



# MEDIA LITERACY AND FAMILIES: NAVIGATING NEWS TOGETHER

**NAMLE**





Families today are navigating the most complex media landscape that has ever existed. They are swimming in media content including a relentless news cycle. There are rising concerns about the impact all this is having on mental health and the ability to discern credibility. This guide is intended to help families maneuver the unending flow of media content they experience every day. For a deeper dive into media literacy, go to [NAMLE](#) for in-depth resources on the topic.

## PROMOTING HEALTHY FAMILY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The most important part about any family learning opportunity is meeting your kids on a level playing field. Even kids likely know a lot about media (and will be eager to share!), and you will no doubt have your own tips and advice you want them to understand. Approaching digital and media literacy with a shared sense of discovery and curiosity, instead of imagining you have to completely take the reins, is a great springboard for healthy family learning. More specifically, consider these strategies to support positive family dynamics as you navigate the digital age together.

**Communication is key.** Make time for open conversations about why it's important for your family to learn more about digital and media literacy, especially in light of important civic moments like voting for president. To start the conversation, try this:

- Reflect on how informed you feel about what's happening in the world and your goals to learn more. What are some things happening in the world your kids would like to learn more about? For example, they might feel unsure about how generative artificial intelligence—which is a type of A.I. that produces content from massive amounts of data on the internet - is impacting what they consume or they may be curious to better understand new tools such as ChatGPT.
- Check in with your emotions, and ask your kids to do the same. What kind of online media experiences feel like they improve your lives, and which ones make you feel lonely, jealous, or even scared?
- Consider all the ways you consume media throughout the day, and reflect on how those moments support family time or make it more difficult. While parents often want their kids to spend less time on devices or to change their media habits, it's important to listen to how your kids perceive your device and media use, too. Give kids agency to think through what adjustments the family as a whole, and each family member, could make to their media habits.
- Demonstrate genuine curiosity for media experiences that make your kids happy. Ask them to share their favorite current show, song, video game, or TikTok, and enjoy it together without criticism or judgment.
- Engage on these issues regularly and in low-stakes moments, not just when you're frustrated about media use or worried about your kid's engagement with less-than-reliable sources.



**Improve your media experiences together.** As you begin to facilitate regular, open conversations with your kids about their online experiences, you can work together to practice media literate habits that will support your family goals. Specifically, learning to identify and appreciate reliable sources of information is something everyone needs a refresher on, especially as media technologies rapidly change and generative AI becomes more commonplace. During a presidential election when information flows rapidly, we want to ensure we are confident about how to find the source of information and assess whether it has been created by GenAI. Here are some tips to support your family's goals to find quality information:

- Think out loud and in front of your kids about your media choices and experiences. By sharing those times you read only the headline but not the article (and then missed an important key fact), shared a social media video without checking the source (and later found it to be unreliable), etc., you can model for your kids how you learned to engage more critically with the content you consume online.
- Establish a baseline by learning about what makes quality news or journalism. Figuring out what's real or fake online is easier when you know what quality journalism looks like, how it's practiced, and the professional norms reporters and the news industry follow. Check out the resources below for more ways to spot "fake news." Consider a trip to your local library to check out different newspapers, or spend time together watching the local or national news.
- Reframe "bias." The idea of "bias" is often rife with negative connotations, but the reality is that no person or media source is without bias. Bias is our personal point of view and preferences towards certain people, things, or ideas, and it's a result of many forces, including our background, education, and life experiences. Instead of imagining that any media content could be free from bias, look for evidence that the source providing the information has expertise in the area and is actually in a position to know that information.



**Practice thinking critically about the media you consume.** Becoming more digitally savvy in our online world can be as simple as regularly asking questions about the media you and your kids consume. Generative AI can make it even more difficult to tell what's accurate or real online. Make a point to practice asking the following questions whenever you discuss media content as a family:

- *Who or what made this?* Knowing who created the media we consume not only reminds us that there are both people and generative technologies creating content online, but it also reminds us that being able to pinpoint the ultimate source of something is a key step in determining its validity. Sources like generative AI models can create media from datasets of content that look authentic but aren't, so tracing something back to its original creator is key.
- *Why was it made?* All media messages are created for a reason: to inform, to persuade, to distract, to entertain, to enrage, and more. Thinking through the intent helps us consider the author's point of view and other perspectives that might be missing.
- *What questions do I still have?* It's rare for any single piece of content, even a news article, to contain every pertinent piece of information. Asking ourselves "what's missing?" is a great way to build our media literacy skills and remember to think for ourselves about the knowledge we're gaining and the knowledge waiting to be discovered.
- *How does this make me feel?* Some media messages are intentionally created to make us laugh or to trigger negative emotions. Other messages might subconsciously activate our emotions, making us think less clearly about the information we're consuming. Regularly checking in with our emotions while we consume media is key.





**Prioritize reliable sources.** Now that you're developing healthy and mindful digital media habits, make it a priority to consume reliable information. The following tips can help you decipher high quality sources:

- Reliable sources keep their information up to date, so be sure to look for published dates or timestamps.
- Reliable sources identify the authors of their content, so make sure every post, video, or article is attributed to the person who made it (and not just the person who shared it). For creation tools like generative AI, content isn't always labeled as "machine-generated" or "AI-created," so it can be more fruitful to examine the site where that content is posted or research the user who posted it.
- Reliable sources follow transparent processes for how they gather information, interview sources, accept criticism, and even fund their publication, so make sure the sources you trust provide ways to learn more about their approach or even engage with their work.
- Reliable sources help us to understand why an expert is a credible authority on any given topic, so make sure the information you consume provides context and background on the experts they quote or reference.
- Reliable sources care about getting information correct, so they are eager to fix their mistakes. Make sure the sources you consume have a system for submitting corrections and for publishing those updates.



Check these resources out for additional ways to begin to decipher together what you consider reputable sources:

[Aspen Institute: Interpreting AI in the News: A Media Literacy Lesson Plan](#)

[American Academy of Pediatrics: Family Media Plan](#)

[Common Sense Media: Essential News & Media Literacy Skills for Students](#)

[Common Sense Media: News & Media Literacy 101](#)

[iCivics: NewsFeed Defenders](#)

[NAMLE: A Parent's Guide to Media Literacy](#)

[National PTA: Media Literacy Family Resources](#)

