

CLOSING PLENARY · 31ST MAINE CHILD WELFARE CONFERENCE · BANGOR, ME

# Tech Talks

*Crucial Conversations for Today's Families, Schools, and Providers*

CLOSING THE DAY

**Dr. Meagan Mitchell, DSW, MSW, MEd, LICSW, RPT**

*Agents of Change Continuing Education & Clinical Training*

1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Where we've been and where we go from here.

This morning, we asked a hard question:  
**Are children technically better?**

Not better at using technology, but better off in their development, relationships, and well-being? We named the landscape, the developmental costs, and what young people told us directly.

**Now we have the opportunity to problem-solve and discuss what is next for us.**



Crucial Conversations - MCWC 2025 2

2

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

# 01

 **The Conversations We Need to Have**

*Partnering with our youth: conversations, topics and how we show up as partners.*

3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Conversations worth having with youth

<p><b>Boundaries &amp; autonomy</b></p> <p>We want youth to be able to set and hold their own tech boundaries even when we aren't in the room.</p>	<p><b>Privacy, consent &amp; footprints</b></p> <p>Every post, share, and tap leaves a trail, and kids deserve to understand who sees it and how long it lasts before they decide.</p>
<p><b>AI companions, deepfakes &amp; authenticity</b></p> <p>What's real, what isn't, and how to tell the difference. The essential skill becomes asking "Is this actually true, and how would I know?"</p>	<p><b>Identity &amp; digital citizenship</b></p> <p>Being a good digital citizen means acting with the same courage and kindness online as offline. We want to encourage youth to be an upstander, not a bystander.</p>

Crucial Conversations - MCVW 2025 4

4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### What these conversations sound like

<p><b>Move away from</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policing and one-way rules.</li> <li>• "Don't do that."</li> <li>• Judgment that ends the talk.</li> <li>• Treating online life as "not real."</li> </ul>	<p><b>Move toward</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership and shared problem-solving.</li> <li>• "Let's talk about how to navigate that."</li> <li>• Treating their online decisions the same as in-person decisions.</li> </ul>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

"Why were you even on that site?" → "Let's talk about what to do when you see inappropriate content."

Crucial Conversations - MCVW 2025 5

5

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Reflection?

**Think of one young person you work with.**

**How can you change your mindset to have a collaborative problem solving conversation with them?**

Crucial Conversations - MCVW 2025 6

6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**02**

**Digital Wellbeing: Beyond Screen Time**

*Less about how much.  
More about how and why they are engaging in the online world.*

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**It's not the hours spent online. It's the habits**

**Questions to Understand Tech Habits**

What's something online that actually makes you feel good, and something that leaves you feeling worse?

When you reach for your phone, what are you usually looking for in that moment?

Is there an app or space where you feel most like yourself? What's different about it?

If you could change one thing about how the internet treats people your age, what would it be?

What's something adults get wrong about your life online?

*These can be two-way questions.  
Feel free to answer them too!*

Crucial Conversations - MCHW 2025

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Building digital agency in youth**

*Agency means moving young people from passengers to navigators.*

- 1 Think critically**  
*About algorithms, platforms, and the incentives engineered to persuade them.*
- 2 Create, don't just consume**  
*Make things and express ideas avoid only scrolling through someone else's.*
- 3 Advocate for themselves**  
*Speak up, set boundaries, and ask for what they need in digital spaces.*

Crucial Conversations - MCHW 2025

9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**New Tool: The Tech Check (HATCH MODEL)**

This resource was created by the Center for Digital Thriving at Harvard Graduate School of Education, in partnership with Common Sense Education.

- H Habit**  
One tech habit to change or start. Why do you want to make this change?
- A Alternative**  
When it happens, what prompts it? What can you do instead?
- T Tricks**  
Small changes that make it stick. Example: Keeping the phone out of the bedroom at bedtime.
- C Challenge**  
"Instead of \_\_\_ I'm going to \_\_\_ I'll try it for \_\_\_ days."
- H Help**  
One person who can support you. How can they make you accountable?

Tech Check Habit Challenge - Center for Digital Thriving (Harvard GSE) with Common Sense Education - shared with attribution, noncommercial.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

10

**Take 5 minutes to complete your own HATCH plan. Choose one tech habit you want to start, stop, or change.**

- H Habit**  
One tech habit to change or start. Why do you want to make this change?
- A Alternative**  
When it happens, what prompts it? What can you do instead?
- T Tricks**  
Small changes that make it stick. Example: Keeping the phone out of the bedroom at bedtime.
- C Challenge**  
"Instead of \_\_\_ I'm going to \_\_\_ I'll try it for \_\_\_ days."
- H Help**  
One person who can support you. How can they make you accountable?

