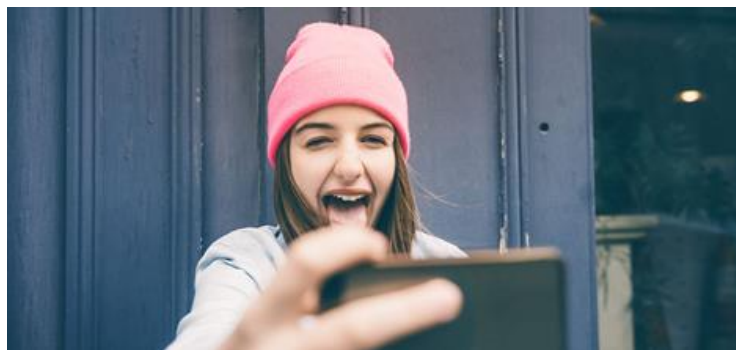




Dangerous Internet Challenges – Understanding Their Appeal to Kids

Internet challenges can be fascinating to teens (/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Stages-of-Adolescence.aspx), who can be both impulsive and drawn to behavior that gets attention – especially in social media.

Some social media challenges, like the ALS ice bucket challenge or the mannequin challenge, can be fun and positive activities. But other challenges that pop up on the internet are dangerous and can lead to permanent harm.



You may have heard of social media trends like the Tide pod challenge, the choking game (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4839780/>) or "blackout" challenge, the cinnamon challenge or the salt and ice challenge. Then there's the Benadryl challenge and another that involves cooking chicken in NyQuil (the Sleepy Chicken challenge), which prompted the U.S. Food & Drug Administration to warn (<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/recipe-danger-social-media-challenges-involving-medicines>) against the dangers of medicine misuse.

These trendy online challenges can cause serious injuries and poisonings, and some can even be fatal. Being aware of these challenges and understanding why they lure teens is important for all parents.

Why are teens susceptible to social media challenges?

Teens' brains (/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Whats-Going-On-in-the-Teenage-Brain.aspx) are still developing. The part of the brain that handles rational thought, the prefrontal cortex, is not fully developed until the mid-20s. This means teens are naturally more impulsive and likely to act before thinking through all of the ramifications.

The role of social media

Social media rewards outrageous behavior, and the more outrageous, the bigger the bragging rights. It's a quick moving, impulsive environment, and the fear of losing out is real for teens. That environment plays into a teen's underdeveloped ability to think through their actions and possible consequences.

Kids won't necessarily stop to consider that laundry detergent (/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Laundry-Room-and-Detergent-Safety.aspx) is a poison that can burn their throats and damage their airways. Or that misusing (<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-warns-about-serious-problems-high-doses-allergy-medicine-diphenhydramine-benadryl>) medications like diphenhydramine (/English/safety-prevention/at-home/medication-safety/Pages/Diphenhydramine-Benadryl-Antihistamine.aspx) (Benadryl) and similar medicines can cause serious heart problems, seizures and coma. What they will focus on is that a popular kid in class did this and got hundreds of likes and comments.

The role of parents – building a better brain

As a parent, you can help your teen build intellectual muscle. Here's how:

- start a conversation, ask your kids about the biggest challenges they've heard about in their circle of friends.
- encourage them to see if they can surprise you. Ask them (calmly and without judgment) what they think about the challenge. This helps build the skill of judging risk by talking about what could happen to someone who takes

the challenge. You can still exercise your parental options such as limiting contact with certain kids or making specific activities off limits. [Back to Top](#)

2. If your child mention an interest in participating in a challenge, use open-ended questions to encourage them to think through each step of the challenge. Ask them to consider the worst outcome. Ask them to think about why they would do it, and if it's worth it. Are likes and comments worth hours in the emergency department?
3. Be sure to "friend" your kids on social media. Staying in touch on their preferred communication platforms can help you keep in touch with what goes on in their day-to-day lives. Watch their stories for clues about what is going on in school and with their friends. Let your children know that if you pay for the device and the wireless network, they have to friend you in exchange.
4. Sometimes kids are more willing to talk about their peers than themselves. Asking questions about school trends, friends and fads may yield more answers than direct questions about their own activities. No matter what, it is important to keep the lines of communication open and avoid passing judgment. Instead, calmly discuss the dangers in those choices.

While children and teens continue to grow, learn more about life, friends, and their place in the world, remember that their brains are still rapidly developing. As a parent, you can help nurture that growth and help your teens develop thoughtful, rational thinking - skills that will continue to be important years to come.

More information

- [How to Connect with Your Teen about Smart & Safe Media Use \(/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Points-to-Make-With-Your-Teen-About-Media.aspx\)](/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Points-to-Make-With-Your-Teen-About-Media.aspx)
- [How to Make a Family Media Use Plan \(/English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx\)](/English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx)
- [Social Media & Your Child's Mental Health \(/English/family-life/Media/Pages/social-media-and-your-childs-mental-health-what-research-says.aspx\)](/English/family-life/Media/Pages/social-media-and-your-childs-mental-health-what-research-says.aspx)
- [Stages of Adolescence \(/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Stages-of-Adolescence.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/Stages-of-Adolescence.aspx)
- [A Recipe for Danger: Social Media Challenges Involving Medicines \(https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/recipe-danger-social-media-challenges-involving-medicines\)](https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/recipe-danger-social-media-challenges-involving-medicines)

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