GENERATION CONFIDENT
A Short Guide on the Big Topic of Raising Body-Positive Girls in the Digital Age

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Everywhere we turn there’s something reminding us that our bodies are “flawed.” Between the diet-obsessed TV commercials and social media ads, it can be difficult to protect our kids from questioning their own body’s appearance and possibly developing an unhealthy body image.

As parents, it’s up to us to instill body positive values in our kids. And it’s not just about what we say—it’s about what we do. Kids are extremely smart and very observant—if we don’t practice what we preach ourselves, they won’t internalize it. It’s important that we speak positively about our bodies and understand that being “healthy” isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach. Everyone’s journey is different, and everyone’s body is different—and that’s okay!

By giving our kids an example of how to talk about and nurture our own bodies, we lay the foundation for a more confident generation.

**START THE DAY WITH POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS.**
Your morning routine can affect your entire day. It can help determine if your day is super awesome or super lousy! To help get your day started off right, try saying a few nice things about yourself, such as: “I am wonderful!” “My body is perfect the way it is!” “My imperfections are perfection!” These positive phrases can really help to build confidence.

**LEARN HOW TO ACCEPT A COMPLIMENT.**
When someone compliments us, we often overthink it or try to dismiss it. And in some cases, we may even think that we aren’t worthy of that compliment. But you know what—we are totally worthy of receiving a compliment! There’s nothing wrong with accepting the compliment, saying thank you, and going about your day. And if you’re up to it, try spreading the love and compliment someone else.

**UNDERSTAND THAT IT’S OKAY TO HAVE BAD DAYS.**
We’re human, which means there will be days where we may not be completely in love with our bodies. Instead of punishing our bodies for not looking a certain way, learn to continue to treat our bodies with appreciation and respect, no matter what. A bad body image day does not warrant calorie restriction or an intense workout. It warrants compassion, patience, and understanding.

**IGNORE THE TROLLS.**
Trolls are people who intentionally leave rude or offensive messages on the internet to get attention, cause trouble, or upset someone. From personal experience, most trolls are filled with insecurities, and to make themselves feel better, they like to project their insecurities on others. When you choose to ignore their hateful comments and refuse to engage with them, they feel invalidated and move on. Remember that their comments are meaningless and do not reflect who you are.

**STOP COMPARING YOURSELF TO OTHERS.**
Our bodies come in all different shapes and sizes. It makes us unique. And that uniqueness is what makes you special and it’s definitely worth embracing. Give yourself permission to focus on the things that make you great and embrace your individuality.

| Andy Mathis is a Body Positive Registered Dietician and Nurish by Nature Made Partner |
In our ever-changing digital climate, we understand first hand how hard it is to provide the right type of support for our kids and ourselves.

To make things just a little bit easier, we created this guide for all the parents, guardians, mentors, and teachers out there. There’s everything from snack-sized, digestible pieces of information to catch you up on digital lingo, alongside in-depth resources that allow you to approach challenging conversations with ease. We hope that you read it in its entirety, but it’s written so that you can dive into it whenever and wherever you have the capacity.

The opening chapters start by providing a snapshot of where we are in our culture and how we got here. The middle chapters offer suggestions to get ready to have conversations with the teens in your lives, including ways to educate yourself and opportunities for self-reflection and to revisit your family values within the context of digital life. Our final chapters serve as a conversation guide that provides critical thinking questions for your child, coupled with thought-starters for you. Our goal: To make you feel more equipped to be the support person your teen needs right now.
We here at Movemeant Foundation hold the opinion that our bodies are a beautiful place to be. Our bodies allow us to dance until midnight, take long walks on the beach, and chase seemingly impossible dreams. But many of us overlook our bodies’ capability, leaving our looks as the singular thing that defines us. Instead of the heart that allows us to dance until dawn, we think about the jiggle of our bellies. Instead of the muscles that allow us to chase our goals, we only think about the skin that’s above it.

Now more than ever, we’re up against an unattainable idea of beauty and perfection created by the images we see every day on social media and streaming television. Flawless, yet photoshopped influencers, creators, and celebrities who either lounge poolside in a bikini proclaiming self-care or are whipping up a dalgona coffee in their sports bras to fuel for their 90-minute boutique studio workout.

Under the guise of offering life skills and beauty hacks, their voices begin to narrate our internal one. We begin to mimic. We begin to follow. We begin to punish ourselves for not having the same six-pack abs while making dalgona coffee. Soon enough, we begin to doubt ourselves. Some of us begin to hate ourselves.

That’s what we’re up against, as parents and as educators, especially now since our young people are spending an increasing amount of time online. Between virtual school, social connection through chat, text, or social channels, our teenagers are spending on average 7 hours and 22 minutes a day online [1]. One study of 3,000 parents found that screen time increased by 500% since the start of the pandemic.

This past year has forced us to take a long, hard look at our culture, our lifestyle, and our relationship with technology. And as a response to what we’ve seen, we created this guide to help guide your family in thinking through the intersection of our bodies and beauty, reminding you that the latter is only skin deep.
OUR MISSION AT MOVEMENT FOUNDATION

We empower girls by providing body-positive, self-confidence building resources. We build constructive associations between physical strength with emotional health to allow girls to feel powerful in the skin she's in, regardless of what that looks like.

While our mission is directed to those identifying as female, we also hope this guide provides a jump-off for meaningful conversations with all members of your family. No one is immune to the body image challenges that the internet creates.

YOUR MISSION AT HOME

As parents, you are the catalyst for creating a new era of healthy, strong, and self-assured young people. This guide addresses the critical need for emotional, social, and physical development with topics ranging from social media’s impact on beauty ideals to mindfulness, body diversity, and genetics. We encourage you to have healthy discussions in a casual environment, infusing the landscape of learning with light-hearted conversation.

