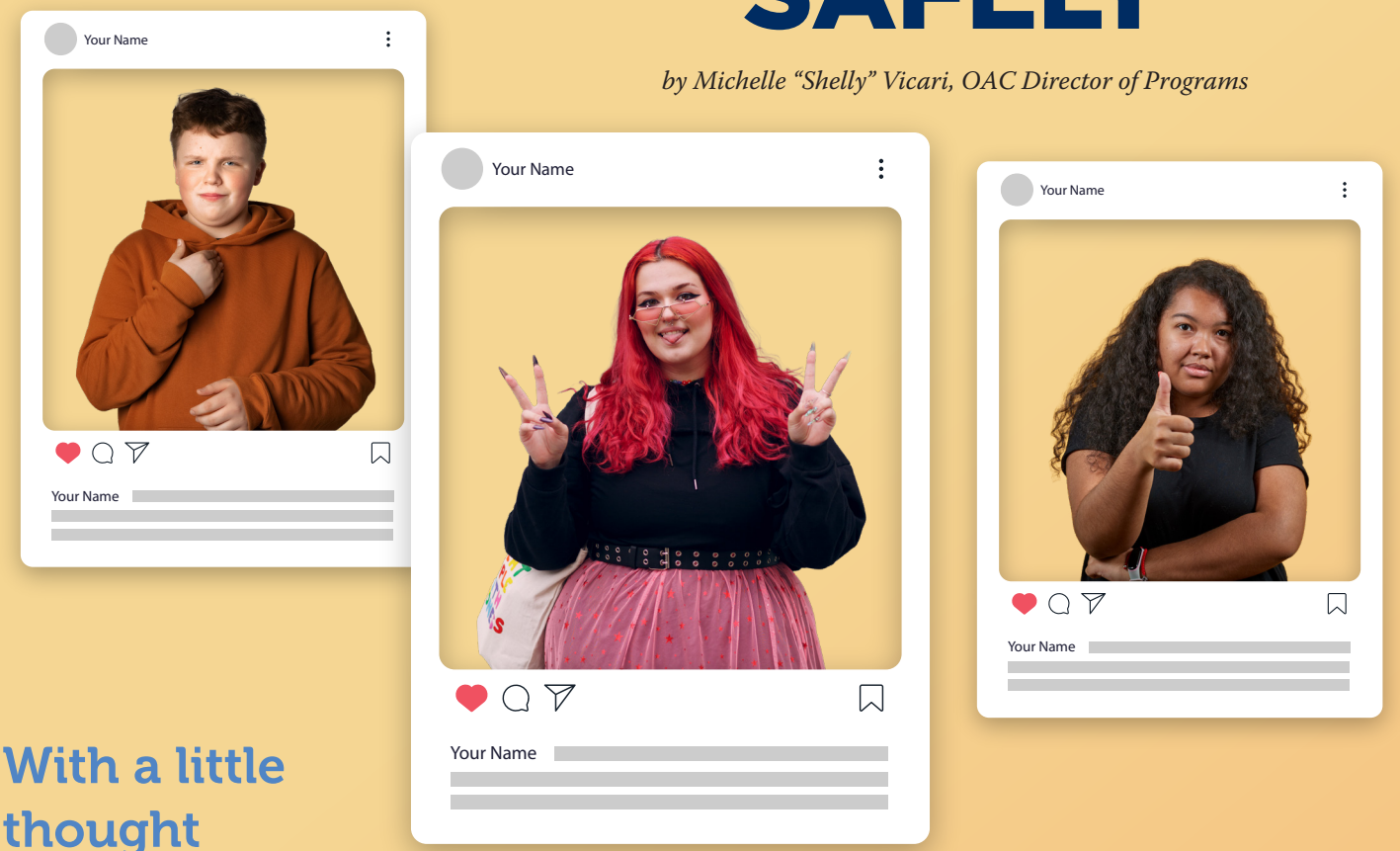
KID'S corner

SHARING Your Story Online SAFELY

by Michelle "Shelly" Vicari, OAC Director of Programs



> With a little thought and a few boundaries, teens and parents can make smart choices about what to share and what to keep just for themselves.

