THE **FAMILY DINNER** PROJECT.ORG

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BYTES & BITES:
A Community Dinner Guide About Digital Life.

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Looking for a way to bring families in your community together and have interesting, relevant conversations about social media and technology? Host a Community Media Dinner! Invite families to join an evening filled with adults and kids sharing perspectives, discussing hot topics, and learning more about each other's experiences.

Parents crave opportunities to have fun and engaging discussions with kids, especially when they're related to digital life. And kids are eager to share their opinions -- especially when adults ask relevant questions and convey genuine interest. Family dinner is a perfect time for these conversations. Plus, having an enjoyable and meaningful conversation over dinner is a great reminder of how valuable it is to sit down together.

Use this guide to bring a Community Media Dinner to your school. It's packed with field-tested activities and tips from Common Sense Education and the Family Dinner Project to ensure you have everything you need to make your event a success.

This handbook includes:

- An overview of the evening's flow and activities
- Logistics for hosting a Community Media Dinner, including information about planning and night-of events
- Field-tested content to use for the activities

OVERVIEW

Goals for the event:

- Engage families in important conversations about technology and social media
- Support families in their efforts to have more frequent and more engaging, fun family dinners
- Enjoy time together as a community
- Recognize the value of family meals

Summary of the evening:

1. Introduction (5 minutes):
   - *Welcome remarks*
   - *Rationale for family dinner as a time and place to talk about technology*
   - *Overview of the evening*
2. Icebreaker (10 minutes): Low- and/or high-tech
3. Appetizer (20 minutes): Making the food and Post-it activity
4. Dinner (30 minutes): Eating while discussing technology dilemmas
5. Closing comments and future plans: (10 minutes)
6. Dessert and mingling: (15 minutes)

LOGISTICS

Step 1: Schedule

- Work with school administrators and teachers to plan your Community Media Dinner.

- Find dates and times that work well for other parents. If this is the first event you're hosting, you can check with a teacher, administrator, or current/former Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) coordinators about which days and times get the highest family attendance.

- As we've designed it, the event lasts about 90 minutes, though we recommend you plan for two hours. (People may arrive a bit late, so you may start a bit later than anticipated, and transition times between activities can take longer than expected.) Decide whether you want to include more time for mingling and casual conversation and how you want to modify the proposed timing and activities.

HINT: You'll want to avoid nights with big community events. It also may be helpful to recruit a teacher or a few older siblings who aren't participating to stay during the event and watch younger children (depending on the age of student you want to engage), since some parents may want to come but need childcare in the evenings. It's also helpful to avoid busy times of year, such as the start of school and times close to the winter holidays.

Step 2: Plan

- Find a space to hold the event. Take stock of the available options and try to find a place where people will be able to comfortably sit and eat while they talk (cafeterias are usually a good option). Try to choose a space where you can spread tables out enough that conversations aren't happening on top of each other. Determine how many people you can comfortably seat.

- Depending on the number of participants you can accommodate, the size of your school, and the turnout you expect, decide whether you want to invite families from one particular class, a specific grade, or a band of grades (e.g., 6th- to 8th-grade families).

- Plan for an easy, crowd-pleasing meal. We recommend trying either a taco bar or a pasta dinner. In both cases, you can start with a simple appetizer that people prep and eat at the table (guacamole, salsa, and chips work well before tacos, or try a simple salad with optional add-ins as a starter for pasta). Cake, brownies, or cookies make for a fun and easy dessert. (If resources don't allow for an ordered-in dinner or for food prepared by the school's cafeteria team, consider trying a potluck so you can keep the feel of a family meal).

- Find a few volunteers, other parents or teachers, to help with setup and cleanup.

- Decide which dilemmas you want to use for the dinner discussion. Try to pick topics you think will resonate with families in your community. Tables will discuss different numbers of dilemmas (some might get through only one, whereas others might get through four) depending on the flow of their conversations and the amount of time you provide. Make sure to give participants more content than you think they need; we recommend preparing packets with five to seven dilemmas. Check in with a teacher or another parent to get a second opinion on the topics.

