

The more we as parents can normalize talking about smartphones and social media with our kids, the less awkward and challenging it will seem to both us and them. Ideally talking about these topics will become part of ongoing conversations, like school, extra-curricular activities and whatever topics get brought up at your home. Waiting for something to go wrong before having a conversation may lead to much more challenging talks, and perhaps motivation on our children's part to hide things from us to avoid parental disappointment. Here are a few takeaways from Monday evenings conversation on this:

- It is natural to want to be a part of a group – while we can likely all agree that kids spend too much time on-line, a desire/need to fit in is likely part of the reason they are not only on their phones too much, but also sometimes engaged in things they shouldn't be.
- It is easy to criticize teens and pre-teens for their on-line behaviour, but try to keep in mind we have no idea what it's like to grow up in this environment. Don't compare your internet/social media use to theirs – kids use social media differently than most adults.
- As stated above: don't wait for an issue to emerge to speak with you child about smartphone use. Bring it up in a positive way: "I read a story about how hard it is to navigate social media, how do you manage so well?" Or "I was at a presentation last night and the presenter talked about how small issues can escalate so quickly on social media...have you seen this happen before?"
- Be prepared for conversations about smartphone use/social media to be ongoing; don't be discouraged if the first conversation doesn't go as well as you hoped! These conversations will show them you are interested, want to understand their perspective while also educating you.
- Speak compassionately about how tough it is to grow up with this technology and opportunity for challenges and how you would be making mistakes with it as well...its only natural. And a learning experience. Praise them for not getting involved in social media drama when the opportunity presented itself.

I hate to sound like a broken record but it is important to keep reminding ourselves that children haven't been taught how to use this ever-growing technology responsibly and so it shouldn't surprise us that they make mistakes. . .we would have too.