

"Can you teach me how to use that app?"

"If I download it, what do you think I should watch out for?"

"Brains need breaks sometimes."

"I know you are wise enough to make good decisions."

"In what ways does that app/service/platform make your life better? In what ways does it hurt you?"

"Test yourself. Give yourself some technology rules and try to follow them."

"I know what it's like to be stressed out for no reason. Has that ever happened to you?"

"It's common to encounter sexual and violent content online. Who can you talk to when you see something you weren't expecting?"

"I like how you encourage people online (or in the group chat)."

"Don't fall for fake! What people post isn't always true in real life."

## A Volunteer's Guide to . . .

# Talking About Technology



with Middle Schoolers



# How to Talk About Technology

By the end of middle school, 91% of teenagers have smartphones.<sup>1</sup>

→ Nearly nothing a middle schooler experiences will impact as many parts of their lives as technology. For many middle schoolers, access to technology is a rite of passage. Still, while they are *technically* old enough for phones and social media (by age 13), middle schoolers need help navigating these new spaces safely. As a volunteer, you can help shape attitudes toward technology, help them develop wisdom around gaming and social platforms, and encourage middle schoolers to use technology appropriately.

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**In this Phase . . .** As a volunteer, your role is to **affirm their personal journey**. That means expressing your belief that they can make great decisions with technology *and* having honest conversations about digital safety.

**Middle schoolers are motivated by acceptance**, and technology is a great way to demonstrate acceptance over and over. Use this time to text encouragement, like posts, or send digital “high fives.” And as often as you can, include parents in digital interactions so they know you are committed to safe and appropriate interactions in digital spaces.

## In Your Conversations . . .

### BEFORE

**Honor the parent.** Survey your group’s parents 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?

**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 closely.** Pay 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.

**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 middle 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 middle 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.

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