kids Navigate
Life Online



The Jewish Board
Health and Human Services for All New Yorkers



Did you know that children, on average, get their first smartphones by age 10?

Yes, kids are getting their devices earlier and using them more often than ever before. Recent research has shown that tweens spend six hours a day on entertainment, including online time. And teens spend, on average, nine hours a day on entertainment, including computer and tablet time.¹



The key to successfully navigating tweens and screens is maintaining an ongoing dialogue. Want to know what your kids are doing online? Have a seat next to them.



Additionally, 39% of kids get a social media account as early as 11.4 years, and 24% of kids now have “private” Internet access from their bedrooms (compared to 15% in 2012.)²

Concerned? You should be. But take heart: when parents become involved with kids’ media lives, kids consume less and understand more of what they consume. Further, kids are able to learn and distinguish between what is helpful, unhelpful and potentially dangerous. Think of it this way: Just as parents have the big “Talk” with kids about the birds and the bees, parents can help teens and tweens navigate the challenges of their wired worlds with a “Social Media Talk.”

FROM TWEENS TO TEENS—SHIFTING PARENTAL CONCERNS

Tweens are growing at a pace they often don’t understand. While they are still mostly family-focused and look to parents first for guidance, they are beginning to compare themselves to other kids and developing peer groups.

Not surprisingly, the tween years (defined as between 10-12 years old) can be challenging. Their bodies are changing, along with social status. Developmentally, they are moving from one or two friends to a group dynamic. A normal part of this development involves online video gaming, a popular activity for tweens.

As tweens become teens, they shift from playing games online to instant messaging (IM), texting, sharing selfie pics, and creating an online presence on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and other social networks. This allows them to connect with an even greater circle of friends.

At this time, parents’ fear for tweens—“What are they being exposed to?”—shifts to “What are they exposing?” for teens. Parents must watch for red flags, including a teen who is always on the computer, no longer wants to join the family, has few real-life friends and doesn’t want to go outdoors. At the least, these red flags may signal your tween is growing isolated, and missing out on a dynamic life of activities, clubs and other interests. It may signal a growing social anxiety and depression. Parents can help their kids achieve a healthy life in balance with both intellectual stimulation and physical activity.



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HAVING “THE TALK”

Parents can help teens and tweens navigate social media with an “Social Media Talk” that helps their kids understand how to create and maintain a healthy context for their digital lives.

PARENTS CAN ASK:

- What are your favorite things to do online?
- What is personal information? Why should you keep it private?
- What could you do to be safer online?
- What would you do if anyone online asked to meet IRL (in real life)?
- Besides me, who do you feel you can talk to if you are in a scary or uncomfortable situation?
- What would you do if someone asked you, “Where do you live? What are you wearing? Do you want to have a private conversation?”
- What’s okay to post? And what’s not okay to expose?

Kids' use of social media can be constructive and healthy—they can make friends online based on shared interests or play games that make them feel connected to others. But there are downsides to unmonitored social media.

- **Lack of Socialization.** Kids who predominantly interact on the Internet—who spend their free time gaming or in chat rooms—can't practice real-life social skills or learn how to manage their emotions.
- **Isolation.** Tweens and teens don't recognize that having 200 Facebook "friends" doesn't translate into sustainable, deep, or in many instances, real, friendships.
- **Danger.** Inappropriate postings, and inexperience with predatory behavior can lead to unwelcome advances.
- **Addiction.** While parents may think, "He's home; he's safe," he may be nurturing a growing screen addiction. This can affect wellness on many levels: reduced sleep, weight gain, diminished social skills, and even increased levels of aggression and lower grades.
- **Cyber Bullying.** When kids have unrestricted access to technology, they can become either victims or perpetrators of cyber bullying—including mean text messages or emails, and rumors sent by email. Messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience.





The “Talk” is just the first step. Here are seven more actions parents can take to help their kids navigate life online.

1. Actively help kids create their social media profiles.

- › Parents can provide guidance about what’s appropriate or inappropriate by getting involved at the very beginning. This is a big moment so remember to have fun with it. Perhaps your kid would like you to snap a profile pic at a nearby skate park?

2. Help kids keep social media in perspective.

- › More than half of kids use social media every day. Parents can help them keep a balance between sharing their lives online and living their lives. Learn more about the people your child admires and follows online. On the flip side, discuss the perils of gossip and bullying.
- › Having a social media presence isn’t all fun for kids. Many kids feel that it’s work—even stressful—to maintain their profiles.

3. Encourage informal learning.

- › You can learn to play the guitar online, listen to a Ted Talk and even explore the ocean floor with Google Ocean. The online world can be intellectually nourishing. Remind them of that.

4. Encourage healthy skepticism.

- › Discuss “credible” sources and sites. Have a conversation about what makes a site or source credible.

