Digital Footprints and Photo Sharing

Today's social media makes photo sharing easy. Kids love to follow friends' photos, share casual moments visually, and simply stay in touch. However, kids don't always think through what they post. Photos they thought were private can easily go public. Likewise, their choice of photos can affect others as well. Together, discuss the importance of showing respect to oneself and others when sharing photos online.

- **Set boundaries together.**

  Discuss your family's values and expectations around photo sharing. Photos that show illegal behavior (for example, underage drinking or texting while driving) are clearly a no-go. But agreeing where to draw the line on certain other photos — for example, pictures of your daughter in her bikini or your son making a rude gesture to the camera — may pose a challenge. Start by discussing the possible consequences of posting these types of pictures. How will they affect your kids' reputation? Remind your kids that once they post a picture online, it's out of their control — such photos could be seen by a friend's parent, a college admissions counselor, or a future employer. Online content is easily searchable and often ends up in hands of those we didn't intend it for. And it is easily taken out of context. Lastly, it also is permanent, meaning it can resurface at any time.

- **Remind your kids to consider the impact of a photo on the people in the picture.**

  It may not be realistic to expect your kids to get everyone's permission before they upload an image, but it's a worthy goal. When they're about to upload a picture that someone has just snapped, encourage them to stop and ask, "Hey — I'm going to put this on Instagram, is that okay with everyone?" Ask your kid to think honestly if every person in the photograph would be comfortable with the photo going online. If she misjudges and someone asks her to take a photo down, tell her it is her responsibility to remove the photograph. The best way to drive this concept home is to set an example. If you want to upload a photo of your child from a recent family vacation, first ask permission to do so or ask for her feedback. This can also offer a great opportunity to model this type of respect with your child.

- **Encourage your kid to talk face-to-face with a person who posts an unflattering photo.**

  Online photo sharing is a part of our world today, and opting out is unlikely. Even if your kids choose not to share photos online, their friends might upload photos of them. But it can be difficult to ask others not to post or to take down photographs. If your child is struggling with what to say, you can offer the following as an example, "Hey, I already untagged myself from the photo you put up, but I was wondering if you would be okay with taking it down. It's not my favorite picture and I'd rather if it wasn't on [Facebook/ Instagram/etc.]. I'd really appreciate it." It may be helpful to have the conversation offline, face-to-face, so that it doesn't end up further perpetuating a digital problem.

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Digital Dilemmas are brief hypothetical situations and corresponding questions designed to foster cross-generational conversations about different aspects of adolescents' digital lives. Use this fictitious scenario, based on real-life stories, to spark a conversation at home with your children and open up the discussion about these very important topics.

Take it down!

When Vin snapchatted his friend an embarrassing picture of himself — he hadn't expected that his friend would take a screenshot of the picture and upload it to Facebook. He didn't want to seem uptight, but he was pretty embarrassed that the picture was posted for all to see. He texted his friend, "Not cool, man. Take it down." His screen lit up: "hahahah." Vin texted back, "Nah, I'm not playing, take it off." His friend wrote back, "Whoa, chill out, I'm just playing" but he didn't take the picture down. Vin was about to go through recruiting for college sports and while he knew the picture wouldn't get him in trouble, it wasn't exactly the image he wanted recruiters to see.

? What is your gut reaction to this story?

? How do you decide what pictures are okay to share on social media and what pictures should stay offline?

? What kinds of pictures do kids screenshot?

? Are there any pictures that you wouldn't mind sharing now but you wouldn't want attached to your name later in life?

? Is it reasonable for Vin to be concerned about the recruiters? What kinds of content do you think the recruiters would or wouldn't want to see if they searched for Vin online?

? What would you do if you were in this situation and your friend refused to take down the picture?

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