OUR VISION TOGETHER

Through this guide, we hope that we can offer you knowledge and skills that will help your daughters tap into their own inner strength and resilience. To feel confident in their bodies, despite social pressures or marked changes of puberty. To work towards creating a world where everyone can feel beautiful.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Health is a universal issue on a global scale. Healthy body image and the merits of a healthy, active lifestyle on both a physical and psychological level, should be accessible to all people, regardless of body type, size, gender, genetics, socio-economic background, culture, race, sexual orientation, or age.
During the first few weeks of the pandemic, many adults relished in makeup-free mornings, dry shampoo, and pajama bottoms. But when Zoom meetings with colleagues put us front and center on camera, it was only a matter of time until we invested in high-quality studio lighting and googling “touch up my appearance” filters for virtual calls. Through our computers, we were looking into digital mirrors of ourselves for hours at a time.

We have to admit that the change was hard for us. But we also have to acknowledge that distance learning in a virtual setting, compounded by social lives that primarily exist on a 2-inch mobile screen, makes this change infinitely more difficult for our young people who don’t yet have the knowledge or adequate experience to navigate the online world.
So let’s help our kids first by defining the difference between image and esteem. Our image is our community’s perception of us from the outside looking in. It’s how our friends and family members, teachers and other students, even the people at the grocery store perceive us. Social media influencers and celebrities typically lead the way when it comes to projecting an image, which can vary from the social activists of Tiktok to the airbrushed “It Girls” of Instagram. Our esteem, however, is fueled by our own sense of self-worth. It’s our genuine awareness of our own value and our own character, regardless of external influences. (Despite her WAP image, Cardi B is actually a sharp political activist with a passion for political science.)

When keeping up with our image begins to take over our identity and tips the scales away from our own sense of self-esteem, we become more susceptible to what psychologists call “smiling depression.” Smiling depression is a term used to describe people who are depressed but do not appear so. In America today, 6.7 percent of the population over the age of 18 suffers from major depression, and it is the leading cause of disability in the 15-44 age range. [2]

For so many of us in the digital age, a smile is nothing but a mask, especially online. Reminding your children of that and providing them with outlets to express their inner turmoil without feeling like they need to accept social defeat is critical. Later on, we’ll provide you with talking points and conversation starters to do just that.

**TL; DR**

**Image** is our community’s perception of us from the outside looking in. It’s how our friends and family members, teachers and other students, even the people at the grocery store perceive us in our totality of attitude, personality, physical appearance, and action.

**Body image** is the way that we believe someone perceives our body’s shape and size. This is based strictly on physical appearance. Our body image is often affected by family, friends, social pressure, and the media. [3] Body image is closely linked to self-esteem. High self-esteem can lead to positive social interactions, success in classrooms, and engagement with familial relationships. Low self-esteem in adolescents can lead to eating disorders, early sexual activity, substance use, and suicidal thoughts.

**Esteem** is our own sense of self-worth. It’s our genuine awareness of our own value and our own character, regardless of external influences.

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Being a young woman is full of mortifying moments made all the worse by parents who flounder when confronted with questions about diet culture, Kardashians, Youtube influencers, and TikTok dance trends. But when you’re armed with up to date, accurate information and a few strategies for handling the tough conversations, we have the opportunity and responsibility to give our children the information and understanding they need.

But before you dive into the deep cuts of creators on social media, it’s important to understand why we need to relate to our kids on their level. When watching reality-based streaming content, for example, even seemingly innocent game shows can lead to kids often becoming desensitized to what they are seeing.
Nancy Molitor, a professor of Clinical Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine, said in a recent interview: “You see contestants being laughed at, rejected, voted off, made fun of by ‘winning’ contestants. And watching these shows makes kids feel superior as well. It’s reinforcing all kinds of negative behavior that we don’t want to see in our kids, including relational aggression.” [4]

A study by the Girl Scouts found much of this to be true too. In fact, girls who were regular consumers of reality television were much more likely to believe that gossiping was a normal part of female friendships than their counterparts who didn’t watch reality television.

So here’s our harsh reality. Reality content is here to stay. And our best solution is to become media literate ourselves, which means learning and sharing the same digital language as our kids. The goal is to give them a good platform to have open discussions with us.

Professor Nancy Molitor from Northwestern agrees. She says, “These shows aren’t going anywhere. The programming is lucrative and cheap to produce. So for parents, it’s not necessarily about banning these shows. Instead, parents should be talking to kids about what they’re seeing.”

Molitor’s advice? “You have to sit them down and help them understand that it’s entertaining but it’s not real life. And it’s not OK to behave in the way these contestants often do. The bullying, the talking behind people’s backs, the cruelty. Kids can relate to that, to people not acting fair, and it really can lead to some important conversations.”

Approximately 91% of women are unhappy with their bodies and resort to dieting to achieve their ideal body shape. Unfortunately, only 5% of women naturally possess the body type often portrayed by Americans in the media.[5]

Studies show that the more reality television a young girl watches, the more likely she is to find appearance important.[6]

Students, especially women, who consume more social media and streaming TV, place greater importance on sexiness and overall appearance than those who do not consume as much.[7]
No doubt, it's rough out there, but now it's time to do the work. And by work, we mean that it's time to start talking to the young people in your lives about their experiences and helping them set healthy boundaries in their digital lives. While technology is a profound tool for learning and connecting, it is also an environment where rules and norms need to be learned and navigated. This section will give you the tools to teach that structure, so that you may have productive and valuable conversations with your kids.

**GETTING IN THE MINDSET OF AN ADOLESCENT**
You already know that adolescence is a fantastic and tumultuous time. Fifth to twelfth-graders grow developmentally, physically, and emotionally at an incredible rate. As they develop their own interests and opinions, they also become more aware of their outside world and can be easily influenced by it.

Physical maturity can progress significantly ahead of emotional maturity. The human brain does not finish developing until age 25, and teenage brains are specially wired to prioritize present rewards over long term consequences. Helping teenagers navigate what's real and what's important online can be a considerable challenge. Social acceptance can depend on conformity, leading to intense comparison to others. Learning the skills for self-regulation can be a challenging process. Adolescents will go through periods of pushing adults away; however, adult love, support, and modeling are critical in the healthy development of adult skills and behaviors.

All of these qualities can make it incredibly rewarding to have in-depth conversations with preteens and teens. At times, your child may be very concrete in their thinking, but they can also get excited about exploring complex concepts and moral issues when you can allow them some freedom in their processing. It can be helpful for your teen to feel like they are teaching you too. Treat it as a conversation, not a lecture. (They sometimes do know a lot more than us!) While adolescents can at times seem self-absorbed, they are becoming more capable of self-awareness, insight, and deep empathy.

