



FAMILY TIP SHEET

Common Sense on Boys, Girls, and Media Messages

What's the Issue?

In today's 24/7 media world, girls and boys are flooded with messages about how they should look and act. The images and stories kids see in the media play a powerful role in framing their sense of what's "acceptable" and what isn't. The media often encourages narrow definitions of girls' and boys' roles, and these definitions are now making their way into the digital world. As kids grow older and become more active online, they may encounter more extreme attitudes about differences between girls and boys. Our media landscape has widened — creating new forms and sources of pressure for girls to look pretty and "sexy," and for boys to toughen up and "act like man."

Why Does It Matter?

When kids see the same gender stereotypes portrayed over and over again in media, they can become deeply confused about how the world sees them and what they can grow up to be. They may also form judgments about others based on what they see in stories and images. When kids are exposed to rigid ideas about boys' and girls' roles through their peers — both online or offline — it may be more difficult to convince them not to adopt those ideas.

What Families Can Do

In this digital age, it's important for kids to develop media-literacy skills early on. Parents, relatives, teachers, and other adult mentors are in an important position to help kids make sense of the gender messages they see on TV, at the movies, in ads, in games, and online — and to encourage them not to continue harmful stereotypes.

common sense says

Point out photos that look too good to be true. When you're standing in line at the grocery store with your children, take a look at the magazine covers. Explain how publishers use computers to airbrush images of people. Point out elements of our bodies that would normally be captured in photos but are missing there. Where are the freckles, veins, or wisps of hair?

Seek out positive role models. The characters and stars that kids love may not show a complete picture of boys' and girls' roles. Help them by finding role models in books, on TV, in movies, and in real life that show kids how they can be recognized for their talents and brains rather than their looks.

Challenge assumptions. Depending on your kids' ages, you can talk about common stereotypes and ask your kids whether or not to accept them. Use examples from the real world — like all blondes are dumb, for example — to show that media portrayals often aren't accurate.





FAMILY TIP SHEET

Common Sense on Digital Life

What's the Issue?

We may think of our kids' online, mobile, and technological activities as "digital life," but to them it's just life. In their world, being able to connect and communicate 24/7 from just about any location is normal – and expected! Between kindergarten and fifth grade, kids go through rapid growth in learning. From playing games on their mom or dad's cell phone, to learning how to point and click a mouse, to navigating online by themselves, kids this age are participating in a connected culture.

Why Does It Matter?

The stakes are high because our kids' technological abilities can be greater than their maturity and judgment. Having unrestricted access to information and people can result in gaining a wealth of information and experiences but also access to inappropriate content. Just as kids learn to eat properly, swim safely, or drive a car carefully, they need to know how to live in the digital world responsibly and respectfully. Their success depends on their abilities to use digital media to create, collaborate, and communicate well with others. Those who master these skills in using digital tools will benefit from the digital world's awesome power.

common sense says

Use bookmarks and safe search. Teach your child to bookmark his or her favorite sites. This way, your child is less likely to go somewhere online you don't want. Use safe search options on web browsers, such as Epic or DuckDuckGo, to make sure your child can search safely.

Consider using filtering and blocking software. Some parents find these tools to be useful to help protect younger children from accessing inappropriate content.

Have older siblings help. Have your older children help teach your younger children how to be responsible and safe online. Let the older ones know that you want them to help you protect their little brothers or sisters online.

Share wisdom. Kids often don't understand how their actions affect others. We do. We teach kids to choose their words carefully, play nicely with others, and respect their teachers. Now we have to extend those lessons to a vast, invisible world. As a parent, you can translate your values into the digital world and help kids understand the implications of their actions.

Seek balance. If our kids are going to thrive with digital media, we must balance the negative with the positive, privacy with protection. As our children grow, they need more independence and privacy. But parents have to be sure their kids know how to be safe and responsible before letting them loose.

Keep an open mind. We don't see the world the way our kids do. We don't help our kids when we judge their lives through the lens of a non-digital world. It's important for us to understand that our kids will spend much of their lives in a connected world, where everyone creates and communicates. We need to help them to enjoy it and learn from it.