SOCIAL MEDIA & YOUR TEENAGER

FOXBORO NEXT GEN PARENTING SERIES

Hi everyone! Before I get started, a disclaimer: I'm not an expert in any of this. I don't go around teaching seminars, reading all the latest studies on screen time, social media, and the psychology of teenagers. The pace of change in technology is accelerating, and like you all, I'm pretty much figuring it out as I go along.

But I am a parent of two teenagers, and I am a communications professional who pays a lot of attention to how we attract and hold onto people's attention online. I was talking with Blaire one day about this stuff, and she suggested that I might be helpful to other parents wrestling with the same issues I am. So, here goes.

Think of this like a workout with a personal trainer. We all know the exercises, and we can all go to the gym ourselves and workout. But a trainer kicks it up a notch: they motivate us, help us understand the proper technique, and take some of the mental work of mapping out the workout away. I'm going to try and be your personal parenting-in-our-social-media-world trainer for the next 20 minutes or so.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF TRUST
CLARITY, CONSISTENCY, AND LISTENING

Mainly, I'm going to talk about how we build a culture of trust with our teenagers. It all starts with trust. When you put technology in a kid's hand, you're saying "I trust you with this incredibly powerful tool." It's like giving them the keys to the car, except it's a car that you aren't even sure you know how to drive! Yet you hope that they'll be safe and in control, because they're operating fully independently.

And that's the easy part! As parents, we all take steps of trust with our kids, giving them increasing levels of freedom: going out with friends, without us; staying home alone; driving the car; etc…. From the time our kids are young, we're nurturing them towards trustworthiness.

The thing is, this is great for a teenager. They mess up, and either feel bad or get punished (or both), and they're over it. They don't expect that if they come home late one time and get caught that they'll never be allowed to go out again, right?

But what happens when you make a mistake? They remember it FOREVER! Getting your teenager to trust you is just plain difficult. Teenagers are natural skeptics, generally unforgiving, and the influence of their peers is really strong.

That's why building a culture of trust in your home isn't mainly about *you* trusting *them*; it's mainly about *them* trusting *you*. You've got to earn it. So how do you do that?

Three things come to mind: *Clarity*, *Consistency*, and *Listening*.

CLARITY
WHAT'S ALLOWED, WHAT ISN'T
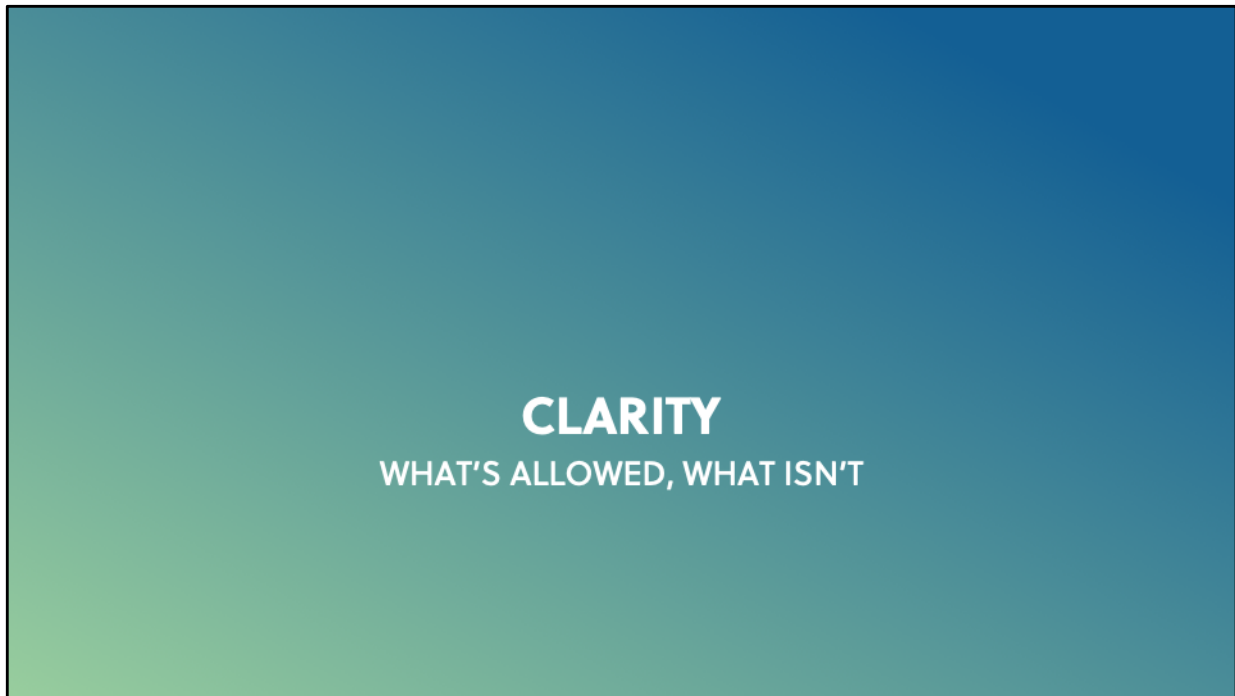
Clarity: make it clear what's allowed and what isn't.

