

Understanding Teen Online Safety from a Youth Advocate's Perspective



Written by:
Mona Murakami Cho



In today's technology-driven world, the discussion about technology's impact on youth mental health and wellbeing is more prevalent than ever. As a youth advocate for online safety and the founder of **DOSE Initiative**, a non-profit dedicated to raising awareness about online abuse, I often work with youth, parents, educators, and policymakers navigating complex decisions about children's technology use. Some believe their child should have a phone at age 10, while others advocate for waiting until they turn 18. Although there are various approaches to addressing technology use amongst youth, one thing is clear: technology is here to stay.

From what I'm seeing as a young person and my experience as an advocate, I believe technology has equal caveats and benefits for youth. To me, we should all be working towards fostering a healthy and safe digital space to preserve the positives of technology and mitigating the harms. Youth voices should be included when making decisions on technology—whether those decisions are as small as your nuclear family, or as big as an entire school district. This guide aims to shed light on the youth perspective of this topic and provide practical tips and resources for parents, educators, and caregivers.



Learn more:

fosi.org & doseinitiative.org

What I'm Seeing



The Positives: Community

Technology and social media is a lifeline for many teen communities. Whether that is through Instagram groups or Discord chats, teens often find safe spaces with other teens online that are often inaccessible offline. For example, LGBTQ+ youth who struggle to find affirming communities offline often turn to online spaces for connection and support. According to a 2024 survey by The Trevor Project, 68% of LGBTQ+ teens have found affirming spaces and communities online, compared to 52% and 40% who reported the same at school and at home respectively. These digital communities provide connections, resources, and friendships that are critical to preserve.

The Negatives: Harassment and Image-Based Abuse

At school and between my peers, I see teens facing online harassment including forms of image-based abuse such as non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) and deepfake Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). These forms of digital violence can have serious psychological effects, leading to anxiety, depression, and withdrawal from social spaces. These harms amplify the pressures youth confront in our digitally-immersed world. Teens need protection and support to navigate these challenges.



🔍 Learn more:

fosi.org & doseinitiative.org

Where Can We Go from Here?

For Educators and School Administrators: Involve Teens in Technology Policies

Amid new state laws regarding phone usage in schools, many schools are establishing technology committees to pass and implement technology restriction policies in their school district. Technology policies in schools should not be created without input from the students they influence. By involving teens in these conversations, schools can craft resolutions, policies, and guidelines that balance safety with the realities of technology being embedded into our generation's culture. This can manifest through:

- Hosting student-led discussions on technology policies.
- Interviewing or surveying students on their thoughts on technology policies.
- Recognizing existing data on the impact of withdrawals of technology from teens.

For Parents: Facilitate Healthy Conversations About Technology

I interact with many parents who are torn on when, where, and how they should integrate technology into their childrens' lives. When you as a parent have conversations with your partner or co-parent about this, or when you are researching this topic, include your kids in these conversations and activities! These actions can make your children comfortable with talking to you about this topic. Much of the harm youth can be exposed to online can be mitigated if children feel comfortable asking their parents for help and guidance.

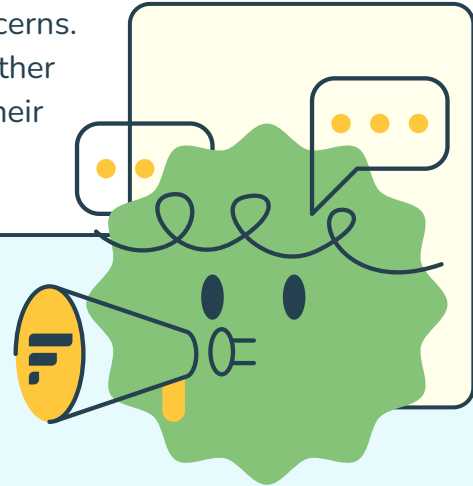


 Learn more:

fosi.org & doseinitiative.org

I believe that by engaging teens in your conversations instead of focusing solely on restrictions, you can cultivate a home environment where your teens understand technology boundaries and feel agency in their digital lives. Some strategies include:

- Asking open-ended questions like, "What do you enjoy about being online?" or "How does interacting online make you feel?" rather than leading first with your concerns.
- Setting technology boundaries *with* teens rather than *for* them, so they feel ownership over their digital wellbeing.



Resources for Parents, Caregivers, and Educators

If you're looking for guidance on fostering a balanced approach to technology in your teen's life, here are some valuable resources:

Books:

- [Mediatrician's Guide](#) by Dr. Michael Rich
- [Behind Their Screens](#) by Emily Weinstein & Carrie James

I read both of these books alongside my mother, and reading them helped us better understand each other's perspectives on technology. I would highly recommend these books for parents to read with their teens, as they provide research-backed insights, authentic experiences, and a focus on empowering families with the knowledge they need to navigate the digital world.



 Learn more:

fosi.org & doseinitiative.org

Online Resources:

- **FOSI Good Digital Parenting Platform** – Online FOSI Resource that offers timely, practical tips and tools for parents navigating their child's digital life.
- **Thorn for Parents** – Provides guidance on preventing online child exploitation and fostering digital safety at home.

About the Author



Mona is a high school junior and an activist for online safety and gender equality. As the founder and president of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit DOSE (Digital Online Safety & Empowerment) Initiative, she is committed to raising awareness of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) and empowering young people to navigate the online world with safety, confidence, and resilience.

Mona's grassroots efforts include giving presentations on TFGBV at middle and high schools, community organizations, and nonprofits, as well as creating social media content. Her top-down efforts involve speaking engagements with federal and state governmental agencies and public organizations to advocate for policy changes. Through her work, she champions survivor-centered solutions, striving to create a future where her generation can thrive in today's tech-driven world free from harassment, discrimination, and exploitation.

This resource was developed by FOSI and DOSE Initiative

