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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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## Know! The Dangers of Digital Dares

Thinking back to your younger years, chances are, you witnessed or actively took part in some type of dare or challenge that involved unwise behavior. In the past, dares were likely to take place on school grounds, public parks or in someone's basement - in front of a handful of peers, at best. Today, challenges are recorded on smart phones and uploaded onto the internet for a teen's entire peer network, and the world, to see. Due to this wide viewing audience and fear of public ridicule, teens often succumb to the pressure of taking on the challenge, even if they'd rather not.

While some internet challenges are silly and harmless, many more are dangerous and even deadly. Here are just a few to be aware of:

**Fire Challenge:** An individual stands in the shower, douses himself in alcohol or other flammable liquid and lights himself on fire, trying to put out the flames before it burns his skin. This challenge has resulted in severe burns and deaths.

**Neknominate (neck + nominate):** A person quickly drinks extreme amounts of alcohol in outlandish ways and then nominates two "friends" to do the same. Multiple accounts of ER visits and alcohol poisoning deaths have been reported due to this "game."

**Salt and Ice Challenge:** Individuals pour salt onto their arm or other chosen body part, and apply ice for as long as they can stand it. The combination of salt and ice drop temperature levels to far below freezing, which can cause not only third-degree burns, but the need for amputation.

**Kylie Jenner Challenge:** In an attempt to mimic the voluptuous lips of TV reality star Kylie Jenner, the person puts a shot glass over her lips then sucks, causing them to swell. While this may not sound dangerous, many people experience pain and bruising from the suction, and repeated attempts can cause scarring and permanent disfigurement. Even very young girls are taking part in this challenge.



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The list of digital dares go on and on. Teachers are encouraged to address the topic in the classroom and openly discuss the dangers of these online challenges.

#### Here are some points to keep in mind:

- **Know that all students are at risk for engaging in these challenges:** Remember, a teen's brain is not fully developed - impulsivity along with peer pressure and the competitive desire to one-up a peer, are all powerful influencers.
- **State (and restate) the obvious:** While lighting yourself on fire seems quite obviously NOT okay, make no assumptions when it comes to student safety.
- **Engage students in the topic:** Share with students what you consider to be acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Then ask your students to weigh-in.
- **Prompt critical thinking:** Ask students, "What do you think could happen if you do this?" In the face of such a challenge, help your students learn to step back for a moment and apply basic logic and reason before making a decision that could impact their health and safety.

It would be naive to think we will ever keep up with all the latest internet trends, dangerous or not. What you can do is talk to your students, educate them on the dangers of digital dares and teach them to think critically before the next risky challenge presents itself.

Sources: McAfee Blog Central: Digital Dares: Dumb Kids with Smart Phones, Sept. 2014. New York Daily News: Viral 'neknominate' drinking game linked to five deaths, Feb. 2014. TWCN Tech News: Dangerous dares start making rounds on the Internet, Oct. 2014. uKnowKids.com: YouTube Challenges and Peer Pressure, Dec. 2014.