

“What creators should I follow? What do you like about them?”

“What limits have you set for yourself with technology? What limits would you want to set?”

“Brains need breaks sometimes.”

“There’s no such thing as a private digital space.”

“It’s normal to make mistakes online (and everywhere else) and it’s ok to ask for help.”

“Never meet up with someone you haven’t seen in person before.”

“You can always tell me if you feel unsafe.”

“What are some causes you follow online? How can I (we) get involved?”

“I wouldn’t recommend a dating app in high school. Dating is complicated enough without swiping left and right.”

“You did a great job on your _____ (YouTube channel, Instagram campaign, etc.)”

A Volunteer’s Guide to . . .

Talking About Technology



with High Schoolers



How to Talk About Technology

By ninth grade, 91% of teenagers have smartphones.¹

→ 1 in 5 say they are on YouTube or TikTok “almost constantly.”² Many have had phones, social media, gaming systems, and online access since elementary school.

In the high school phase, phones and social media are as much a necessary part of daily life as microwaves and landlines were in previous generations. And how a teenager uses technology can impact their education, self-esteem, and mental and physical health. As a trusted adult in their life, you can help high schoolers develop the skill of self-monitoring or boundary setting and help them recognize opportunities to leverage digital skills for good.

In this Phase . . . As a volunteer, your role is to **mobilize their potential**. Pay attention to opportunities for teenagers to use their gifts in digital spaces by celebrating the launch of their YouTube channel or liking their “almost viral” video.

High schoolers are motivated by freedom, so it’s important to reframe conversations about technology with their independence in mind. It isn’t that “technology is bad,” it’s that “you deserve to be in control of your devices” and “you’re allowed to set limits with technology.” When discussing boundary setting as a personal choice, high schoolers are more motivated to set limits for themselves.

In Your Conversations . . .

BEFORE

Honor the parents. Survey the parents of your group to ask what their rules are so that you can respect them in your conversation.

Check with your ministry leader for policies around technology. Will you text or DM with kids? Will you include another adult or a parent? Which (if any) social platforms will you use? Will you have one group chat or many?

Check your assumptions. Many teenagers have better digital habits than adults in their world. Decide you will learn from them, too.

Make it personal. Do a quick evaluation of your own digital footprint. Make sure your accounts reflect the kind of role model and digital citizen you want to be.

DURING

Choose your words wisely. Pay attention to how you talk about technology when some kids in your group don’t have phones or social media. Make sure to speak in a way that no one feels excluded.

Be mindful of comparison. Acknowledge that every house has different rules around technology and be mindful to honor every parent in the conversation.

Listen carefully. Pay close attention to students who disclose they have seen or experienced something disturbing with technology. Be sure to follow up and connect with their family or another appropriate adult if necessary.

Remember the good. Technology can be a positive thing. While you talk about safety and precautions, be sure to talk about opportunities to do good, serve others, and grow through technology.

Create a shame-free zone. Teenagers make mistakes online—sometimes really serious ones. Your job isn’t to shame them (or shame them into not messing up) but to be a safe place for conversation and finding support.

Download an app they like. Listen carefully to which platforms come up most often and which ones are new to you. Are your students on Discord? Twitch? TikTok? Do they use a particular gaming system or music service? Choose one or two and make a note to download and get to know them better.

AFTER

Follow up. If a high schooler discloses that they have seen something disturbing online, be sure to set a time to chat with a parent or guardian.

Become a student. What platforms or creators do your students mention the most? By exploring their interests, you can build relational equity.

Be an encouragement. If a high schooler shares about wanting to set better boundaries or use technology in positive ways, follow up with them in the next week or so to see how that is going.

¹ Miller, C., et al. “When Should You Get Your Kid a Phone?” *Child Mind Institute*, 30 Oct. 2023.

² Vogels, E. et al. “Teens, Social Media and Technology 2022 | Pew Research Center.” *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, 11 Dec. 2023.