I realize this is kind of like Parenting 101, but in the fast-changing world of technology and social media, it's not actually that easy! This is where your intentionality around creating the culture you want in your home starts. You, as the parent, set the ground rules. But what should they be?

Rules to think about

What social networks are allowed?
What apps are allowed?
What are the limits (screen time, data)?
Can accounts be public?

Here's a checklist of basic rules to think about:

What platforms are you allowed to access?
What apps are you allowed to have on your phone?
What are the limits you have on phone/computer use? (Data, screen time, etc.)
Can your accounts be public? (At my house: Nope. Not 'til you're 18.)

Practical applications: clarity

- You friend dad; you let dad follow you.
- No social media under the age limit. If the app says 13, it's 13.
- I can look at your phone at any time
- Screen time limits
- Banned apps: Snapchat

Practical applications: Some of the other rules at my house:
You friend dad; you let dad follow you.
No social media under the age limit. If the app says 13, it's 13.
I can look at your phone at any time (I'll talk about this more in a bit)
Screen time limits
Banned apps (Snapchat)

It's okay to make up rules as you go, as long as you're clear in how you communicate them. We had to implement the "no early morning FaceTime conversations in our household public spaces" rule after an unfortunate "nice jammies Mr. Willey" incident. I'll just leave that one there for your imagination and move on….

CONSISTENCY
WHAT'S AN EXCEPTION, WHAT'S A RULE?

Better to not have rules than have rules you break all the time, or let your kids get away with breaking. Enforcing rules on digital behavior can be so difficult! If you break the rules you've clearly stated, you're eroding trust. If you let them break your rules, you're eroding your ability to enforce them and remain close to your teenager.

Maintaining consistency

Rules build trust
Rules keep us on the same page
Exceptions are OK if they're infrequent

Practical applications: consistency

- Don't have app-based rules. If it's not okay to say face to face, it's not okay to say on Twitter.
- Don't let your kids profiles be public until they're 18 (if ever)
- Don't troll your kids! Embarrassment = distance
- Let up when it helps (like snow days)

Don't have app-based rules. If it's not okay to say in person, it's not okay on Instagram or Snapchat.

Help your kids maintain a bigger perspective by helping them understand that all these apps are kind of the same: they make you (and your information, and your attention, and your content) the product. And they profit from it.

I don't recommend allowing your kids' profiles to be public on any platform – even Twitter – until they're at least 18. If the app says you can't have an app until you're 13, you can't have it until you're 13. Period.

Consistency doesn't just apply to the formal rules; there are unwritten rules like "please don't embarrass me in front of my friends in a way that makes them want to share it." Be your consistent self, but DO NOT TROLL THEM. What's funny to you can wreck their day and distance them from you. I just deleted a pic from my story because I had a hunch it would embarrass them. I want them to trust me in their lives, I have to honor that trust with respect. I resist the incredible temptation to embarrass them online.

On sick days and snow days, I take the time limits of our wifi; they're bored and I get it.

LISTENING
TRUST STARTS WITH LISTENING

I don't approach social media like it's a separate thing. Your kids are doing things like keeping their Snap streak going, curating their Rinsta (and constantly messing with their Finsta).

Your kids social media is an expression of who they are, like the way they dress is, or the music they listen to is. Talk to them about it. Don't be judgy!

Don't just look at their followers and who they follow once; keep up on it.

Social media reflects who we want to be, not who we are

Teens carefully curate their Instagram

Teens think about what their friends think, not what you think

They are digital natives (it's not about the technology)

It's about creativity, peer pressure, and teen life

Practical applications: Follow your kids on social media. DO NOT FOLLOW YOUR KID'S FRIENDS (that's creepy).Require their accounts be set to private. Make what's cool on social part of your conversations. Ask them about what they think is cool! Just not while you're driving. That never works out.

PRIVACY
THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS ONLINE PRIVACY

Kids aren't as good as understanding "everyone out there" as we are; their view of the world tends to be a little more self- and friend-centric than ours. If your kids are like mine, they roll their eyes every time you talk about privacy online. "We know dad, everyone out there is out to get us."