About 95% of teens have access to a smartphone and nearly half say they are online almost constantly, according to the Pew Research Center. Social media is a major part of everyday life. Teens message friends, share photos, watch videos and follow people who inspire them, much like the rest of us, but more of their lives take place online than in previous generations. Today, there is often an expectation that people share most of their lives online.

If you have ever thought about sharing your experiences online, you might have mixed feelings. Part of you may feel excited about connecting with others who understand, while another part wonders how people might respond. That is completely normal. Sharing your story can help others feel less alone and remind you that you are not the only one going through certain experiences. The key is finding a way to share that feels comfortable for you while still protecting your privacy. With a little thought and a few boundaries, teens and parents can make smart choices about what to share and what to keep just for themselves.

Why Share at All?

Teens share parts of their lives online for many different reasons, and there is no single “right” way to do it. For some, social media works almost like a digital journal. It becomes a place to document moments from daily life, reflect on what they are learning and look back at how far they have come. For teens navigating a journey with weight and health, posting can be a way to celebrate small wins, talk about challenges or share something that helped them feel stronger or more confident.

Sharing can also help others. When one teen speaks honestly about their experiences, it can help another teen realize they are not the only one going through something similar. It can open the door to understanding, encouragement and support from people who truly get it.

The most important thing to remember is that sharing is always your choice. You never have to post anything personal if you do not want to.

Positive Things That Can Happen

Sharing parts of your story can lead to meaningful and encouraging experiences.

Connection

You may find other teens who understand what you are going through. Those connections can make you feel supported and remind you that you are not alone.

Learning

You might discover new ideas from other teens about fun snacks, ways to stay active, getting better sleep or managing stress. At the same time, something you share might help someone else learn too.

Confidence in Communication

Talking about your experiences can help you get more comfortable explaining your needs, asking questions and speaking up for yourself with doctors, teachers or family members.

Helping Others

Your story could help another teen feel seen and understood. Sometimes just knowing someone else has faced similar challenges can give another person hope and encouragement.

Handling Comments and Protecting Your Space Online

Online spaces include many kinds of people. Some will be supportive, some may ask questions and others may leave comments that are not thoughtful or kind. Sometimes people post negative remarks simply to get a reaction or start an argument.

If someone leaves a mean or hurtful comment, remember that it says more about them than it does about you. You do not have to respond. Ignoring those comments is often the best choice.

You are in charge of your page. If a comment feels uncomfortable, you can delete it, block the account or limit who can comment. Many platforms also allow you to filter certain words or approve comments before they appear. If something online upsets you, it can help to step away and talk with a parent or trusted adult. Setting boundaries online is healthy and important.

Safety and Privacy

Before posting, pause and think about safety. Online information can spread quickly and be hard to remove once shared. Do not post personal details such as your home address, phone number, school name, classroom information, daily routines, appointment locations, private documents or family information. It is also safer not to share your location while you are still there and instead post later.

Using privacy settings is one of the best ways to protect yourself. Consider setting your account to private or friends-only so only approved people can see your posts. Many apps also allow comment filters, comment approval, tag approval and restricted accounts so you control who interacts with you. Parents and teens can review these settings together and adjust them as needed over time.

Even with these settings, anything posted online can still be shared by others. Before posting, make sure you feel comfortable with what you share being seen beyond your intended, immediate audience.

Social Media Platform Privacy Tips

YouTube: If you post videos, consider setting them to Unlisted or Private so only people you choose can see them.

TikTok: Turn off video downloads, duets and stitches for personal posts so others cannot reuse your content.

Instagram: Use the Close Friends feature for more personal stories and turn on tag approval so you control when you are tagged.

Snapchat: Turn on Ghost Mode in Snap Map so your location is not visible to others.

Facebook: Set posts to Friends Only and review timeline and tag settings so you approve posts before they appear on your profile.

All Platforms: Check your privacy settings regularly and limit who can comment, message or share your posts. Before posting a photo, check what appears in the background, such as school logos, street signs or house numbers that could reveal your location.

