

Selfie Culture

- **Take the pulse on their posting.**

It's easy to watch the way kids pose and pout in front of the camera and panic that their behaviors are a sign of narcissism or self-absorption. But before you jump to any conclusions, consider asking your kids the following questions and listening earnestly to their responses: (1) Why do you like taking selfies? (2) What makes for a selfie that you like? Which selfies don't you like? (3) How do you decide which selfies to share? Where and how will you share a selfie? (4) What do your friends normally do or say when you post a selfie? Have you ever gotten a reaction that you weren't expecting? By taking the pulse on your kids' posting, you can determine whether or not their selfies are really something to worry about and tailor your responses accordingly. If the image they're projecting is concerning to you, explain why; if quantity itself seems like an issue, respond in the same way you would if your kid were spending hours in front of the mirror.

- **Clarify family expectations.**

Selfies are just one kind of photograph that kids take and share, but they can serve as a useful opportunity to dive into a conversation about digital footprints and what images kids should and shouldn't share online. Are there specific activities that they should never photograph? Is there a difference between what pictures they're allowed to take and which they can share online? When you clarify your expectations, you help kids think through potentially sticky situations before they arise — rather than after an image has already gone viral.

- **Encourage critical consumption.**

We know that kids are impacted by the content they see on their newsfeeds, but you can help by encouraging them to be critical consumers. Debunk the notion that everyone always looks as perfect and happy in person as they do on social media. Encourage a critical eye with respect to what they see online: ask them why they think a friend posted a particular image online, and what kind of reaction that person was hoping for. Invite kids to think about the kinds of posts that make them feel better about themselves and the kinds of posts that leave them feeling worse. Recognize, too, that the feedback kids give and receive online is often based completely on physical appearance. Make sure that you're focusing on other aspects of your kids' best qualities when you give feedback at home, and help them practice giving their friends positive reinforcement that isn't based entirely on looks.

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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.

Dylan's friend Jamie was completely addicted to posting selfies. Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook — you name it — Jamie's page was covered in selfies. Dylan had tried to ignore it, but it was only getting worse and a few things were especially driving Dylan crazy. One, their other friends had started making fun of Jamie's posting and Dylan didn't know what to do: defend Jamie or join in? Tell Jamie about their friends' teasing, or just stay quiet? Two, whenever they were hanging out, Jamie would be snapping selfies or asking for Dylan's opinion about which picture to post and what to make the caption. It started to seem like it was all about Jamie, all the time, and Dylan was exhausted.

- 1. Is this situation realistic? Why or why not?
- 2. Why do you think Jamie would post so many selfies?
- 3. Why do you think Dylan and Jamie's other friends make fun of Jamie for posting selfies?
- 4. If you were Dylan, would you say anything to Jamie? If so, what?
- 5. Are there rules among kids your age about acceptable ways to post selfies? What makes for a "good" selfie? What kinds of selfies are annoying?