



Online Challenges

The quick and easy access of smart phones with continued improvements and updates of recording features, paired with the widespread use of social media apps and sites such as Tik Tok and/or Facebook, has led to the “online challenge craze”. Kids as well as adults over the last few years have been completing a variety of these challenges and posting them online.

An online challenge generally involves a person recording themselves completing a challenge and posting the video on a social media site. Different challenges are created almost daily, and some of them go viral.

Many of these challenges are fun and light-hearted, such as the Ice Bucket Challenge or the Mannequin Challenge.

However, some of the challenges are extremely dangerous and life threatening, such as the Tide-Pod Challenge and Planking. These challenges have led to serious injuries and even death for some partaking in the challenge.

More recently, we have heard about challenges such as the Slap a Teacher Challenge or the Devious Lick Challenge. Kids might find these challenges to be funny but they are criminal in nature and have led to serious criminal charges and arrests of students.

And while it seems rather overtly obvious to many of us that some of the challenges are extremely dangerous, risky or just plain inappropriate, kids don’t necessarily make that connection in the same way adults do. We need to remind ourselves that kid’s brains are not fully developed and fully wired like an adult’s brain.

As we know, research shows us that adult and teen brains operate differently. Most adults think with our prefrontal cortex, the brain’s rational part. This part of the brain helps us with judgment by thinking though long-term consequences and helping us with impulse control. Teens process information with the amygdala. This is the emotional

part of the brain. The prefrontal cortex is one of the last parts of the brain to mature for teens.

So, What Can You Do?

Quite simply, talk with your kids/students. While adult brains and teen brains operate differently, that does not mean kids/teens don't know right from wrong and/or recognize what is dangerous. Many times, just talking about things going on in their lives, especially on social-media sites/apps, is one of the best ways to get to know what interests them and if they are being safe and using good judgment. It also gives them the opportunity to think about situations more deeply and all the different consequences and risks involved to themselves and others. Furthermore, discussing possible consequences of their actions can actually help teens' brains develop by producing and making connections in their prefrontal cortex which helps wire their brains to make these connections more often.

Let them know what the expectations and rules are when it comes to phone and social media use and make it known there are consequences when they don't comply with your expectations and rules. Likewise, they should also know they could face legal/criminal consequences that go well beyond any of the consequences you have outlined for them.

In addition to all the above, make sure when it comes to sharing warnings about online challenges, that you look into them first. Sometimes we have a knee jerk reaction to things we hear and inadvertently spread panic about challenges which turn out to be hoaxes. And make sure to check the factual basis of any harmful online challenge using a known, reliable source.



<https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/adolescent-brain-development>

<https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/how-to-respond-to-dangerous-online-challenges/>

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/blog/viral-youtube-challenges-internet-stunts-popular-with-kids>