What Can You Share?

You are in charge of your story and what you choose to share. Many teens focus on everyday moments instead of private details. That might include trying a new activity, sharing a favorite playlist for a walk, posting about a snack you discovered, talking about better energy or sleep, celebrating a small win at school, learning a new fitness routine, sharing a photo from a walk with a friend, posting something helpful you learned at a healthcare visit or offering encouragement to someone else who may need it. Sometimes the most relatable stories come from the small moments of real life.

You do not have to include scale numbers, measurements or medical details. Health includes many parts of daily life, not just one number.

Tips for Teens

- Take breaks from posting when you need them. Posts do not have to be daily.
- Protect your mental health first. If social media starts to feel stressful, overwhelming or negative, step away.
- Avoid comparing yourself to other accounts. Social media shows only small, edited parts of people's lives.
- Focus on what helps you feel confident, supported and positive about yourself.
- If posting starts to feel uncomfortable, pause.

Tips for Parents

- Stay connected by openly following your teen's account so you understand the spaces they spend time in online.
- Let your teen know you are there to support them, not monitor every post.
- Talk about what they experience online.
- Help your teen decide what feels comfortable to share.
- Practice simple ways to handle negative remarks and set healthy boundaries together.

The 30-Minute Pause Rule

Before posting something personal, give yourself 30 minutes. Ask yourself two quick questions: Would I be okay if more people saw this? Will I still feel good about this next week? If you are not sure, save it as a draft and look at it later.

Pick What Feels Okay to Share

- [ ] Something new I learned about my health
- [ ] A habit I am working on
- [ ] A way I handle a stressful day
- [ ] A "win" I am proud of
- [ ] Advice I would give another teen
- [ ] Something that helps me feel strong or confident
- [ ] A small goal I set for myself
- [ ] A challenge I handled in a positive way
- [ ] How I spoke up for myself at school or at a doctor visit
- [ ] A healthy routine that makes my day easier
- [ ] A myth about health or weight I used to believe
- [ ] A reminder I wish more people understood
- [ ] Something I am still figuring out
- [ ] A supportive person in my life and what they taught me
- [ ] A recipe or product that has helped me in my journey
- [ ] A playlist of inspirational songs
- [ ] A shoutout to a person or group that has been supportive
- [ ] A moment when I chose kindness toward myself

Sharing Your Story

Sharing parts of your life online can be a positive experience that creates connection, encouragement and understanding. If you choose to share, do so in ways that feel comfortable and safe, and lean on trusted adults when you need support.

The Obesity Action Coalition often shares real experiences from teens and families to help others feel understood and supported. If you are comfortable sharing your journey, you can send your story to **membership@obesityaction.org**. Your story may help someone else realize they are not alone.

About the Author:
Michelle "Shelly" Vicari is the Director of Programs for the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC). She studied Child Development & Family Studies and Political Science at San Diego State University and previously served as Curriculum Director for the largest NAEYC-accredited child care centers in Southern California. At OAC, she leads a variety of education and support initiatives, including Thrive Together, a youth and families program that provides resources, community and events for children, teens and parents affected by obesity.

OAC
Obesity Action Coalition

PUTTING OUR MISSION INTO MOTION

Every initiative we lead is rooted in our commitment to uplift and support individuals affected by obesity.

Thrive Together
Empowering youth and families with resources to thrive

STOP WEIGHT BIAS
Challenging weight bias and pushing equality forward

OAC ACTION
Mobilizing advocates to create change

obesity care week℠
Raising global awareness to rethink how we care for obesity

YOURWEIGHTMATTERS FOR•YOUR•HEALTH
Helping individuals start the conversation about weight with a healthcare provider

... And that's not all.
Explore more at ObesityAction.org

OAC
Obesity Action Coalition

ABOUT THE **OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)**

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.

VIBRANT COMMUNITY

NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

ANNUAL CONVENTION

ADVOCACY

PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs • Community Discussion Forum • Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections

AND MUCH MORE

JOIN TODAY: GO TO **OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN**

info@obesityaction.org
(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838

@ObesityActionCoalition
@ObesityAction