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**GETTING DIGITALLY LITERATE**

We know everyone has a different starting point here, so we’re breaking it down into three easy steps.

**STEP 1**
Learn and review some key words and phrases related to body-positivity in the digital age

**STEP 2**
Learn what your children are up to online

**STEP 3**
Reflect and set yourself up for successful conversation
**STEP 1: LEARN AND REVIEW SOME KEY WORDS AND PHRASES RELATED TO BODY-POSITIVITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

**A. DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY**
Digital literacy is defined as the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. [8]

Media literacy is understanding the difference between different digital platforms. For example, Twitter is a social media network that broadcasts to anyone, while Instagram and Facebook offer options to control who sees what you’re sharing. Media literacy also means judging whether sources of information online are reliable or what’s become known as ‘fake news.’

What to Read: *Digital and media literacy from Common Sense Media.*

**B. SOCIAL MEDIA**
Websites, apps, and other platforms where users can create and/or share media and content, and create a "social network" by linking with other users. Users engage in social media on computers, laptops, smartphones, and tablets.

Some examples popular with adolescents include TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Others include Reddit, Whatsapp, Tumblr, Pinterest, Twitter, and Vimeo.

Most of these platforms have age restrictions for joining, but they are easy to get around. It’s essential to help your child understand that each site has its own privacy settings that dictate who can see the content your child posts and consumes. They can be confusing and hard to navigate, not to mention that they are ever-changing and sometimes settings need to be updated when a platform changes its own rules.

Just setting parental controls on your children’s devices isn’t enough. A simple web search can show you that there are many ways to get around them. Investing the time to have conversations with your children about family values and behavior standards is more important. Appropriate consequences for breaking your rules or norms are also important.

The business model of social media is the same as television: brands pay for advertisements, and those advertisements look like content. Social media sites use the most advanced algorithms to show ads and content designed to hold the users’ attention. Therefore it’s essential to educate children about this type of manipulation of the content they watch. Social media can be a great way to connect during a pandemic, but it’s something that kids need at least some adult guidance in setting up and navigating.

What to Watch: *The Social Dilemma on Netflix.*

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STEP 1: LEARN AND REVIEW SOME KEY WORDS AND PHRASES RELATED TO BODY-POSITIVITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

C. CREATORS VS. INFLUENCERS
Creators are content producers who create digital content, namely photography and video, as a means of self-expression. Coined first by YouTube back in 2011, creators imbue a sense of creativity, imagination, and ingenuity into what they consider to be their art. Many people believe the term to be interchangeable with the term “influencer,” however, there is a clear distinction.

Influencers describe anyone who leverages social media to grow a following and exerts influence over that following to make money. For example, an influencer might be the teenager who blows up on Instagram for viral makeup tutorials and starts selling beauty products via sponsored posts.

D. HEALTH VS. WELLNESS
We speak about health in holistic terms. Media messages about health often focus on physical health, leaving mental and emotional health out of the picture. However, it’s essential to keep in mind that there are many components to health, including physical, mental, emotional, social, environmental, and spiritual.

Wellness, which is a phrase gaining in popularity, is the active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life. Wellness is much more inclusive than just our physical health; it is a dynamic change and growth process.

What to Read: From the World Health Organization: Wellness is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

What to Read: From the National Wellness Institute: Wellness is a conscious, self-directed, and evolving process of achieving full potential.

E. SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING
According to the Collaboration for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), “social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

CASEL’s Framework consists of Five SEL competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Proficiency in these competencies has a host of positive outcomes, including the ability to make sound decisions, decreased emotional distress, improved academic success, and more.

What to Explore: CASEL is providing free additional resources for parents in helping students navigate distance learning and social isolation.
F. MENTAL HEALTH AND ANXIETY

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Adolescents already experience a wide variety of physical and emotional changes because of their rapid growth and development that can also play into their mental health. Mental health affects one’s ability to realize their full potential, manage stress, and experience a wide range of emotions. Biological factors, life experiences, and family history also affect mental health.

Emotional health is a subset of the umbrella phrase “mental health.” It is defined as having both an awareness of our emotions and the ability to manage and express our feelings in an age-appropriate manner.

Anxiety is defined as “a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.”

Occasional anxiety is a part of life, and for your child, that might include moments around test-taking, new social situations, or an important athletic event. This is known as situational anxiety. However, anxiety disorders are a classification of psychiatric disorders where a person experiences prolonged anxiety along with physical and emotional symptoms and side effects.

Since anxiety generally increases during stressful events like a pandemic, many are exposed to anxious feelings. Teenagers have experienced more major life changes during an already tumultuous time. They absorb stress through media and real-life just like we do. It’s helpful to name feelings, and it’s important to help them distinguish between temporary and more long term exposure to anxiety and how it affects their lives.

You might catch others describing their actions by saying something like, “it’s my anxiety.” A vague and obscure admission of a non-diagnosed anxiety disorder can eventually become part of someone’s identity. The phrase has become so popular that we hear it being parroted by kids as young as five years old. Hearing this phrase in TV, movies, or in conversation is an opportunity to explore the difference between anxiety disorders and “situational anxiety” that has an identifiable cause.

If you are concerned that you or your child are experiencing prolonged anxiety, please speak to a medical professional right away. Counselors at the Crisis Text Line are readily available. SimplyText HOME to 741741 to reach a Crisis Counselor. Or if you or someone else is experiencing an immediate crisis, dial 9-1-1 for emergency medical attention.

G. BODY IMAGE AND BODY POSITIVITY

Body image is the way that we believe someone perceives our body’s shape and size. This is based strictly on physical appearance. Our body image is often affected by family, friends, social pressure, and the media. Body image is closely linked to self-esteem.

Body talk is defined as anything said about a person’s body. It can be positive, neutral, or negative. We break down different kinds of body talk in our lessons. We also believe that although some positive body talk is complimentary, it can still give the connotation that what is important is how a person looks, thus playing into the idea of the feminine beauty ideal.