Tech Check Habit Challenge - Center for Digital Thriving (Harvard GSE) with Common Sense Education - shared with attribution, noncommercial.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

11

**Reflection?**

**With someone at your table discuss what this process was like.**

**How easy or hard was it to self-reflect on your own tech habits?**

**How will completing this activity allow you to partner with a young person around their online habits?**

Digital Conversations | 10/16/2024

---

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

12

**03**

 **Shared Responsibilities**

*The ethics of protecting and empowering youth online.*

13

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Be clear about what AI cannot do.**

*Kids need simple, strong, repeatable statements:*

- "AI cannot feel."**
- "AI cannot keep secrets."**
- "AI cannot call 911 for you."**
- "AI does not know you personally; it only uses patterns."**
- "AI is not your friend."**

14

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

**Platforms have a responsibility too.**

Children grow up inside systems adults design. Those design choices set the default and we can advocate for better ones.

-  **Vote with attention and dollars. Choose, pay for, and recommend platforms and tools that protect kids by default and walk away from the ones that don't. Demand drives design.**
-  **Use the levers you already have. Report harmful content, adjust and advocate for safer default settings, give feedback to platforms and schools, and back the policies and leaders pushing for child-safe design.**
-  **Show what healthy, intentional tech use looks like, and raise kids who can recognize manipulative design. An informed user base is what forces platforms to do better.**

© 2024 Common Sense Education. All rights reserved.

15

---

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

**Protecting and empowering: The balance.**

**Protect**

Set age-appropriate limits with a clear "why," know the platforms a child is actually on, and screen for real danger like exploitation or unsafe contact.


Safety comes before anything else.



**Empower**

Teach kids how to navigate a space rather than just limiting how long they spend there, let them make real choices and repair when they make mistakes...

Treat them as the expert on their own online life.



**The "work" is holding both at the same time. I want to name that this is hard!**

Crucial Conversations - MCWC 2026

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

16

# 04

## A Call to Action

*What can we do to make a change and move the needle?*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

17

**A worldwide movement. What other countries are doing.**

**Australia**

World's first **ban** on those under age 16 using social media. Enforced since December 2025, with ~4.7M underage accounts removed.

**France**

Voted in early 2026 to **ban** those under 15 years old from social media and extend the school phone ban into high schools, phasing in through 2026-27.

**European Union**

The Digital Services Act **requires platforms to protect minors**, and the EU is piloting a privacy-preserving age-verification app.

**China**

Long-standing state limits cap how much time minors can spend on online games each day, with nightly curfews.

European Commission (2025). Commission presents guidelines and age-verification app prototype for a safer online space for children. European Commission (2025). European age-verification app to keep children safe online.   
 The Guardian (2025). French lawmakers approve social media ban for under-16.   
 The Guardian (2025). France bans 15-year-olds from social media after Australia banned them for children younger than 16.   
 The Guardian (2025). Teen-club ban in France sparks concern to curb children's social media games.   
 The Guardian (2025). Chinese state restricts amount of time minors can spend playing video games.

Crucial Conversations - MCWC 2026

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

18

### Moving Towards Digital Thriving

#### Moving away from tech fear

We cannot operate in fear. The goal is not to protect kids from every screen forever. The goal is to prepare them to use technology with awareness, agency, and support.

#### Moving away from tech worship

Technology is powerful, but it is not going to save us. It can support connection, learning, and creativity, but it cannot replace presence, relationships, or human judgment.

**Digital thriving means finding the middle path: We can use technology in ways that support our values, protect our well-being, and help us live more fully both online and offline.**

Crucial Conversations - MCWC 2026

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

19

### Start small.

*We don't have all the answers. Start small and build momentum.*

#### One conversation

Start a conversation you've been putting off. Approach with curiosity.

#### One shift

Change one habit of your own that a young person can see. Take that shift as a model for our youth.

#### One partnership

Build one bridge. Start the conversation and make a plan with a family, a school, a colleague.

Start

Crucial Conversations - MCWC 2026

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

20


### Where to keep learning



**Center for Digital Thriving**  
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Youth-centered research turned into free apps, printouts, and classroom lessons that build digital agency – the source of today's Tech Check and the "It listens" insight.

[digitalthriving.gse.harvard.edu](https://digitalthriving.gse.harvard.edu)



**Common Sense Media**  
with Common Sense Education

Independent reviews, research, and guidance on media and tech for families and schools. Its education arm offers free digital citizenship curriculum.

[commonsensemedia.org](https://commonsensemedia.org) · [commonsense.org/education](https://commonsense.org/education)

Crucial Conversations - MCWC 2026

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

21

**So — are we “technically better”?**

*The most powerful technology in a child's life is still a trusted adult.*



**Thank you.**

Dr. Meagan Mitchell, DSW, MSW, MEd, LCSW, RPT

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---