

## **Youth Tips for Resource Families on Navigating Technology and Social Media in Partnership with Adolescents**

### **What youth want families to understand about use of technology and social media:**

- School, social, and other healthy outlets outside of the home are limited, so social media, phones, and the online world are the only outlets. Without outlets, youth may want to break rules to hang out with friends or run away.
- Youth want direct online access to some news and information about COVID-19 to address their worries.
- Tech is the only way right now to provide the support youth need and want—legal, therapeutic, educational, access to social workers, visits with family, and time with friends.
- Tech allows youth to keep connections to friends and family. Youth have already experienced separation from family and are struggling to make and keep lifelong connections.
- Online connections and phone time with friends and family can support youth through struggles with mental health challenges and loneliness. Connection can help youth maintain stability right now.
- The world that requires tech to create connections and have access to everything has already been created. It is the world youth need to learn how to live in and be safe in. It's not bad, just different, even though families may not understand it.
- Youth feel more connected to their support system if they have online platforms. Youth feel left out from their friend groups if they don't have it.
- Youth use social media creatively—to help others through social justice and advocacy, to support friends, to find out what other youth think, to market their skills, and to showcase creative talents.

### **What youth want to tell families about what needed to stay balanced and safe with tech and social media:**

- Right now is the time for foster parents to bond with youth and take the time to explain their fears and the reasons behind rules or restrictions, so youth understand their perspectives and can hear that restrictions come from a place of caring, not control.
- With so much unstructured time, youth may need help learning to manage their screen time so they can keep on course educationally and emotionally. Youth are worried about the future and staying on track. Timers and apps can help with this, but give youth as much control and freedom as possible with the process of managing.
- Families should take a solution-based approach to any concerns about safe use of the internet and online dangers. This is an important opportunity to teach youth how to say NO and be empowered to make healthy choices. Teach youth about how to avoid online dangers such as scamming, online predators, and pedophiles. Teach youth how to use apps safely, including disabling locating-sharing settings and not giving out personal or financial information to

strangers. Families should help youth be aware of dangers like trafficking and be alert for signs of danger.

- Families should help teach youth about the potential severity and consequences of reckless actions they take on the internet, so they can make good decisions.
- As conversation-starters, families should ask youth about what they have seen on social media or elsewhere online and what they find interesting. If there are concerns about what youth are searching for or running into online, families can explore how they can fulfill youths' interests in healthy ways, without punishment or stifling curiosity. This is an opportunity to have open conversations with youth at home.

**Advice youth have for families in creating agreements or dealing with conflict over social media and online use:**

- Compromise does work and is important with teens. Meet teens in the middle when developing an agreement or working out conflict.
- Have discussions that allow both youth and foster parents to share their expectations. This will be more effective than policing—that doesn't work with youth.
- Be open-minded. Families' response to the agreement and conflict matters—their approach can make the difference. Both the resource family and the youth need to feel heard.
- Again, families need to communicate the “why” to youth. It's important to explain that you are not trying to be in youths' personal business but are trying to help keep them safe and teach them responsibility.
- Families should make sure to not shame or judge youths' activities online.
- If families feel they have to check a youth's social media or online activity, this needs to be agreed upon in advance, and checking should be done very carefully, in partnership with the youth, with explanations why.
- Youth want to have at least the same screen time privileges as biological children in the home, but they may need additional time given their special circumstances. Remember that youth may be walking into a new environment where they haven't been raised with screen time rules, that they have additional needs for connection with family/friends, and that they have additional trauma they may be using online means to heal and process.
- Incentives might be the best approach to online access, rather than punishment.