HINT: Don't forget that you'll need plates, cutlery, napkins, and cups, as well as utensils for serving.
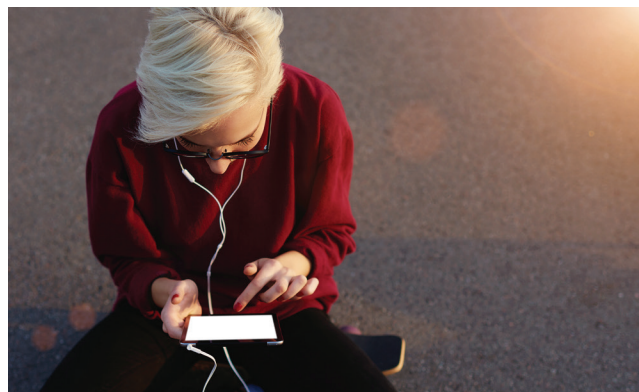
Step 3: Invite

Get the word out! Copy, paste, and tweak the following message for an email or newsletter:

Community Media Dinner and Digital Media Conversation
On [Date] at [Time]

Unsure what questions to ask about Instagram? Confused about digital footprints? Curious how your kids think about privacy and Internet safety? Please join us for a Community Media Dinner and cross-generational conversation about technology and social media! We'll do some cooking, do some chatting, and enjoy a meal together.

Please RSVP to [email address]. Participation is free, but space is limited.

Step 4: Recruit facilitators

- Once you have a sense of how many people are coming, you can determine how many tables you will fill. If your space and tables allow it, we recommend six to eight people per table and having both parents and kids at each table. You'll want to recruit at least one parent facilitator per table. Facilitators will help with the digital-dilemma discussion portion of the evening.

- One of the best ways to ensure that the evening runs smoothly is to make sure facilitators are prepared to keep their tables on track and guide conversation. Two ways you can help facilitators get ready are: 1). share our Facilitator's One-Pager ahead of time to give them a sense of what to expect, and 2). schedule a training call (you can do this using a dial-in conference line or over Google Hangouts) to provide an overview of the plan for the evening and discuss any questions.

Step 5: Prep

- If you plan to show the "Oversharing" video during the introduction, make sure you have a projector and sound system so people can see and hear the video from their seats.

- Gather supplies for the appetizer activity. You'll want at least two sheets of giant Post-its, plus regular-size Post-its and pens or markers. Write "What we want our parents to know … " at the top of one and "What we want our kids to know … " at the top of the other.

- Print out digital-dilemma packets for the dinner discussion, and make sure you have enough copies so every participant

(child and adult) has his or her own. Place the packets in the middle of each table before everyone arrives.

- Confirm the food plan, including where you'll set up the buffet. Make sure you have plates, cups, napkins, and utensils, plus anything you need for serving.

- Select the resources you want to make available as take-home materials, and print copies to distribute at the end of the night.

- Double-check the RSVP list to make sure you have enough food, facilitators, and seats.

Step 6: Host

Welcome everyone to the event! Encourage adults to sit with their kids but also with at least one other adult/kid combination at their tables; you want families to stick together but also take advantage of the opportunity for a slightly different dynamic and the benefit of some outside perspectives. Ask facilitators to spread themselves out so they're sitting one per table.

Explain that the evening is divided into four main parts: an introduction, an appetizer activity, the dinner discussion, and a casual dessert with time for mingling.

INTRODUCTION:

Once people are seated at their tables, give them an overview of the evening, ask facilitators at each table to identify themselves, and get started with an icebreaker. We have two icebreaker options, a high-tech version and a low-tech version. Review both in the field-tested content section below and choose the one that makes most sense for your group.

HINT: In your introduction, include reasons why dinner is a great time to talk about technology and to have other meaningful conversations. You can acknowledge the irony that dinner is often one of the few times of the day when most families turn off gadgets.

APPETIZER ACTIVITY:

Ask adults and kids to form separate groups. Put the Post-it notes you prepared on the wall so the adults have the "What we want our kids to know … " version and vice versa. Invite everyone to jot on the Post-it notes any thoughts or ideas about what they want the other group to know, remember, or understand related to technology and social media. Give the groups about 15 minutes for this activity.

HINT: It's helpful to have one facilitator with each group to keep everyone on task. Also, if you have a large group, you may want to consider breaking it up into several adults–only and kids–only groups. Aim for each group to be no bigger than 15. Remember, if you're going to split up into a series of smaller groups, each group should have a giant Post–it to stick their responses on.

While everyone is working on the brainstorm, have them also dive into making the appetizer. Depending on what you think will work best for your group, you can have the appetizers already set up on the tables or you can have people do the prep while they're brainstorming (e.g., you can chop ingredients for the guacamole or salad ahead of time and put them on the tables, then invite people to mash/mix/toss while they eat, or you can have the appetizers on the tables ready to be eaten).