Body positivity is a social movement initially created to empower and popularize overweight women and men while also challenging the ways in which society presents and views the physical body. The movement advocates the acceptance of all bodies regardless of physical ability, size, gender, race, or appearance.
**STEP 2: LEARN WHAT THEY ARE UP TO ONLINE (BECOME FAMILIAR WITH “HEY, YOU’RE HOT. CAN I GET YOUR SNAP?”)**

By now, it should be no surprise that trendy internet slang is breaking the hearts of linguists one syllable at a time. Although it may feel impossible to catch up with all the acronyms and double-entendres of ostensibly innocent words, becoming fluent with the ever-evolving digital dialect is essential for parents. It’s the way our children are communicating in this modern era, and we need to know what they’re saying.

Since every child is different, it’s difficult for us to provide a comprehensive list of what your kids might be up to online. The hot app or platform can change quickly, and the rules within existing platforms are dynamic too. Asking your children to have some form of age-appropriate transparency in their activity is an integral part of keeping them safe online. Establishing clear rules that work for your family and holding children accountable helps you guide their choices. Expecting adolescents to self-regulate entirely on their own is generally unreasonable. As they mature and demonstrate good judgment, you can allow the scaffolding of your guidance to come away gradually.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

- Make sure you know where your teens are spending time online. Ask them, or take their devices and look for yourself. We know this looks different for every age and family, and you’ll figure out what works for you.

- Read these guides from Common Sense Media to review specific platforms:
  - Common Sense Media Ultimate Parent Guides

- Do a web search for “popular influencers of…”

- Play around on any app or platform where you notice your child spends a lot of time, then look at those accounts and experience the content for yourself.

- Look up the meaning of any slang terms your teen uses in real life or online, including in texts. There are many online resources to help. Usually a websearch will do.
STEP 3:

SELF-REFLECTION AND PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION WITH YOUR KID (EYES UP! INSTAGRAM DOWN!)

The last essential thing to do before you ask your teens to talk is to take a quick look at your own behavior. As an adult, what you do matters as much as what you say. Teens are great at sniffing out hypocrisy. We generally can’t hold them to standards that are entirely different from ours unless we are clear about the discrepancy between adult privileges and a kid rule. Most importantly, it’s always okay to admit you don’t have all the answers and that you aren’t perfect either.

TIPS FOR MODELING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR:

+ Be critical of media messages that don’t reflect your family values. Point out when media messages represent narrow views, partial stories, manipulated truths, and altered images. Shine a light on hidden advertisements, and educate about the ulterior motive of people selling things online! It can be fun to team up with your child as sleuths for internet traps that use tricks to seek our attention and money or shape our thoughts and values.

+ Post mindfully. If you post, be mindful of what you are emphasizing. Use your platforms to engage in the same way you expect your children to engage. Make sure your posts aren’t always emphasizing looks or participating in body talk. It’s helpful to have some family boundaries around posting pictures. Do you ask before you post photos of your children? Do you expect them to ask you before posting a photo of you?

+ Reflect body positivity when taking photos. Think about how you act when taking photos or appearing in photos. What message does it send when you take tons of pictures to get the right shot or angle? When possible, be in the photographs and emphasize happy memories over perfect scenes and looks. Try not to shy away from being a part of the fun photo even when you don’t feel your “curated best.”

+ Hold boundaries with your own devices: Participate in whatever boundaries you set for your children with devices. “No phones at the dinner table” means you too. When setting boundaries, consider the total amount of academic+fun screen time, distraction factors, transparency with online life, and logical, easily enforceable consequences for breaking the rules.

+ Admit if you make a mistake or fall for an internet trap. If you get in an internet wormhole, make an impulse purchase based on an online advertisement, procrastinate using your device, or post something that doesn’t have the desired effect, talk through it with your child. Share what happened and how it made you feel. This is a chance to learn from each other’s mistakes and show that the internet is powerful both in positive and negative ways.
A LITTLE SELF REFLECTION:

The next big step is to get ready to have some hopefully fun but probably tricky conversations with your children. To get in the right mind space, we suggest doing a little self-reflection. Take a moment to think about or jot down your answers before reading ours, and pay attention to any special themes in your answers.

1. WHAT DO YOU WANT MOST FOR YOUR CHILDREN IN THEIR (IN-PERSON) LIVES?
Perhaps you want them:
+ to be healthy: emotionally, physically, and socially
+ to be confident, no matter what is happening internally or externally
+ to be compassionate and ready to step outside of their privilege to help those struggling
+ to be goal-oriented and able to recognize their innate talents and abilities
+ to be resilient and able to access and accept constructive feedback and to self-regulate
+ to be genuine and able to learn about and be who they are safely

2. WHAT DO YOU WANT MOST FOR YOUR CHILDREN IN THEIR ONLINE LIVES?
Perhaps you want them:
+ to use online resources to further their learning and their productive engagement
+ to have fun, but do so safely
+ to connect with others respectfully, in the same manner they would in person
+ to know that they are much more as individuals than filters or hashtags or the commentary of followers and friends make about them online
+ to choose role models critically
+ to avoid comparing themselves to things that aren’t real or realistic

Now consider, there’s most likely a discrepancy between what you want and what your kids are seeking. Though they might not be explicit about the behaviors that dictate their actions online, their goals are generally quite different from your desires for them.

FROM THE MOUTH OF KIDS, THEY WANT:
+ to connect with peers
+ to be entertained
+ to be liked and “liked”
+ to be seen, known, or heard
+ to escape from the pressure or stress of their situational reality (i.e., academic pressures, social pressure, physical pressures—body type, shape, changes, or perceived family pressures or strained relationships)
+ to express themselves
Your loving, long-term hopes and dreams for them may not always align with the flashy appeal of some of what is seeking to gain their attention online. Our goal is to help them make choices that balance their desires with ours as parents.

