

CASE SCENARIO FOR PROVIDERS

SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Medical Appointment with Jace (10)

Pediatric and adolescent providers can integrate conversations about media use into health consultations with increased confidence knowing that their acknowledgement and guidance can have a positive influence on youth and families. A healthy relationship with a trusted adult is a protective factor for youth mental health, and many youth trust health care providers' expertise.¹ Talk about digital media in the spirit of health and wellness, not judgment and control. Engage with youth and their caregivers by demonstrating curiosity and offering your partnership.²



TIP: Submit any questions you have to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) [Center for Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health Q&A Portal](#) for a personalized and evidence-based response. Patients can also look to the portal for additional support outside of the office.

The [AAP's policy statement](#) on media use offers some key recommendations for pediatricians.



CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
Social Media and
Youth Mental Health
FROM THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational Interviewing is a specific method of talking with people about change and growth to strengthen their own motivation and commitment. This evidence-based process is grounded in research about what makes conversations more or less helpful, allowing others to explore change more comfortably. Relational skills include demonstrating compassion, acceptance, partnership and empowerment. Technical skills include asking open-ended questions and using reflective listening statements. Because change is a process and rarely a straight line, the discussion moves like a dance and takes into consideration the person's values, beliefs, age, culture and social structures.

Jace is 10 years old. His mom is concerned about the videos he watches on YouTube. At the end of Jace's appointment, his provider opens a discussion around Jace's social media use.



Provider: It was great to see you both again today. Good luck with the start of the school year! Before we wrap up, Jace, I'd like to ask you a little about how you like to spend time online. Is that okay with you? (**Partnership**)

Jace: Yeah, sure.



Provider: What do you like to do for fun online? (**Open question**)

Jace: I like watching challenge videos on YouTube. You know, the ones where people do funny or intense challenges to win a lot of money!



Provider: It sounds like you enjoy the excitement and big wins. What else about those videos do you like? (**Reflection, Open question**)

Jace: Yeah, it's cool seeing people do things to win a bunch of money, and they get so happy when they win. My friends and I talk about it at school.



Provider: You like seeing how happy winning makes people, and you can connect with your friends over the videos. What do you and your friends think about the challenges themselves, like how safe or risky they might be? **(Reflection, Acceptance, Open question)**

Jace: We don't really think about it. We just laugh about the epic stuff they do.

Jace's Mom: I don't like how much the videos focus on money and showing off, and I worry about how dangerous some of the challenges are. I just don't want him and his friends to try anything that could hurt them.



Provider: That makes sense. There can be a lot of showing off and risky activities in videos, since that gets more clicks. What are your thoughts on that, Jace? **(Compassion, Open question)**

Jace: I honestly don't think about it much. I guess YouTubers are always flexing and showing off to get more likes. But I'm not interested in copying the challenges.



Provider: It's great that you can tell when YouTubers are trying to get attention. Your mom's concern for your safety makes sense, too. Some challenge videos may have riskier activities than she'd like you to see. How do you feel about that? **(Acceptance, Compassion, Open Question)**

Jace: I get it. I don't want to do something stupid and get hurt.

Jace's Mom: I know Jace is a smart kid, and I'm glad to hear he's not going to try the challenges himself, but I worry about the things he sees online. I don't trust the algorithm. I've heard about parental controls that can help me monitor what he's watching and give us both some say over what he sees, but I don't really know how to use them.



Provider: That's a smart way to think about it. Encouraging age-appropriate exploration is a great next step. I appreciate both of you sharing your experiences and concerns here. Would it be okay for me to share a few resources for building health habits online, including a [Glossary of Digital Media Platforms](#) with information about parental controls, for you and your mom to look over? **(Affirmation, Partnership)**

SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How did the provider build partnership?
2. What can empowerment look like between a provider and a youth client? Between a provider and parent?
3. Where is there room for acceptance and choice in conversations like these?
4. What would you do differently in this interaction to support growth and change?
5. What cues from this patient gave you the sense he was engaged?
6. When working with youth patients, consider how digital media impacts their experience of the world. What questions could you ask to better understand their experiences and motivations?



Social Media and Early Adolescence: What should be on your radar

The early tween and teen years are a time of growing independence, changing bodies, exploring identity and building a solid sense of self. During this phase, adolescents begin to place increased importance on relationships with peers, which parents might experience as losing connection. It's an important time to establish regular conversations about their digital lives – who they are and what they interact with online.

Use [Common Sense Media](#) to check ratings and reviews of video games, movies, apps and TV, and pick ones with positive social and identity messages. Given platform policies around age and that the research shows more downsides than upsides to social media for kids under 13, we suggest waiting until at least age 13 before starting a social media account. Help them find alternates like messaging apps (e.g., iMessage, Messenger Kids, Kinzoo Messenger).



RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

Visit the [AAP Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health website](#) and check out the following resources for more information and tools:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** [Using Motivational Interviewing to Discuss Family Media Habits](#)
- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** [Talking Points for Media Use Based on Parent/Child Concerns](#)
- **Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers:** [Understanding Motivational Interviewing](#)
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing:** [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#)

Resources for providers and parents:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** [The 5 Cs of Media Use](#)
- **HealthyChildren.org:** [Family Media Plan](#)

The following resources can be shared directly with parents and youth:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:**
 - » [Building Healthy Relationships with Media: Essential Skills for Children 10 and Younger](#)
 - » [Family Social Media Tip Sheet](#)
 - » [Glossary of Digital Media Platforms](#)
 - » [Social Media and Youth Mental Health Q and A Portal](#)
 - » [Social Media: Enjoy the Upsides and Avoid the Downsides](#)
 - » [Social Media Tips for Teens](#)
- **Crisis Lines:**
 - » [SAMHSA's National Helpline](#) is a 24/7 treatment referral and information service.
 - » [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) offers 24/7, confidential support for people in distress.
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing:**
 - » [Youth Hub](#)

REFERENCES

1. Snell, A. & Kline, J. (2022, July–October). Findings from an online assessment of youth ages 13–18 years old [Unpublished internal document]. Commissioned from Lake Research Partners by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.
2. Moreno, M.A., Klein, J.D., Kaseeska, K., Gorzkowski, J., Harris, D., Davis, J., Gotlieb, E., & Wasserman, R. (2023). A cluster randomized controlled trial of a primary care provider-delivered social media counseling intervention. *Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 73(5), 924–930. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.06.007>

Funding for the Center of Excellence was made possible by Grant No. SM087180 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, or an endorsement by, SAMHSA/HHS or the U.S. Government.



NATIONAL
COUNCIL
for Mental
Wellbeing