DINNER DISCUSSION:

Have the adults and kids return to their original tables. Start by telling everyone the food plan (if you have dinner set up as a buffet, you may want to tell tables you will invite them to go up one at a time). Next, explain that the digital dilemmas are designed to facilitate conversation, and they can be used in whatever way each table wants. Note that the dilemmas are all based on real kids' stories. Each table should feel free to skip around, change the order, or deviate from the questions. Remind everyone that there are no right or wrong answers and this is really an opportunity to learn and share. Give the groups about 40 minutes for this portion of the evening.

HINT: It can be helpful to provide some guidelines for having a conversation when there may be different points of view. For example, everyone gets a turn to talk with equal time. Suggest that people be curious rather than critical.

DESSERT:

Invite everyone to think about what they might add to the giant Post-its following their dinner conversations. Make sure the regular Post-its are available, and encourage people to add to their group's original brainstorm during dessert. Let everyone know they can use dessert time to mingle and connect with others as well as do a "gallery walk" and check out the other groups' Post-its (have participants add Post-its of a different color so everyone can see which ideas are new).

- If you've prepared any take-home resources, encourage families to pick them up before they leave.

- Say thank you, share any next steps or resources, and give families a chance to share feedback about the evening, whether in person or with a note.

Step 7: Follow up

After the event, follow up with all the adults by email. If you're able to snap a picture of each of the giant Post-its at the end of the evening, consider sending it with your email. This is a great opportunity to say thanks again for their participation and to capitalize on the momentum of the evening to keep the conversation going. Check out our Conversation Cases and Teen Panel Guide for other events to bring to your community next!

FIELD-TESTED CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Option 1 (high-tech):

Play the "Oversharing" video. After watching together, ask everyone at each table to name the type of online oversharing that surprises him or her most. VIDEO: (https://www.commonsensemedia.org/videos/oversharing-think-before-you-post). Made in collaboration with our partner Flocabulary, the experts in educational hip-hop, this animated music video raps about the hazards of oversharing online and emphasizes a thoughtful approach to digital footprints. Tweens, teens, and adults can laugh and learn about the ups and downs of communicating and connecting in the digital world.

Option 2 (low-tech):

The event is all about media and family, so warm up by having everyone at each table share his or her favorite dinner scene or food moment from a movie.

Option 3:

Depending on your timing, there may be time for both icebreakers. Option 2 only takes five minutes, so it's possible to start with it to get folks engaged and then jump into the video.

APPETIZER ACTIVITY

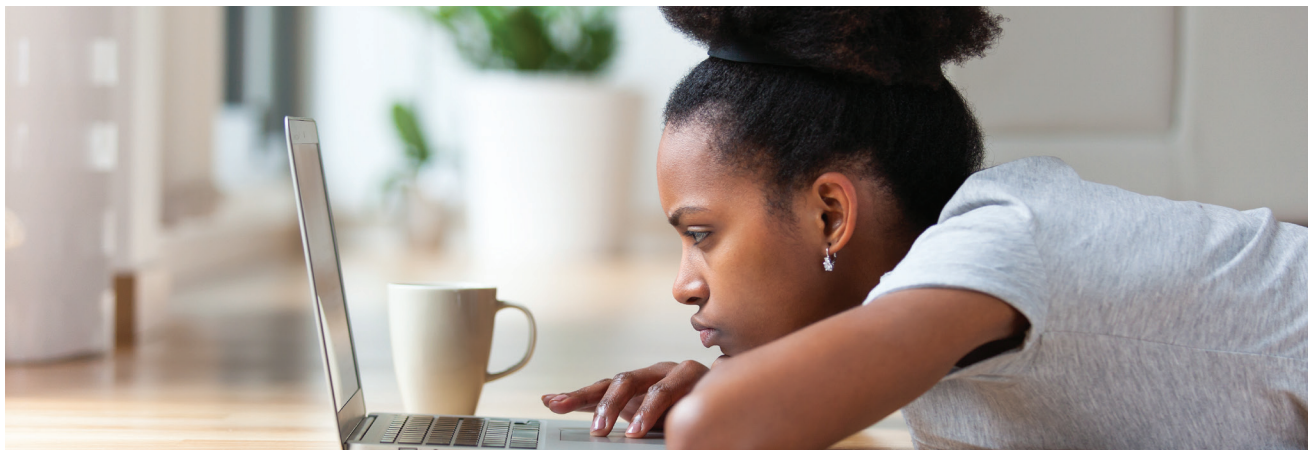See description in the *Logistics: Host* section (above) for details.

DINNER DISCUSSION

We've included eight of our digital dilemmas here. Pick five to seven that you think will resonate most with your community.

