



Media Literacy for Parents



Media Literacy 101: Media Messages They Might See

 Meta + **NAMLE** National
Association
for Media
Literacy
Education

Media Messages They Might See

Is a meme a joke? Is an ad always obvious? How do you say “gif”?



These are just some of the questions you might have about the media messages your teens might encounter as they explore social media.

Because our teens use social media for so many different reasons and in so many different ways— to socialize, to educate themselves, to experience new ideas and perspectives, to express themselves — it’s highly likely they’ll come across content that feels new or even foreign to the adults in their lives. We might be nervous about what they see online or want to chat with them about different media messages to better understand their experiences.

Like navigating a map, traversing online content requires us to recognize different forms of content and become savvy to the techniques used to communicate so that our online experiences are as enjoyable as possible and we get where we want to go. We know our teens are going to see news, entertainment, personal stories, celebrity gossip, sports scores, and even false information. Much of that content will be presented through specific types of media messages, such as memes, gifs, sponsored content, satire, or trends. Use this tip sheet to explore these different types of media messages and build your foundational knowledge. Then, use the suggested questions and actions steps to engage with your young people in more meaningful ways about their online experiences and the messages they might see online.



Learn more: meta.com/familycenter

Flex Your Knowledge

Types of Messages

Trending/Trends — Does your money jiggle jiggle, or does it fold? Have you ever tried to capture the perfect audio of bacon sizzling in a pan? If neither of these questions make sense, brushing up on social media trends is your next move. Social media users tend to capitalize on trends—popular audio, video, or visual cues—as they craft and share messages online. You might see a message with music that’s popular, or your teen might recreate an influencer’s photo shoot or a dance video to be part of a trend. Engaging with content that’s trending can be a meaningful way for young people to connect with their peers online.

Satire — Has your teen ever rolled their eyes at your interpretation of social media, sighing in exasperation over how you missed the joke or didn’t see the point? You might have missed a moment of satire—content that exaggerates, uses humor or even ridicules in order to make a point about a contemporary issue. Satire is often difficult to interpret through text alone and is often misinterpreted. Looking for visual, sound, or context clues can help you to determine if someone’s words are authentic, face-value opinions or if they are meant to be satirical and make a larger point about an issue.

Memes — Picture this: A Star Wars image that replaces Jedi faces with politicians. Or: An image from a classic movie manipulated to change the skin color of the characters. Memes are layered, nuanced visuals (typically a static image) that can spread rapidly online. Creators and sharers of memes capitalize on trending photos, cultural references, and iconic graphics and visuals to express their opinions or ideas on a wide variety of topics. Memes are often layered, can seem like an “inside joke,” and typically require some background knowledge or context to understand.

Gif — An image of a cat about to push a glass off a table with flashing text that says “how my day is going.” An image of a Lord of the Rings character furrowing his brow with the text “one does not simply walk into Mordor,” sent to a friend to illustrate just how tough it is to ask someone on a first date. Gifs are often simple animated photos that help communicate emotions or reactions. Like a meme, they may rely on trending visuals, but they are often easier to interpret and are used more casually in online conversations.

Sponsored content — When your teen comes across a social media message from their favorite athlete just raving about their new athletic shoes, chances are that media message is sponsored content. Sponsored content is promotional content that looks like authentic, user-created content but is designed to advertise a product or promote a brand. These types of messages are legally required to note that they are ads, but some might use the hashtag #sponsored instead.

Talk It Out

- ➔ **Guide the discussion:** Building healthy relationships with your teens around social media requires open-minded discussion that is aimed first at understanding and learning about their online worlds.

Consider these starting points for conversation:



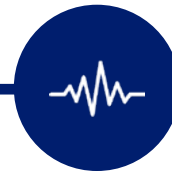
Get a sense of how often your teen sees sponsored content when they are online by asking about the brands or people they connect with whom they don't personally know. Then, ask what they learn or what they enjoy from following these accounts. Do they know that these types of messages are designed to make them want to buy something?



Ask your teen to share the funniest memes they see on social media each week as a way to connect over what's trending and to learn about what content they interact with.



Online conflicts are all-too-common when we misinterpret messages. Ask your teen how they identify satire and how their friends are using humor and exaggeration to discuss issues that are important to them.



For teens who enjoy creating or engaging with trending content, consider asking whether that engagement is amplifying their connections and creativity or amplifying their "fears of missing out." What's their motivation for being part of an Internet trend?

Action Steps



Learn more about how sponsored messages work by following accounts of your own—maybe it’s a yoga creator or a food brand that posts recipes. Then consider how these messages contribute to your life. Are they an added benefit? Do you have to monitor your time more carefully and be mindful to take breaks?



Embrace the trend—Pick a trend you don’t mind participating in, and make it a contest. Who can recreate those dance steps best? Who can pick the best photo for the hottest trending audio right now? Offering an incentive or prize can help reticent teens join in the fun (may we suggest swapping a chore for a trend or supreme control over the dinner menu for a night?)



Turn family photos into family gifs. Scroll through your photo library together, and choose images of your family members that convey strong emotion or humorous reactions (make sure your teens are on board with your selections—this should feel funny, not embarrassing). When the moment is right, try sending those images to communicate with each other instead of text.