There's one great way to cure them of that: take their phone and look through it. TELL THEM YOU MIGHT DO THIS AT ANY TIME. Look through their texts, their emails, their social media, WhatsApp, etc. We have this rule in my house.

BUT I take advantage of this rule VERY INFREQUENTLY. Our home is not a surveillance state! Trust needs to be modeled just like other behaviors: going to church, prayer, reading your Bible, caring for others, etc.

Here's the catch: I let them look at my phone any time they want. My social media, my texts, my email. This isn't just to reinforce the idea of trust; it's also to reinforce the idea that my stuff isn't more private than theirs.

But there isn't any such thing as "the past" either. There's only the stored-until-a-future-time present content. Pastor Bryan recently talked about Cancel Culture, and

frankly it's terrifying. Anything you share, comment on, like… those can show up at any time down the road.

Privacy practices that build trust

I can look through your phone anytime.
You can look through my phone anytime.
Going public is just a screen shot away.
Be careful who you let follow you; periodically review who's following you.

Periodically take their phone from them and read through their stuff.
Always think twice before accepting that follow request.

Others

Facebook: my parents' social network
YouTube: where I watch videos
Twitter: everyone here is so mad!
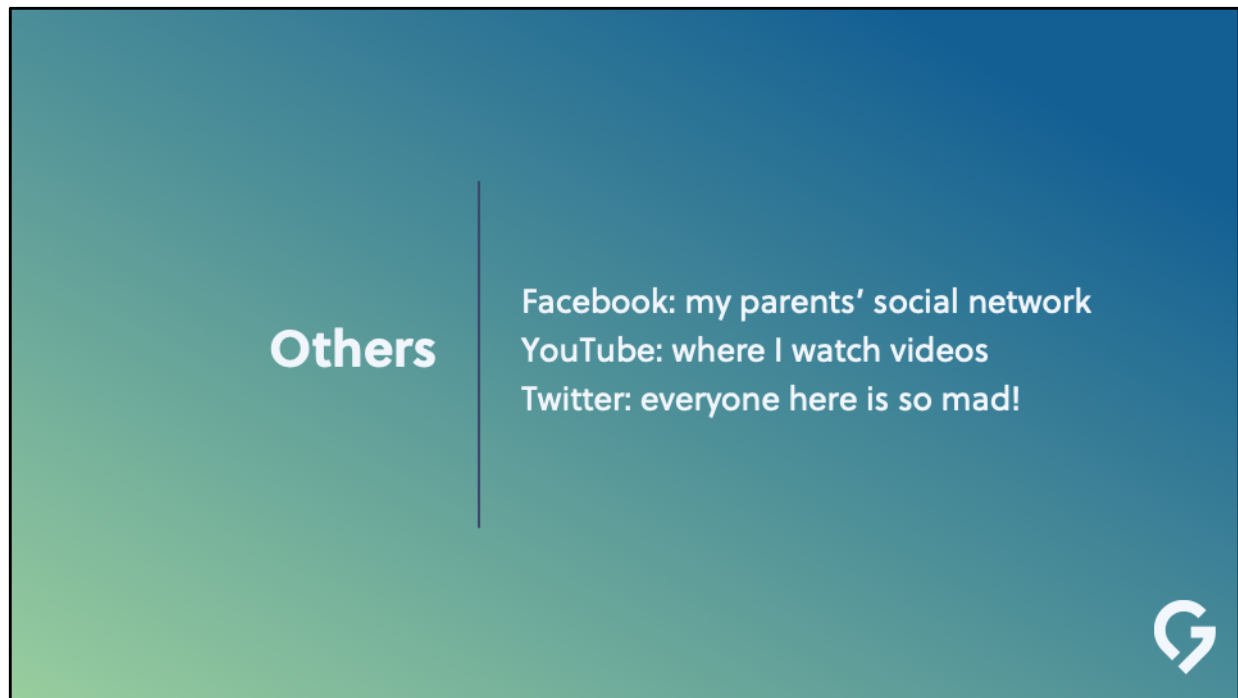
Things to know about all of them: it's not hard to find pornography and sexual content, violent/demented content, drug use content, etc. It's more prevalent on Snapchat, less so on other platforms but still there.

Useful Tools and Resources

- Verizon Smart Family app:
  https://www.verizonwireless.com/solutions-and-services/verizon-smart-family/
- Disney Circle: https://meetcircle.com
- Apple's Family Sharing: https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201088
- Common Sense Media's Parent Guides:
  https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parents-ultimate-guides

Verizon Smart Family app: https://www.verizonwireless.com/solutions-and-services/verizon-smart-family/

Disney Circle: https://meetcircle.com

Apple's Family Sharing: https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201088

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