DIGITAL DILEMMAS

All available online at www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/connecting-families/share

DILEMMA A: DISTRACTED

Every night, Cruz gets home from school and starts doing his homework. Most of his homework is on the computer, so he often has multiple windows open and will occasionally check back and forth between an assignment and different websites. Sometimes he even finds social media helpful, because he can chat a friend from class to get help. Cruz's mom told him she doesn't want him using the Internet while he does his homework because she feels like he gets too distracted, but Cruz told her he actually can't do his homework assignments without it. Plus, he's getting his homework done and he's doing well in the class—so who cares if it takes a little longer because he gets distracted once in a while?

- What's your gut reaction to this story?
- How do you find technology helpful for learning?
- Do you ever find yourself distracted by social media or your cell phone when you're trying to focus on work? What do you do when that happens?
- What do you think of Cruz's argument that it shouldn't matter how long his homework takes so long as he's doing well in the class? Are there any issues with his logic?
- What advice would you give to Cruz's mom?

DILEMMA B: IT'S NOT EVEN MY POST!

Melissa was allowed to get social media accounts on one condition: She had to give her dad the passwords so he could log on to her accounts. Melissa didn't mind the rule because she never posted anything inappropriate, and it seemed to help him chill out about the whole thing. The only problem was that Melissa couldn't control what her friends were posting, and her dad would hold it against her whenever her friends shared anything questionable. Melissa tried to tell her dad that she agreed some pictures and comments were inappropriate, but he didn't seem to understand. First he asked her to unfollow one of her best friends. "That's not an option!" she said. Now he was even saying he didn't want her to sleep over at one girl's house because of a picture she posted a few weeks ago.

- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- What seems realistic (or unrealistic)?
- What kind of content do you think Melissa's dad would have been concerned about? Is there a difference between what kids think is inappropriate and what adults think is inappropriate?
- Why do you think Melissa's dad wanted her passwords instead of simply following her?
- Kids, if you were a parent, what strategies would you use to try to keep your kids safe with technology, cell phones, and social media?
- What advice would you give Melissa? What would you do if you were in Melissa's situation?

DILEMMA C: EDITING AWAY

Tali knew exactly which day of the week and what time of day she should upload a picture to maximize the number of likes she received (Sunday night, it turned out, was golden). She had mastered the most flattering pose and knew the best filters to perfect her look. In reality, she put a lot of thought into each picture she uploaded, even though she had it down to such a science it seemed effortless. If she didn't get at least 11 likes within the first hour of uploading a picture, she would almost always delete it. At lunch one day, Tali's friend told her about a new app that let you edit your pictures to make you look skinnier. The app could make you look like you were five, 10, or 20 pounds skinnier with a quick tap. Her friend was planning on using it, but Tali told her that was weird. "You edit your pictures all the time!" her friend responded.

- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- What do you think of Tali's approach to uploading pictures, knowing just how to pose and when to post a picture and even taking a picture down if it didn't get enough likes?
- How would you explain "likes" to someone who has never used social media? Are they important, and if so, why?
- What do you think about the idea of an app to make you look skinnier? How is this similar to or different from using other types of editing tools (such as filters)?
- Do you think using a skinny editing app would be more likely to help or hurt the user? Why? would you do if you were in Melissa's situation?

DILEMMA D: TAKE IT DOWN!

When Vin Snapchatted his friend an embarrassing picture of himself, he hadn't expected him to take a screenshot and upload it to Facebook. He didn't want to seem uptight, but he was pretty embarrassed that the picture was posted for all to see. He texted his friend, "Not cool, man. Take it down." His screen lit up: "hahahah." Vin texted back, "Nah, I'm not playing, take it off." His friend wrote back, "Whoa, chill out, I'm just playing," but he didn't take the picture down. Vin was about to go through recruiting for college sports, and though he knew the picture wouldn't get him in trouble, it wasn't exactly the image he wanted recruiters to see.

- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- Is it reasonable for Vin to be concerned about the recruiters? What kinds of content do you think the recruiters would or wouldn't want to see if they searched for Vin online?
- Why do you think Vin's friend took a screenshot?
- Are there any pictures you wouldn't mind sharing now but wouldn't want attached to your name later in life?
- Have you ever asked anyone not to post a picture of you or to take down a picture of you? Has anyone ever asked you to take down a picture?

