

CONVERSATION STARTERS: FOR TEENS



The Representation Project inspires individuals and communities to challenge and overcome gender stereotypes so that everyone, regardless of race, class, age, sexual orientation, or circumstance can fulfill their potential. Learn more:

www.therepresentationproject.org.

Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology. Visit www.commonsense.org for ratings and reviews on more than 18,000 media titles, advice and research on raising kids in a digital world, free educator resources, and more.

“The media can be an instrument of change... It can awaken people and change minds. It depends on who is piloting the plane.”

KATIE COURIC,
journalist and America’s first female solo network TV news anchor



DISCUSS

- What do you think about the quote above? What does it mean to you?
- What attracts people to reality TV? Why is it so popular?
- Does reality TV portray women differently than men?

IMAGINE

Pretend that you are a cast member on a reality TV show. During a one-on-one interview, the director of the show asks you questions trying to get you to talk about your friend behind his or her back. What would you do? How far would you go? Do you think any of your answers could be manipulated to make you appear a certain way?

TAKE ACTION TIPS

BE A REALITY TV DETECTIVE

Most reality TV shows have staged or even scripted moments to keep their episodes action packed. As scenes get heated or emotional, imagine the camera person and director interacting with the cast members. See if you and your friends can guess what’s “real” and what’s manipulated—and have fun with it.

TALK IT OUT

Reality TV often shows extremes including: women or girls gossiping behind each other’s backs, and having crazy catfights. Think twice before you criticize or demean another person, and ask yourself where those negative feelings are coming from. Assume that when a friend confronts you about something, he or she wants to problem solve rather than criticize.

“Girls get the message from very early on that what’s most important is how they look.”

JEAN KILBOURNE,
author, scholar, and director of “Killing Us Softly”



DISCUSS

- What do you think about the quote above? What does it mean to you?
- Do you remember the age when you first became aware of your looks? What was it like? How has this awareness changed as you’ve grown older? Do you catch yourself criticizing the way you look?
- The media send a strong message that being “sexy” is a key element of power. What do you think about that? Does the media send this message to females and males equally? Why or why not?

IMAGINE

You notice that a bunch of people have commented on your (girl) friend’s profile picture. Many guys left comments like: “Wow, You are so fine.” Most of the girls posted things like “OMG you look gorgeous! Love you!” Do you think a boy

would receive these kinds of comments on his profile? Also, is the pressure to look good online equal for girls and boys? Why or why not?

TAKE ACTION TIPS

MONITOR YOUR TALK

Receiving a compliment on the way you look can feel great. But it’s important to realize that people often comment on girls’ appearance more than guys’. Try to focus on celebrating each other’s accomplishments and personality traits rather than looks.

TAKE NOTE OF SEXISM

For one week, try keeping a tally of sexist comments you hear. If you hear a friend say something sexist, ask the simple question “Why did you say that?” or, “If someone took the comment seriously, how do you think it would make him or her feel?”

THE REPRESENTATION PROJECT AND COMMON SENSE MEDIA ARE PROUD TO PRESENT THIS GUIDE TO EMPOWER YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS TO HAVE HONEST CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE SUBTLE, AND NOT-SO-SUBTLE, IMPACT OF MEDIA ON OUR LIVES. OPEN UP THIS GUIDE TO FIND:

- Real-life scenarios to help you imagine how media messages impact our daily lives
- Questions about media and popular culture for you to discuss with peers
- Tips to help you take action to change media habits and become more conscious consumers

Every person is different. We hope that you use this tool as a starting point for a dialogue about your media habits!

"I think one of the worst stereotypes in reality TV is that women exist to be decorative...catty, manipulative, vindictive—not to be trusted, especially by other women."

JENNIFER POZNER,
founder and executive director of Women In Media & News (WIMN)



DISCUSS

- What do you think about the quote above? What does it mean to you?
- Can you think of any examples of media—whether books, movies, TV shows, or songs—that impacted your life in a positive way? If so, what were they, and why did they leave such a positive impression on you?
- If you had the opportunity to create a TV show that could empower girls and encourage healthy relationships between girls and boys, what would it be like? What roadblocks might prevent your show from becoming a success? Why? How would you find ways around those roadblocks?

IMAGINE

Suppose that you could bring one female character from a book, show, or movie to life in order to change the world?

Who would you choose, and why? How would you help her make a difference?

TAKE ACTION TIPS STAND UP TO DOUBLE STANDARDS

If you hear someone demeaning a girl or woman's appearance or intelligence, ask yourself whether a guy would have been judged in the same way. If not, speak up in her defense.

BE PROUD OF THE MEDIA YOU CREATE

Do you text? Do you have a social network site? Do you have a blog? If so, you're a media creator. Remember that every photo you upload, every post you leave, and every comment you make sends a message about who you are, what you value, and who you want to be.

"You can't be what you can't see."

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN,
founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund



DISCUSS

- What do you think about the quote above? What does it mean to you?
- Can you identify a few people whom you consider leaders? Are they sport figures, musicians, politicians, or characters from film or television? How about someone you know personally, such as a coach, teacher or an older student? What characteristics do you admire in these people?
- List some steps you can take to show leadership. Think about leadership in the groups you are involved in, and the communities you are a part of.

IMAGINE

Pretend you get to have lunch with someone who inspires you. What would you ask that person, and what would you like to let him or her know about you? What would you hope to learn from that person's experiences?

TAKE ACTION TIPS IDENTIFY A MENTOR

Is there a career path you are interested in? If so, ask your friends, teachers and family members if they know anyone who is working in that field. Then ask them to introduce you. Request an informational interview with that person, and ask if he or she will become your mentor and meet you regularly.

SPEAK WITH STRENGTH

You can show leadership in small ways, such as in how you speak and interact with others. Here are some tips from leading experts on persuasive communication:

1. Avoid using "upspeak" (when you make a statement and your voice rises at the end to make it sound like a question).
2. Make eye contact with the other person to show you are an engaged speaker and listener.
3. Ask your best friend to point out each time you say "like" or "um" when speaking.