

Key points

- **Social media and other media influence teenage attitudes and behaviour.**
- **When teenagers are aware of media influence, they can handle media pressure better.**
- **Talking and questioning is the best way to help your child handle social media and other media influence.**

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How does social media and other media influence teenagers?

Teenagers can be very smart consumers of media messages. They don't just take on board everything they see and hear on [social media](#) or in other media. You can help them develop the skills they need to handle media influence.

Media influence on teenagers can be **deliberate and direct**. For example, advertising is often directed at children and teenagers. This means that children and teenagers are increasingly conscious of brands and images.

Media influence can also be **indirect**. For example, this might include sexualised images and content on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and YouTube. It might also include violent imagery and coarse language in news media, documentaries, video games and some song lyrics. This kind of media influence can suggest to teenagers that certain ways of behaving and looking are 'normal'.

Positive social media and other media influences on teenagers

Here's the good news: social media and other media can be positive influences on teenage behaviour and attitudes.

Citizenship

Teenagers who are exposed to and take an interest in news media are more likely to be interested in major social and political issues like climate change. In this example, media can encourage them to become more involved as citizens in their communities.

Health and lifestyle

Teenagers can also pick up important health promotion messages from social media and other media. This might include messages aimed at preventing youth depression and suicide, promoting positive, respectful relationships, or encouraging healthy eating and lifestyle habits.

Identity

Good-quality stories in television shows and movies can help teenagers explore aspects of identity like sexuality, relationships, gender or ethics – for example, the sympathetic treatment of sexuality in a movie like *Bohemian Rhapsody*, or gender in *Ride Like a Girl*, or ethics in TV show like *The Good Place*. Watching these shows with your child is a great opportunity for discussion.

It's always worth remembering that media – good and bad – is just one of several influences on teenage behaviour and attitudes. Other influences include family, friends and peers, cultural background and more. Often these influences can be more powerful than media influence.

Negative social media and other media influence on teenagers

Media messages can have a negative or unhealthy influence on teenage behaviour and attitudes in certain areas, including body image, health and citizenship.

Body image

Your child's [body image](#) is influenced by social media, other media and advertising. If teenagers see unrealistic 'thin' or 'muscly' body types often enough in the media they follow, it can have an impact on their body image and dieting behaviour. This is especially true when there's no-one to disagree with messages like 'thin is beautiful'.

Health and lifestyle

Social media and other media can influence the decisions that teenagers make about their health and lifestyle. For example, media messages and content can make it look 'normal', cool or grown-up to eat junk food, smoke, [drink alcohol and take other drugs](#).

Citizenship

To be responsible citizens, teenagers need reliable and good-quality information. But social media and other media are sometimes used in negative ways during elections and at other times. For example, 'fake news' might influence teenagers to believe false information about a politician, public figure or celebrity. Or sometimes online forums promote biased or hateful attitudes towards groups of people.

Experts don't agree on whether violence in [video games](#) can lead to aggression or violence in teenagers in real life. But they do agree that the best way to deal with the issue of violence in video games is by talking with your child about it and sharing your own family values.

How media celebrities influence teenagers

Celebrities and the way they use the media can be powerful influences on teenagers.

In particular, teenagers can be attracted to lifestyles, products or behaviour that celebrities promote on social media. This can sometimes be a negative influence – for example, YouTuber Logan Paul's risky behaviour. But there are lots of celebrities whose lifestyles, values and behaviour provide positive examples – for example, YouTuber Elise Ecklund.

Children and teenagers do need to be aware that some celebrities are paid to advertise the products they endorse.

Helping your child handle media influence

Exposure to media messages is a part of modern life, but you can help your child work out what's worth paying attention to.

Talking about media messages

The best way to help your child navigate the influence of social media and other media is to talk about media messages. For example, if your child likes watching beauty channels on YouTube, you could talk about product advertising and sponsorship.

Or if your child is into a computer game like Grand Theft Auto, you could talk about the violence, exploitation of women and criminal activity. You could also talk about how your child would handle these situations in real life.

If your child spends a lot of time on online forums, it's OK to ask what people talk about on the forum. You can also ask whether the forum seems to support particular attitudes towards race or ethnicity, gender or sexuality and whether any of these attitudes are biased or even hateful.

Encouraging a questioning attitude

When you're talking about media with your child, you can encourage him to ask questions too. This can help your child sort facts from opinion, identify advertising, understand bias and be aware of the misuse of statistics.

For example, you could choose one of the **YouTube channels or Instagram accounts** your child follows. Ask your child:

- Who's behind it?
- What's their motivation?
- What do they want from you?
- How does it make you feel?
- Do they want you to feel that way? Why?

You can do the same for **celebrities**. Encourage your child to ask herself:

- Why do I like these people?
- Are they presented in a realistic way?
- Are they like this in real life?
- What values does this person portray?
- How does this person make me feel about myself?

During an election campaign, share some **political memes** with your child. Encourage your child to ask:

- What ideas are being promoted in this meme?
- Who made this meme and why?
- How might this meme influence voters during the election?

Understanding advertising

You can help to limit the influence of advertising on your child by talking about how [advertising](#) sells ideas as well as products. For example, you could encourage your child to ask:

- Does this advertisement link the product with a particular kind of lifestyle?
- How does that make you feel about the product?
- What messages does this advertisement send about what girls, boys, women and men should look like, wear, do, eat and drink?

Helping teenagers balance the influence of social media and other media

When your child balances media use with other activities like physical and creative activities and socialising face to face, he comes into contact with a wide range of influences. These include peers, community mentors and family, as well as the media.

You can also introduce your child to real-life, positive role models. Ways to do this could be joining local community groups, sporting clubs or mentoring programs.

You're still [your child's most important role model](#). By being an informed and questioning consumer, you show your child how to handle powerful media influences. Part of this might be ignoring advertisements for the latest and greatest new gadget, or talking with your child about why you follow certain people on Twitter or Instagram.