Teenagers and Technology

Table Talk: Family Conversations About Current Events

Topic Summary
According to a new study from the Pew Research Center, 24% of teenagers (ages 13–17) are online “almost constantly.” The intense way in which young people are connected is enabled largely by the use of smartphones. Nearly 75% of teens have access to a smartphone and 30% have a basic phone. These phones and other mobile devices have become a primary driver of teen internet use: 91% of teens go online from mobile devices at least occasionally.
For the current generation of teens, gaming, video chatting, text messaging and social networking are a vital means of self-expression and a central aspect of their social lives. The digital age has changed—both positively and negatively—the way teenage friendships are formed and maintained.

The research also found the following:

- For today's teens, friendships may start digitally.
- Text messaging is a key component of young people's daily interactions.
- Video games play an important role in the development and maintenance of boys' friendships and online gaming builds stronger connections between friends.
- Teen friendships are both strengthened and challenged by social media.
- Phone calls are less common early in a friendship, but are an important way that teens talk with their closest friends.

Age
11 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation

- Does this information reflect your own experiences or the experiences of your friends? Why or why not?
- In what ways is being connected “almost constantly” both positive and negative?
- What do you think life was like for teens before technology?
- Do you say and share things using technology (social media, texting, etc.) that you would not share in person? How so?
- Is there anything about your technology habits you would like to change and if so, what would that be?
Questions to Dig Deeper

- What do you see happening in the future with technology and social media?
- I know parents often worry about their teens being “addicted” to technology or young people losing their social skills because of all the technology. What’s your take on these concerns?
- Do you ever see “cyberhate” online? What do you think can be done about it?

(The "Related to this Resource" and Teens, Technology and Friendships (Pew Research Center) provide articles and information that address these questions.)

Ideas for Taking Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- Using the Pew research questions and others of your own, create a survey about teens and technology and distribute it to classmates and friends. Compile and share the results.
- Working with other students and school staff, develop a public awareness campaign about cyberbullying and what to do about it.
- As a family, decide on a specified amount of time to go “off the grid” (i.e. not use technology) in order to gain insights into what is gained and lost by being connected. Share your reflections through a letter or essay on the topic.