We hope that this can be a fun and productive exercise where you both can listen and learn. During these interactions, you will ask your child to be vulnerable: self-reflecting and sharing parts of their world. We all need to cultivate a safe, non-judgmental environment where children can feel comfortable being open and honest. Sometimes we need to set clear family rules and boundaries for teens, but adolescents also really appreciate it when we listen, learn, and trust them too. It can be challenging to strike a balance with teenagers between your clear family expectations and your openness to their input and thoughts. It can be a dynamic exercise. You won’t always get it right, neither will they, but try to be easy on yourself and them, and have some fun with it! It’s worth the effort because it can feel gratifying to connect honestly with our teens during meaningful talks on pertinent topics.

Depending on your child, their development, and your previous clashes or agreements around technology, these conversations may be anywhere from easy to challenging to initiate and navigate. Wherever you are starting, consider these tips and don’t give up if your teen seems resistive! You’ve got this!
1. **BE APPROACHABLE, BUT BE THE ADULT.**
Adolescents can push boundaries in adult relationships. They are easily confused about why sometimes you act more like a friend, and other times, you get frustrated when they are behaving inappropriately. It can be a challenge to create a space where our children can show up and be their best authentic selves.

2. **WAYS TO MAKE YOURSELF MORE APPROACHABLE.**
+ Be aware of your tone, eye contact, and body language.
+ Make an effort to connect by removing distractions (including your own.)
+ Practice active listening: listening attentively, paraphrasing and reflecting on what your teen has said, following up with questions, and withholding any immediate judgment or advice.
+ Make sure you choose the right time to engage in conversation.

3. **WAYS TO MAKE YOURSELF THE “ADULT.”**
+ Clearly express when something is negotiable vs. a family rule or expectation.
+ Avoid making empty threats as consequences or “punishments.”
+ Model boundaries with technology.

4. **CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE.**
Maybe you’re already aware of the time and place when your child is most willing to engage in deep conversations. Some parents like to take advantage of car rides where there is no option to leave, and seating arrangements make eye contact more optional. Maybe it’s a time set aside for a special date or bonding. It can help to allow your child to have some say in how and where you approach them to talk.

**Ex:**
“I have a couple of things I want to get your thoughts about. Is now a good time to talk?”
“Should we make a date to go for a walk or grab a boba tea and chat?”
“It’s OK if you’re not in the mood now. When is a better time?”

Don’t feel like you need to have the whole conversation at once. Feel free to break it down into pieces and be respectful if your child seems to be losing energy. They will appreciate knowing that you are paying attention to their feelings. If you get off topic about something else interesting, feel free to let it ride and come back around another time.

**Ex:**
“Woah! I’m happy we dove into that today instead. Let’s talk about <X> another time.”
“It seems like you’re done talking about <X> right now. Let’s pick up another time.”
“Thanks for your time and thought. I know these conversations aren’t always easy.”
5. BE PREPARED.
Make sure you’ve done some thinking about how you want the conversation to go. It’s great to harness “teachable moments” to have meaningful conversations, but thinking ahead is useful when we can. We are only human too, and gathering our thoughts and feelings can help us guide the conversation constructively. Having an opening question in your mind can help you kick off the discussion. See the Critical Thinking Questions section for ideas.

6. MODEL VULNERABILITY.
Starting conversations by showing your own emotions and vulnerability models doing this for our kids. Showing our humility can be a great starting point.

Ex:
“I didn’t grow up with technology, so I’m learning too. Uncharted territory makes me nervous because I care about keeping you safe more than anything else.”
“I know that we use the internet in different ways, and I want to learn because it makes me worry when I don’t understand how kids are using it today.”
“I trust your judgment, but I don’t trust everyone who creates platforms online or those who participate in those platforms to have your best interest at heart as I do.”
“I know you are a great critical thinker, and I want to work through creating family boundaries with technology that will work for everyone.”

7. BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER.
It’s important to listen attentively and paraphrase back your teen’s thoughts, so they know you heard them correctly and are showing sincere interest. Ask lots of questions and follow-up questions. Reflect but withhold immediate judgment or advice. If you need to buy yourself time to think about how to respond, you can always reply with another question.

Ex:
“Tell me more about that.”
“Can you ask that again in a different way?”
“Is this something you’ve been wondering for a while?”
“What do you think?”
8. YOU DON’T ALWAYS HAVE TO HAVE THE ANSWER.
You can always take a deep breath and think before answering. By doing this, you’re modeling the positive behavior that it’s OK to stop and think when you aren’t sure about something.

Ex:
“I want to think more about how I can best answer.”
“I need to look that one up. Should we do some research together?”

9. BE SENSITIVE.
Teenagers can be enormously sensitive. Be careful not to be directly critical of your child. Encourage them to feel safe in the space to open up to you. Owning their truth can be scary, and they will immediately shut down when/if judgment enters. Be prepared that they might say/share something that startles you. Maybe even practice how you want to react. Try not to get lost in the minutiae of jargon or strong language if it allows you to see deeper into their reality. If they say something that is not factual or against your family values, validate their contribution before giving the correct information or directing the conversation back on track.

When possible, present alternative perspectives as suggestions instead of mandates.

Ex:
“I’m glad you brought that up. Thank you for being honest.”
“Thanks for speaking up and sharing your perspective/experience.”
“I can see why you say that.”
“Others have thought that too.”
“That’s surprising to me.”
“I had no idea...”
“Yes, and...”
“Have you ever considered <X>?”
“I think this (rule, answer, perspective) fits more closely with our family values because...”
FINALLY. IT’S TIME TO HAVE THE TALK.

We’re hoping that the information you’ve digested up to this point is preparing you to have heartfelt conversations with your kids. So now it’s time to put that knowledge and self-reflection to the test. To help, we’ve designed conversation prompts that allow you to explore the digital space with your kid. We start with warm up questions before we dive into the more intimate and theoretical questions about what it means to be living in a digital world. Our goal is to help our kids know themselves better online, and to know that they can turn to you when something makes them feel bad, unsafe, or threatened.

THESE QUESTIONS ARE ORGANIZED BY TOPIC. EACH TOPIC IS BROKEN INTO FOUR PARTS:

1. THE FUN QUESTIONS
   The “fun” question is meant to be like an ice breaker. It is a great place to start if you have a child who is resistant to these types of conversations or the topics in a particular section haven’t come up. They are meant to be open-ended and unintimidating for your child. It’s good to give the “no wrong answers” vibe when putting it out there for discussion.