5. Have a home media plan. And write it down.

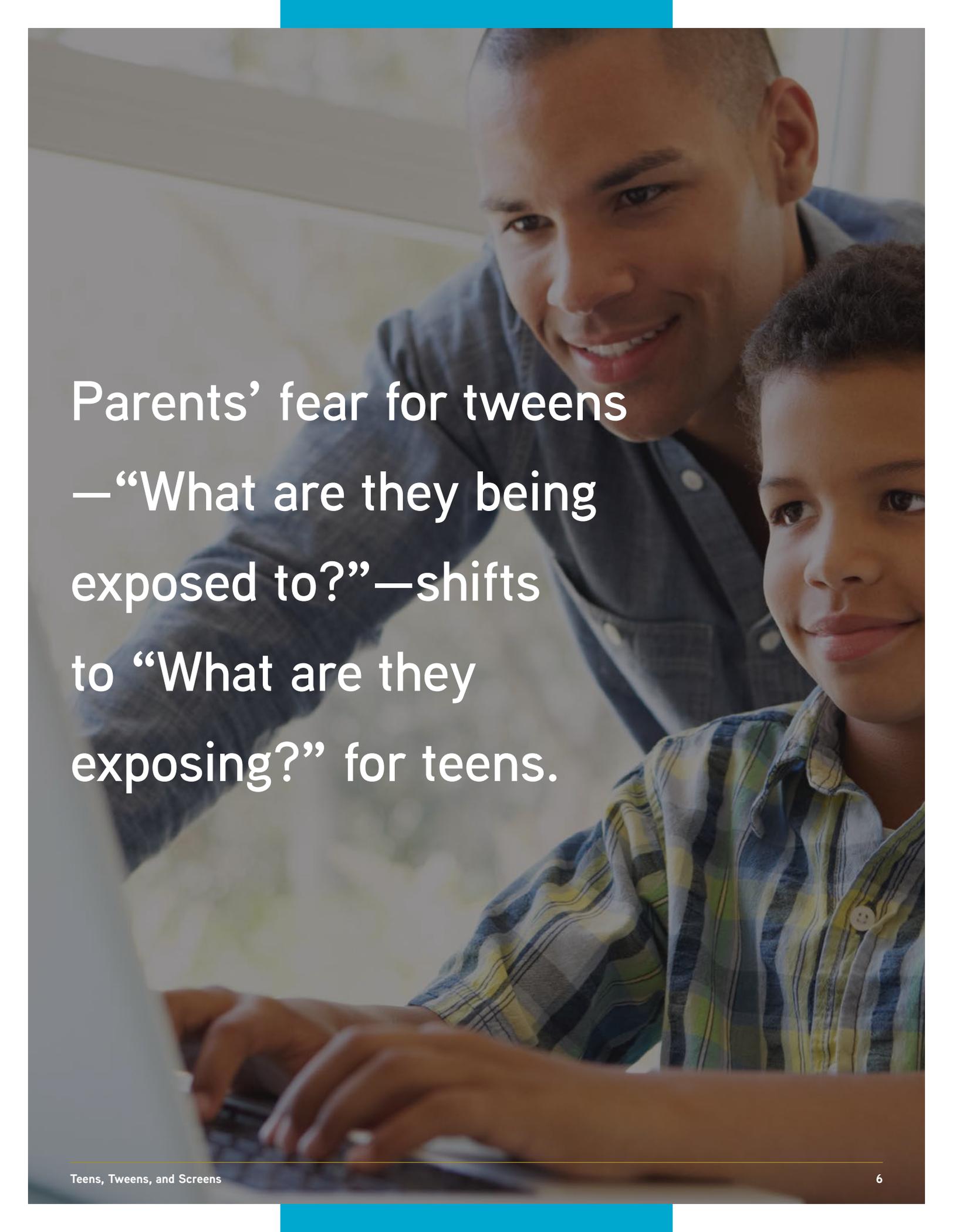
- › Create screen-free zones, such as the dinner table. Remember this is a rule for parents as well.
- › Cut down on multitasking during homework.
- › Create a media center in a shared space to limit too much time online in private spaces like bedrooms.
- › Set limits on time and sites they can visit, both by using parental controls embedded in apps and web browsers that restrict usage and content by age rating, and by enforcing it in person.

