

MEDIA LITERACY IS NOW A PARENTING SKILL

A practical worksheet for helping teens slow down, question what they see, and make healthier decisions online.

The goal is not to make your teen afraid of the internet. The goal is to help them build an internal filter: Who made this? Why am I seeing it? What is it trying to make me feel or do? And what should I do next?

1. Start With Your Teen's Digital World

Before teaching media literacy, understand what your teen is actually seeing. Curiosity works better than interrogation.

Which spaces are part of your teen's everyday life?

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ TikTok / short-form video | ☐ Instagram |
| ☐ YouTube | ☐ Snapchat |
| ☐ Discord / gaming communities | ☐ AI chatbots or AI tools |
| ☐ Streaming platforms | ☐ Group chats |
| ☐ Online shopping / influencer links | ☐ Other: _____ |

What does your teen seem to use these spaces for most?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Entertainment | ☐ Friendship / belonging |
| ☐ Learning | ☐ Escape from stress |
| ☐ Validation / likes / attention | ☐ News / information |
| ☐ Identity exploration | ☐ Shopping / trends |

One thing I genuinely understand about my teen's online world:

One area I realize I may be judging before fully understanding:

Parent reminder: If every conversation about technology starts with criticism, teens learn to hide. If conversations include curiosity, teens are more likely to bring you what they are seeing.

2. Teach the 6-Question Pause

Use these questions with a video, post, headline, influencer claim, AI answer, advertisement, or screenshot. You do not need to lecture. Pick one or two questions and think through them together.

1	WHO MADE THIS? A friend? Influencer? Brand? News outlet? AI system? Anonymous account?
2	WHY WAS IT MADE? To inform? Entertain? Sell? Persuade? Shock? Get clicks? Build followers?
3	WHAT DOES IT WANT ME TO FEEL? Fear? Envy? Anger? Urgency? Attraction? Shame? FOMO?
4	WHAT IS MISSING? Context? Another perspective? Evidence? Risks? Fine print? What happened before or after?
5	CAN I VERIFY IT? Can I find the original source? Do reliable sources agree? Is the image/video edited or taken out of context?
6	WHAT HAPPENS IF I ACT ON IT? If I share it, buy it, try it, message someone, or believe it - what could happen next?

Try It Together

Choose one recent post, video, ad, or AI answer your teen has seen.

What was the content?

Which of the six questions changed how you looked at it?

What would you want your teen to do next time they see something similar?

3. Spot the Influence

A powerful media-literacy skill is noticing when content is influencing behavior before we even realize it.

Influence	Ask yourself...
Comparison	Does this content make me feel behind, unattractive, unsuccessful, unpopular, or not enough?
Urgency	Does it make me feel like I have to buy, post, respond, or decide right now?
Social Proof	Am I trusting it mainly because everyone seems to like, follow, or repeat it?
Authority	Is this person actually qualified, or do they simply look confident and convincing?
Personalization	Am I seeing more of this because an algorithm noticed what keeps my attention?
Emotion	Would I believe or share this as quickly if I were calm instead of angry, scared, or excited?

4. Before You Share, Post, Buy, or Respond

- I know where this came from.
- I checked whether the claim is accurate.
- I understand what this content is trying to get me to do.
- I am not acting only because I feel pressured or emotional.
- I would be okay with a trusted adult seeing what I am about to post/send.
- I understand that screenshots and reposts can outlive the moment.
- If money is involved, I know whether this is an ad, affiliate link, sponsorship, or sales tactic.
- If AI is involved, I know the answer can still be wrong.

Useful phrase for teens: "I don't have to decide while I'm activated." Pause, verify, and then choose.

A digital situation I want my teen to pause before reacting to:

5. Build a Family Digital Agreement

The healthiest agreements are specific, predictable, and revisited as teens mature. The goal is not perfect compliance - it is building judgment and accountability.

Phones during meals	Our agreement: _____
Phones at bedtime	Our agreement: _____
Private / anonymous accounts	Our agreement: _____
Posting photos or videos of others	Our agreement: _____
Purchases / subscriptions	Our agreement: _____
AI use for schoolwork	Our agreement: _____
Unsafe or disturbing content	If this happens, we will: _____
When a parent will check a device	We agree that: _____

6. The Most Important Question: Can My Teen Come to Me?

Media literacy is not only about identifying misinformation. It is also about creating enough relational safety that your teen can bring you something confusing, embarrassing, sexual, frightening, manipulative, or simply weird without believing the first consequence will be losing you.

Complete these sentences:

When my teen tells me something uncomfortable, I want my first response to be...

One reaction I want to work on managing better is...

I want my teen to know they can always come to me when...

One conversation I want to have this week is...

Connection before correction. You can still set limits, impose consequences, and disagree. But when teens believe honesty automatically leads to humiliation or explosion, they learn to hide. When they believe they will be heard first, parents stay part of the decision-making process.