2. THE MORE QUESTIONS
   The “more questions” are written in a purposeful order to help draw your child towards a particular vein of thinking and toward conclusions written with Movemeant’s values. We provided “take-home points” that you might want to aim for in summing up your thoughts together. Sometimes you might just end up highlighting family values together through the conversation without lecturing. It’s essential to show that you know they can tackle significant issues with their critical thinking.

3. THE GO DEEP QUESTIONS
   The “go deeper” questions are meant to get more philosophical. Teens like knowing that we trust and respect their ability to engage deeply and recognize that they can push us to continue our adult thinking too.

4. TAKE IT HOME
   Last, we included “take-home” points for each topic, providing language to include in your answers. Remember, this is a conversation. The questions might be turned back on you too!
TOPIC 1: ONLINE LIFE: ONLINE LEARNING AND BOUNDARIES WITH TECHNOLOGY

THE “FUN” QUESTIONS:
+ How do you think digital connectivity might affect people your age in the future for better and/or for worse?
+ What would you miss most about your online life if it was suddenly gone?

THE “MORE” QUESTIONS:
+ What do you want most from your online life?
+ How do you define “healthy boundaries with technology?”
+ Do you see others around you or in our family practicing healthy boundaries?
+ Do you think we should change anything about how our family operates with our phones and other devices?
+ Do you ever get distracted by technology when you wish you didn’t?

THE “GO DEEPER” QUESTIONS:
+ How do you think your life would have changed during the past <insert a timeframe> if circumstances were different?
+ Would your online life have changed in a different way?

TAKE-IT-HOME POINTS:
These prompts are designed to help your child think and reflect. It’s mostly important that you listen and ask more questions about their answers to take the conversation deeper. Some open-ended, non-judgemental questions/prompts include:
+ Tell me more about that.
+ I’m not sure what you meant by...
+ Can you teach me more about that?
+ What makes you feel that way?
+ Do you think there are other perspectives?

This can also be a great time to talk about your family rules that help everyone keep healthy boundaries with technology. (Don’t leave yourself out here!) Reminding children that social media is designed to capture and keep our attention is really important for kids to realize.
TOPIC 2:
PASSIVE CONSUMPTION: DID YOU KNOW WHAT WE SEE ONLINE FROM OTHERS IMPACTS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT OURSELVES?

THE “FUN” QUESTIONS:
+ What do you think has more influence on your self esteem: What you see posted by others or reactions to what you post yourself? Why?

THE “MORE” QUESTIONS:
About role models:
+ How do you choose role models? What is your standard?
+ Who are your role models online?
+ Do you have any role models who you know both in-person and follow online? If so, are there ways that they portray themselves differently online and in-person?
+ Do you follow anyone online who you don’t really respect? If so, why do you follow them?
+ Why do people who are sending negative messages sometimes get the most attention?
+ What are some examples of celebrities who use their influence to inspire others to be healthy and confident?

About true beauty:
+ Where do we get our ideas about what is beautiful or ugly?
+ Who determines what is beautiful in our society? Who should?
+ Does seeing altered images skew our ideas about real beauty?
+ What are the qualities that make someone beautiful on the inside? How can someone express inner beauty online?
+ Who is someone you think is beautiful on the inside, and why?

About advertisements:
+ Where do you see advertisements online?
+ Is it always easy to tell what is an ad and what isn’t?
+ What techniques do ads use to convince us to buy things?
+ Do most models in ads look like real people you might see walking down the street or at your school?
+ Why do advertisers only choose certain types of models or images?
+ How does it make you feel when you realize an advertiser is trying to manipulate your thoughts and beliefs?
+ Do you think advertisements affect how we see ourselves?
TOPIC 2:

PASSIVE CONSUMPTION: DID YOU KNOW WHAT WE SEE ONLINE FROM OTHERS IMPACTS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT OURSELVES?

THE “MORE” QUESTIONS: (continued)
About the news:
+ How can you tell if an online source is reliable?
+ How does the “repost” culture play into spreading both real and fake news?
+ Have you ever seen something posted to look like “news” that didn’t seem to be accurate?
+ How do posts and news sources use numbers and statistics in ways that can be biased and misleading?
+ Once you read one type of “news” story online, have you noticed that you are suggested stories with similar focuses afterwards? How does this affect what you see and consume?

About social media and reading what other people post:
+ Why is it important to consider what you see posted on social media as much as what you post yourself?
+ Do you spend more time looking or posting? Why?
+ Which apps or websites make you feel the best about yourself?

THE “GO DEEPER” QUESTIONS:
+ As a society, do you think we need a better standard for role models?
+ What would the world look like if we all rejected the way the media sometimes portrays women? Men? People of certain races or ethnicities? LGBTQIA community?
+ How do you feel about how people with your various identities are portrayed online?
+ It’s great to want to look our best, in person or in posts, but what are some ways we can put effort into honoring our inner beauty? If brushing your hair is a way of working on your outer beauty, what would be an inner beauty equivalent?
+ Does social media force us into a trap of comparing us to things/people/lives that aren’t totally real or don’t tell the whole story?
+ How do you think adults who didn’t grow up with technology engage with technology differently than your generation who has always had it?
+ Do you think it is fair for companies and platforms to collect and sell data about us?


**TOPIC 2:**

**PASSIVE CONSUMPTION: DID YOU KNOW WHAT WE SEE ONLINE FROM OTHERS IMPACTS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT OURSELVES?**

**TAKE-IT-HOME POINTS:**

**About role models:**
The people we look up to can inspire us in lots of ways. Hopefully, these people send us messages that help us be our best, healthiest selves. Our role models have public and private personas. It’s important to remember that we are only seeing their online personas most of the time. It can be challenging for middle school and high school students to look critically at their heroes. You can remind them that it’s OK to look at multiple sides to anything! No one person, influencer, celebrity has it all together all the time. They don’t always have to be perfect, but it feels good to look up to people who have the same values as we do.

