# RETHINK
# CYBER SAFETY RULES
# AND THE "TECH TALK"
# WITH YOUR TEENS

Teens connect to the online world much differently than their parents do – thanks in part to our rapidly advancing technologies. Today more than ever, teens lead complex online lives and are faced with real-world problems online. In the National Cyber Security Alliance's (NCSA) second annual Keeping Up With Generation App: NCSA Parent/Teen Online Safety Survey, 34 percent of teen internet users (13-17 years old) report that someone has been mean or cruel to them online in the past year, with 52 percent of those incidents involving something they said or did, 35 percent involving something about their appearance and about one in four involving their sexual orientation, gender or race. In addition, the issue of "fake news" is also a worrisome topic for both parents and teens. Nearly 50 percent of teens said they were "very" or "somewhat" concerned about mistakenly spreading fake news or misinformation. Parents are even more concerned, with more than 60 percent indicating that they were "very" or "somewhat" concerned that their teen would spread misinformation.

The results of this research have led NCSA to set some new recommendations for helping teens be safer and more secure online. In general, online teens reported that their parents are their primary source for learning about online safety and security. These conversations tended to focus on what should and should not  be shared on cell phones (74%) and ways to behave toward others online or on the phone (64%). Even as more of these family tech talks are happening, 57 percent of the teens report having online accounts of which their parents are unaware, such as a social media site or app.

As technology continues to become fully integrated into young people's lives, it will be nearly impossible for parents to know everything their children do online. Additionally, parents need to understand that teens may seek help from – or be asked for help by – their peers. Forty-one percent of the teens surveyed reported that a friend of theirs has sought help because of something that happened online. Focus points of family tech talks should include how to offer helpful advice and how to determine when a situation requires adult assistance.

NCSA recommends rethinking the family tech talk to help both parents and teens learn how to better recognize and resist online issues and be resilient when faced with problems.

## RETHINK THE RULES.

Too often, parenting in the age of the internet focuses on setting rules and trying to understand and keep track of everything young people are doing. Online safety isn't just about following designated procedures or being totally educated on everything about the internet. The survey revealed a significant digital disconnect with both parents and teens reporting dissimilar expectations around what kinds of rules actually exist and if they are being followed. In one example, nearly a third of teens (28%) state their household has no rules, while 8 percent of parents indicate there are no rules at home for their children's use of technology.

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While NCSA believes rules still play an important role in helping young people stay safe and more secure online, we recommend revising the approach to online safety rules and taking the following into consideration:

- **Make rules that can be enforced:** It's easy to create a laundry list of rules. Making rules that are impractical to follow or enforce won't make young people safer or more secure and can create a situation where rules lose meaning and parents become disengaged. For example, as a majority of teens have online accounts that their parents aren't aware of, rules requiring advance permission before creating accounts are likely to be broken and unenforceable. Before setting a rule, think about whether it will significantly improve your children's safety and how you can keep the lines of communication on the issue open.

- **Have a core set of rules the whole family follows:** The most impactful rules are those that apply equally to everyone. So create a set of rules that everyone in the family is expected to follow. For example, limiting use of devices during meal times or other times spent together as a family, practicing discretion when sharing personally identifiable information about family members, and seeking permission from one another before sharing information, such as posting photos on social networks.

- **Make rules together and change them over time:** Young people may surprise you with how much they already know about being safer and more secure online. Ask them about the rules they have made for themselves and the practices they currently follow. Then have them establish rules they can commit to following. Make sure that the rules evolve as your children grow. What is an appropriate rule for a 10-year-old may not be appropriate for a teen, so periodically revisit your expectations.

## IT'S NOT ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY — IT'S ABOUT HOW IT IS USED.

There can often be hysteria around the latest app or how young people use devices. Connected devices are not unlike cars. Many cars can travel at speeds way above the speed limit, so teaching responsible use and good behaviors is key to safety. For example, smart devices have cameras that can be used to spark and promote creativity, and apps may have functions that allow video chat or live streaming. They can also be used to send inappropriate images or create security vulnerabilities. Teaching the family how to use the technology appropriately and manage privacy and security settings will help everyone learn how to better protect themselves online.

## ESTABLISH A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR TECHNOLOGY CONVERSATIONS.

Although teens might not always come to you for online advice, it's important to be prepared to help them when they do. Work to create an environment of trust in which your kids can comfortably talk to you about their experiences and issues without fear of punishment or blame, even if they have broken an established rule. Additionally, consider asking your teen to talk about their friends' experiences and problems online; they may be more comfortable discussing someone else's experience than their own.

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## HELP TEENS HELP THEIR FRIENDS.

Strong peer-to-peer relationships are fundamental parts of adolescent development, and as the survey indicates, many teens are likely to turn to their friends for help with problems online. Therefore, you can expect your child may be consulted by a friend for help. Talk to your teens about developing the tools and knowledge they need to protect themselves as well as advise their friends with online safety concerns, including how to block users on sites and how to report problems or abuse to sites and apps they use. Help your teen understand their capacity for responding to issues and challenges they face, and encourage them to seek help from someone they trust if a problem they or their friends have seems beyond their ability. Establish some parameters about when they should seek adult help, such as if a friend may commit harm to themselves or others or the law has been broken. While teens are unlikely to intervene directly in an online incident a friend is experiencing, role-play and strategize about how they would handle problems. Being safe and secure online is about trying to prevent negative incidents, but also building resilience.

## TALK TO TEENS ABOUT YOUR SHARED CONCERNS.

Despite their differences, parents and teens actually share many concerns about technology. Similar to last year, the survey found that when it comes to online safety, parents and teens share common concerns on topics like someone accessing a teen's account without permission, someone sharing a teen's personal information and having a teen's photo or video shared that they wanted to keep private.

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