6. Celebrate kids using social media for good.

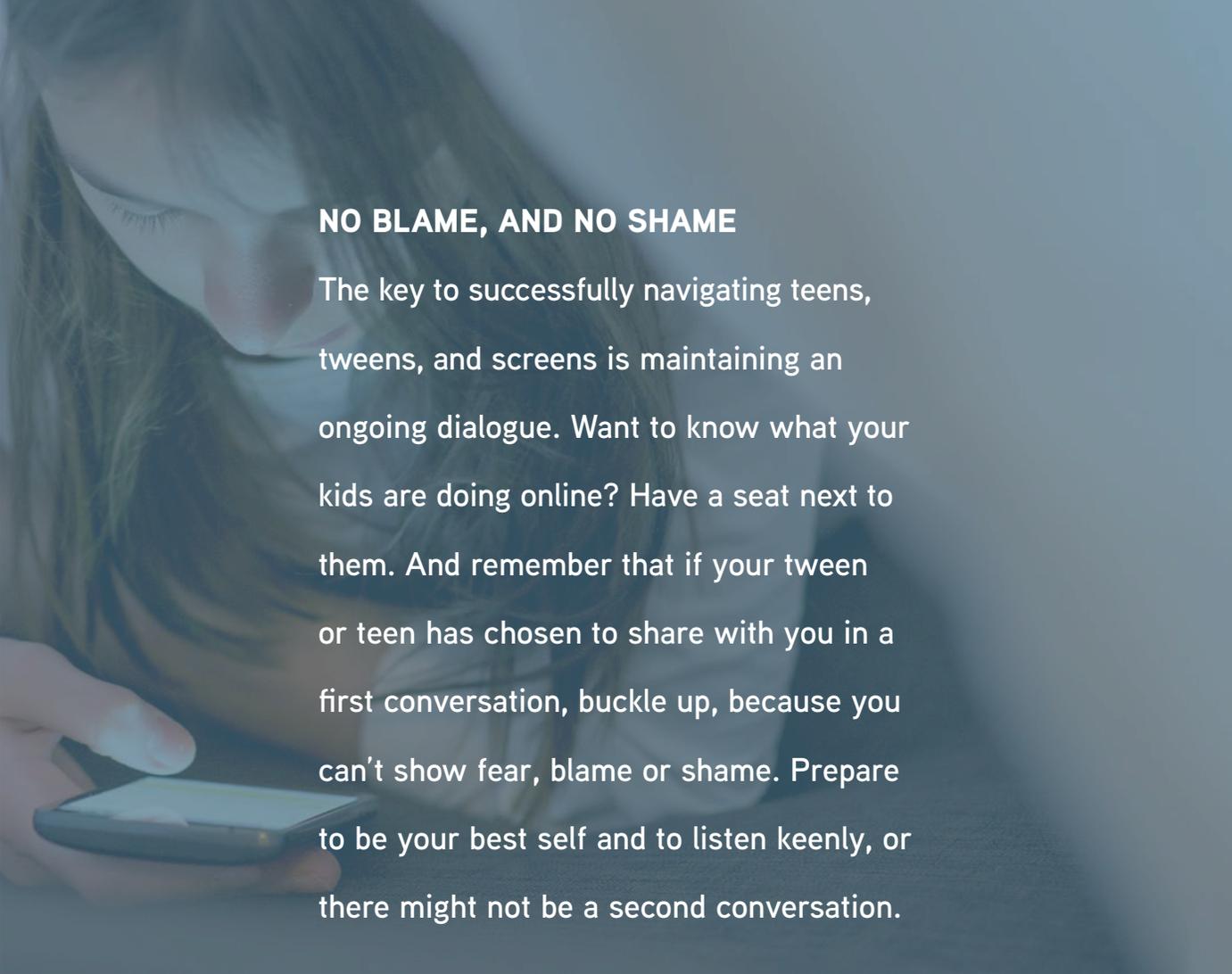
- › Encourage your kids to explore organizations achieving work they admire, learn about petitions for change, and ways to galvanize teens for efforts they believe in. Groups like, DoSomething.org and StudentsRebuild.org, help kids find their passions while working to make the world a better place.

7. Remember that parents need to be safe, too.

- › Don’t post pictures of your child on your own online pages unless you have strict privacy settings to limit your audience.
- › Don’t tag your kids online.

A photograph of a man and a young boy looking at a laptop screen together. The man is leaning over the boy, who is sitting at the desk and typing on the keyboard. Both are smiling and looking at the screen. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor setting.

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NO BLAME, AND NO SHAME

The key to successfully navigating teens, tweens, and screens is maintaining an ongoing dialogue. Want to know what your kids are doing online? Have a seat next to them. And remember that if your tween or teen has chosen to share with you in a first conversation, buckle up, because you can't show fear, blame or shame. Prepare to be your best self and to listen keenly, or there might not be a second conversation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Still have questions about your teens, tweens and screens? Our experts are available for conversations. It's all part of The Jewish Board's continuum of care to help ensure that New Yorkers don't have to navigate life's difficulties alone.

Contact us at hello@jbfcs.org.

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1. Source: Common Sense Media, Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens
2. Source: Kids & Tech: The Evolution of Today's Digital Natives