Sometimes entertaining or funny posts get a lot of attention, even though they may not be the best healthy influence on their viewers. Entertainment value and open expression can be fun, and it’s ok to have fun with your kids online too! Still, it’s also important to look critically at all messages and posts you see and how they might affect our deeper thinking and feelings.

**About true beauty:**
There are many different kinds of beauty, and people have different thoughts about what is beautiful. That’s OK! Many things affect our ideas about what is beautiful: our families, cultures, experiences, the media, etc. It is limiting to only think about physical appearance when we think of beauty in ourselves and others. When we see the beauty in others as more than just looks, it helps us honor the more profound beauty in ourselves.

Ways to “honor” our inner beauty include: being a supportive friend, helping others, telling the truth, being inclusive, being an engaged community member, following our dreams, standing up for what we believe in, and saying something when someone says/does/posts something that goes against your beliefs and values.

**About advertisements:**
Advertisements are everywhere! They are on logos on our clothes, in our social media feeds, pop-ups on websites, TV/radio/music/podcasts, etc. The purpose of ads is always to sell you something. It could be something physical, or it could be a service or idea. Advertisers use persuasion techniques such as celebrity endorsements, portrayals of a glamorous life, attention-getting cute animals, catchy slogans, offers of free stuff, or even scare tactics such as “fear of missing out.” It’s important to remember that advertisers’ first priority isn’t promoting healthy development or self-confidence.

It’s not always easy to tell what’s an ad and what isn’t. Some posts are “sponsored,” which means the person posting is being paid to say good things about that product or idea. Some sites legally share data, so they can target ads to grab more of our attention. Helping teenagers recognize the ways ads try to manipulate us is a significant first step in avoiding the traps they set for us.
TOPIC 2:
PASSIVE CONSUMPTION: DID YOU KNOW WHAT WE SEE ONLINE FROM OTHERS IMPACTS WHAT WE THINK ABOUT OURSELVES?

TAKE-IT-HOME POINTS: (continued)
About the news:
Anyone can post almost anything on the internet. We have to be careful about what we believe is “news” on social media. Looking for the original source is critical to decide if something seems credible, and even credible sources can have bias. Even if they are technically accurate, statistics and statements made as facts can also be misleading. They can be selectively edited and may only include partial facts or part of the whole story to mislead you. (This is a huge complicated conversation.) It’s a good habit to always be critical and look for additional sources before believing or “reposting” something. Misinformation and misleading interpretations of information can spread fast online! Our reputations can be hurt when we aren’t careful about what we repost or pass along.

Some sites will “suggest” a next story or video for you. This can lead to the viewer only being exposed to a certain kind of content. Teenagers can have a hard time understanding how this has the possibility to narrow their knowledge or views.

About social media and reading what other people post:
Thinking about what we consume on social media is just as important as what we are posting. Even if you aren’t actively posting, what you read and see affects our thoughts and how we feel about ourselves. We make comparisons and take others’ comments and reactions into consideration, even when the content isn’t directly about us.

For example, most people post photos when they are happy, have fun, and look their best, but we don’t feel that way even close to all the time. Sometimes people take lots of photos and only choose one to post, meaning we only see a smaller snippet of the whole picture. Filters can change the image to be even further from reality. When our feeds are full of only the best, chosen, filtered moments, it can make us feel like our lives aren’t as great as the people we follow. Comparing our whole picture to an altered one can be a dangerous game.

When we look at likes or read comments that other people have made about someone else’s post, we still get ideas about what is important or valued by the community actively participating. We pick up messages and process them even when we aren’t the subject. Of course, this can sometimes make us feel validated, but again, we’re watching people pass judgment on something that is a small part of the story.
TOPIC 3:
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION: WHAT YOU SAY AND DO

THE “FUN” QUESTIONS:
+ Do you feel more confident about posting something about yourself online or talking in front of a room of people in person? Why?

THE “MORE” QUESTIONS:
Identity Expression Online:
+ What do you and your friends share about yourselves on social media?
+ What messages are you sending about who you are?
+ Are there differences in the way people express their identities online and in-person?
+ Would you share the same things with the same number of people in person who you share with online?
+ How would you feel if something you posted “went viral” at your school or otherwise?

Confidence:
+ What influences our ability to feel confident about who we are?
+ What about your online life influences your ability to feel confident?
+ What about your online life hurts or makes you question your confidence?
+ Some social media posts have a visual element. When you get feedback on how you look, does that affect your ability to feel confident about yourself?
+ What might be dangerous about attaching your self-worth to looks or likes from others?
+ Has there been a time you posted something online that didn’t get the reaction you expected or wanted?

Body talk:
+ Have you commented on someone’s body online? (Positively or negatively) Ex: “You look great!”
+ Have others commented on your body?
+ What more profound messages do these types of comments send about what is important?
+ Have you seen others say negative things about their body online?
+ Why is negative body talk harmful?
+ How can you make your friends feel validated other than emphasizing looks?
+ Do you think the way people compliment looks on social media affects our ability to feel confident about ourselves?

Activism:
+ Who is someone standing up for making the world a better place online?
+ How do they get their message across?
+ What type of positive messages do you want to see more of?
+ What is a time you have gone out of your way to be <kind, brave, caring> in person? What is a time you went out of your way to be <kind, brave, caring> online? Which was easier? Which mattered more?
TOPIC 3:
ACTIVE PARTICIPATION: WHAT YOU SAY AND DO

THE “GO DEEPER” QUESTIONS:
+ What matters more: who you are or how you look?
+ Do people compliment each other online in the same way they do in person? Why? What does this mean?
+ Have you noticed outright or subtle discrimination online based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, religion, nationality, location, age, friends, physical ability, etc.
+ How can someone show the following qualities online? (Note: showing is different than telling) creativity, loyalty, tenacity, sensitivity, openness, patience, thoughtfulness
+ Is it OK to like fashion magazines, blogs, or other websites that display images only representing a narrow range of bodies or use Photoshop altered images?

TAKE-IT-HOME POINTS:
Identity Expression Online:
People can express a lot about themselves online, like what they care about, what they look like, what they are doing, and people in their lives (friends, relationships, family.) In many platforms, there is a visual aspect to posting. Therefore, at least some posts focus predominantly on aesthetics. Helping teens distinguish between sharing and expressing outer identity and inner identity can help them think about what and why they are posting.