DILEMMA E: FAKE PAGES

Mackayla looked away from her computer screen in disbelief. One of her friends had just sent Mackayla the link to a vicious fake page ... of Mackayla's younger sister, Remy. Someone—she had no idea who was behind it—had used Remy's picture and name to make a fake account. The person had filled out all the "About me" sections, making fun of Remy's interests, hobbies, and even her style and appearance. All the tagged pictures were Photoshopped, with Remy's head on embarrassing bodies. One picture showed Remy's face on the body of a very overweight older man, and another had Remy's head on the body of a nearly naked bikini model. Even worse, it looked like the fake page had "friended" more than half of Remy's grade. Mackayla remembered that Remy had mentioned having some issues at school and had even come home crying a couple of times, but she hadn't realized it had gotten this bad. Mackayla didn't know if Remy had seen the page yet, but she was devastated and knew Remy would be too.

- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- Do you think this is a case of cyberbullying? Why, or why not?
- Have you ever heard about this kind of thing happening? Have you ever heard about similar cases like this?
- What would you do if you were Remy's older sister and you saw the page?
- What can different people—Remy's parents, her school, her friends—do to help Remy get through this experience?

DILEMMA F: BREAKING AND ENTERING

Nik and his girlfriend, Blair, were hanging out at his house. Blair got up to go to the bathroom and left her phone on the couch. While she was gone, Nik noticed her phone light up and saw the name "Matthew" out of the corner of his eye. He was torn about whether or not to look but decided he would just take a quick look at the texts on the main screen. Then he couldn't resist: He knew Blair's phone password, so he typed it and opened the conversation. Before he knew it, he was scrolling through Blair's conversations. He saw that she had been texting Matthew a lot. Nik was furious, but he couldn't decide whether or not to confront Blair and admit he had looked at her text messages. Finally, he decided he was too angry to ignore it. Blair could not believe Nik had looked through her messages. She thought he trusted her and felt like this was a complete invasion of her privacy.

- What is your gut reaction to this story?
- Can you understand Nik's decision to read Blair's text messages? Has there ever been a situation when you wanted to read someone's messages?
- What do you think about Blair's reaction? Did she have a right to be angry?
- Are there any situations when it's OK to read another person's private messages or emails?
- Are you surprised that Nik had the password for Blair's phone? Do people you know ever share passwords (for example, with friends, significant others, or family members)?

DILEMMA G: FOR ALL TO SEE

Tisa's aunt requested to be her friend on Facebook. Tisa didn't really have anything to hide, so she decided to accept the friend request. A few days later, Tisa got a notification that her aunt had posted on her wall. When she read the post, she immediately realized her aunt didn't understand the difference between posting on someone's wall and sending a message to an inbox. She cringed as she read the message: "Hi Tisa! Your mom told me that you and your friend are in a fight because you both like the same boy. This has happened to me before too and I know the feeling. Hang in there… I love you!"

- What is your gut reaction to the story?
- How do you relate to Tisa's experience?
- What would you do if you were Tisa?
- What are the benefits of kids being friends with adults on social media? Are there any drawbacks?
- Kids, how do you decide whether you're going to accept a follow or friend request from an adult in your life? Parents, how do you decide whether you're going to accept a follow or friend request from a kid other than your own?

DILEMMA H: YOU'RE SMOTHERING ME

Tadashi really liked his new boyfriend, Max, and he couldn't stop thinking about him. He loved that he could stay in touch with him all the time by texting. Max was crazy about Tadashi, too, and he really liked getting his text messages. The only problem was the quantity: Tadashi was sending Max messages nonstop. If Max didn't respond right away, Tadashi would keep texting him to make sure everything was OK. First, he would send a row of question marks, then "hello??" and then "are you mad at me?" Max tried to tell Tadashi that the texting was too much, but Tadashi got defensive and said that if he felt that way maybe they should just stop texting altogether. Max didn't know what to do—he liked Tadashi, but even other people in his life were starting to comment on how much Tadashi texted him.

- What's your gut reaction to this story?
- What would you do if someone was texting you too much? Have you ever been in a situation like this?
- What advice would you give Max in this situation?
- Have you ever gotten the sense that someone else felt like you were texting him or her too much? How did you manage that situation?
- Do you ever take breaks from using your cell phone and checking your messages/social media? Why, or why not?

Common Sense rates, educates, and advocates for kids, families, and schools:

- For more school-related resources, please visit www.commonsense.org/educators
- For more parent-facing resources, please visit www.commonsense.org

The Family Dinner Project provides resources and tools around food, fun and conversation about things that matter to help families improve the quality of their shared meals. For more inspiration on making meaningful connections at the dinner table, visit www.thefamilydinnerproject.org