Confidence:
It’s essential to help kids understand that there are many external influences on our ability to feel confident, including friends, family, communities, social media, etc. Allowing them to examine these influences can help them make wise choices about who they want to let into their lives.

Since many social media platforms have both a visual component and a feedback component, kids are getting large-scale feedback they wouldn’t likely get in person about their looks and their bodies. The danger in attaching our self-worth to appearance and “likes” is that our looks can change, and what we like may not be what someone else would like or “like.” Even the culture of always giving positive comments to others serves to make looks even more important to teens, who are naturally interested in and can be sensitive about their physical appearance and changing bodies.
**TOPIC 3:**
**ACTIVE PARTICIPATION: WHAT YOU SAY AND DO**

**TAKE-IT-HOME POINTS: (continued)**

**Body Talk:**
Again, body talk includes any comments about someone’s body. Since many platforms have a visual aspect, comments and posts can often then be about looks. Even when words are positive, this can send the underlying message that looks are the most important thing about us. A helpful exercise can be to look at comments on a photo your child has posted of themselves. What are friends commenting about? Can you think of other ways to compliment the post without commenting on looks? Ex: “Looks like fun!” or “You look so happy!” or “I love seeing you so excited!”

All types of negative body talk hurts self-esteem, including someone saying it about themselves, someone gossiping about someone else, or someone hearing or seeing these comments in either situation. Sometimes negative body talk is used when someone is feeling insecure. Any kind of negative body talk can make everyone feel like they need to join in. Sometimes people will use this kind of talk to fit in with others who are doing it. It makes it “normal” to bash your body, which it’s not. We can teach our kids that while they never have to join in on or validate negative body talk, they can try and empathize with how that person might be feeling. If it seems like someone using negative body talk is feeling bad, try to think of a way to help lift that person up. We can all do our part to stop negative body talk by not joining in and standing up against it.

**Activism:**
Social media is a place we can stand up for what we believe in! Our actions matter! What we like, how we consume media, and what we participate in matters. There are plenty of examples out there. If you follow individuals or causes that align with your beliefs, show your kids! Then have them show you or help them find causes and individuals to follow that align with their values. Teens love to be activists for the causes they choose. Social media has positive power too!
Remember, these conversations are an open ended process. At some point, your teen may open up to you about something that has gone wrong for them online. As parents, we can worry a lot about the digital lives of our teenagers. They can be reckless, impulsive, and easily influenced just as they can be deeply thoughtful, dedicated, and courageous. Having a negative experience online can be anything on the spectrum, from passively absorbing something that makes them feel bad about themselves to being a victim of cyberbullying or being exposed to dangerous or explicit content. Our goal should be to help our kids know where to turn when something makes them feel bad online, and definitely when they feel unsafe or threatened. Ideally, we are a big part of their fallout plan when they need adult support.

**REMINDERS TO GIVE YOUR CHILD:**
+ They can always come to you, even if they think they have made a mistake.
+ They can always take a break from anything online.
+ They can always delete accounts or apps.
+ If they see others being unkind online, they don’t have to be a victim or bystander.
+ Even if they delete things, there is a possibility that they are still out there somewhere. (Ex: someone can take a screenshot of a post.)
+ If they see something online that seems like it needs to be reported to an adult or the police, it’s essential to do the right thing.
Nevertheless, kids are growing up with these apps as a part of their everyday life and the usage of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are continuing to surge at alarming rates, especially with the younger kids. Snapchat reaches 90% of 13 - 24 year olds in the United States alone and 60% of TikTok users are between the ages of 16 and 24.

Despite all the bad PR in recent months around social media in general, social companies’ revenue engines are thriving. While extensive regulations exist to protect our physical health (think: the FDA for food and drugs), we don’t have many guardrails to protect our mental health. That’s where you as a parent steps in, with the hope that regulatory forces will soon come in as a partner to parents to force change for the mental health landscape.
Dr. Susan Mitmesser’s Tips & Tricks For Keeping Up Your Energy Levels – So You Can Keep Up With Your Kids!

Dr. Susan Mitmesser is the Vice President of Science & Technology at Nurish by Nature Made, where she brings deep expertise in nutrition and her passion for wellness to help communicate scientific findings and research to consumers.

1. LET’S START WITH THE OBVIOUS—SLEEP.
   Yes, getting a good night’s rest is often easier said than done. Sleep can influence your mood, appetite, ability to store memories, and your immune system. If you find that your z’s are escaping you, try committing to a nightly wind-down routine — turn off the TV and your cell phone thirty minutes before bed, enjoy a cup of bedtime tea like chamomile, and try a crossword puzzle or book until you feel tired.

2. ENJOY YOUR CAPPUCCINO, BUT DON’T NEGLECT YOUR WATER BOTTLE.
   A cup of coffee can be a delicious and effective jumpstart to your morning, but without steady hydration throughout the day, you’ll start to feel that fatigue creeping back in. Best practice is 64 oz of water a day. And, try to keep caffeine consumption to the first half of the day.

3. FIND TIME FOR EXERCISE YOU ENJOY.
   No need for an expensive at-home spin bike — a walk through the park or a YouTube yoga session are convenient and budget-friendly options that can improve your overall health and your mood. Plus, as busy parents, it’s important we carve out time for ourselves so we can bring our best to our kids — even when they drive us up the wall!

4. CONSIDER ADDING A VITAMIN SUPPLEMENT.
   There’s a reason mom always told you to take them, yet 9 in 10 adults aren’t meeting their nutrient needs. You can tailor your regimen to your unique goals or nutritional gaps. Stock up on vitamins like B12, which helps convert your food into energy.

5. TRY A RECHARGING MEDITATION.
   Mindfulness isn’t only for relaxation — a 5-minute morning meditation session or afternoon reset can be the boost we need to take on the day. There are lots of guided meditations available on apps for free — if you don’t love it on your first try, give it time — once you get the hang of it and find the style that works for you, the benefits are endless!
THIS GUIDE WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY MOVEMEANT FOUNDATION’S CORPORATE PARTNERS.

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