4-H RESPONSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY
Caption This!

KEY CONCEPT:

Captioning photos on social media responsibly

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

- Decision making
- Self-Responsibility

AUDIENCE:

Age range: 12 and older

Skill Level: Beginning

TIME:

20-30 minutes

SETTING:

A room with tables and chairs

MATERIALS:

☐ A variety of photos printed full size (8-inch by 10-inch) (selfies or photos of youth cleaning parks, having fun, fighting or doing other activities) (Laminate if you want to use more than once.)

☐ 1 copy of the photo titled "Clean-Up" (supplied upper right)

☐ Pens or pencils (one per participant)

☐ Dry erase markers and marker erasers (if using laminated photos) (one per participant)

☐ Flipchart or other large paper

☐ Markers

Clean-Up

BACKGROUND:

According to "Teens, Social Media and Technology Overview 2015" by the Pew Research Center, nearly three-quarters of teenagers ages 13–17 have access to a smartphone. Of those teens, 92 percent report going online daily, and 71 percent say they use more than one social networking site (Lenhart, 2015).

In addition, youth enjoy sharing photos through social media tools as is evident by the popularity of Instagram and Snapchat with younger demographics. Young people should understand how to properly caption a photo because the words that accompany a photo can affect the way the photo is perceived.

OVERVIEW:

In this social media activity, participants will create their own captions for various photos that could be shared online. They will explore the concept of how a few simple words can change what people think about a photo online. This activity pairs well with other lessons on responsible social media usage.

OBJECTIVES:

After completing this activity, the participants will be able to:

- Explain how photo captions can change the perception of a photo.

- Practice writing various photo captions.

- Understand the importance of taking time to consider the photos they share online along with the caption with it.

PROCEDURE:

Before the meeting:

1. Review the background information and activity directions.

2. Print off the "Clean-Up" photo to share in the first activity.

3. Print off a variety of photos as described under "Materials." Think about possible positive and negative photo captions. Create ideas to help groups struggling for words.

During the meeting:

1. Ask participants:

   - *What do you most enjoy sharing on social media?*
   - *What types of posts receive the most feedback when shared online?*

2. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:
   Technology changes, apps come and go, and the next wave in social media platforms will come about. Take a moment to reflect how at one point MySpace was the social media destination for everyone, then it moved to Facebook, and now people are using Snapchat and Instagram. Although changes in media may occur, we still need to think about the photos that we share and the captions that go with them. Everyone enjoys sharing photos through social media, so it is important to understand how the caption provided with a photo can completely change how people perceive that photo. Every picture you share with others paints a picture of you. Others can use these photos and captions to start making assumptions that could have negative consequences.

3. Now take a minute to show the group the photo of youth who are doing a park clean-up. Everyone who sees the photo can come away with a different opinion on what is happening. Ask participants: *What are some captions that could be attached to the photo?*

4. Record the answers on flipchart paper and ask them to share why they created the caption they did.

5. Now provide the following two caption options to the photo:

   - *"It's a great day to do a park clean-up."*
   - *"Ugh, why do I have to do this?"*

   Read aloud or paraphrase the following:
   Each gives the viewer a different perspective on what is happening. Some people will think that is a great group of young people who are trying to help out the community, while others would question why they are cleaning the park. They might think cleaning it is a punishment for something they did wrong. How did either caption make you feel about the photo?

6. At this time, have the group break into groups of two to four participants and provide each group with a few photos that you have printed off. Each group needs to write at least two different captions for each photo: one that could make the photo seem positive and one that gives the photo a negative connotation. Allow the groups 5 to 10 minutes to write the captions. Walk around and answer any questions that may arise and help groups that may be stuck with caption ideas.

7. When the groups have finished writing their captions, have each group share their photos and the captions they wrote.

8. After all groups have shared their captions, guide participants through discussion and process questions.

TRY THIS, TOO

If you have extra time or the participants grasp the concepts quickly, consider having them look at the last five images they have shared online and reflect on the perception those images would provide people who saw them. Also, have them think about how they could have rewritten the captions to give a different view of the photos.

TALKING IT OVER:

Ask the group the following questions:

- Think about the last time you posted a photo online. Who might be able to see the photo?

- Why might it be important to consider other people in the photo before you post the image?

- Have you ever been offended by a photo shared online? Why? When sharing a photo online, do you think about whether this photo will offend anyone?

- When sharing a photo online, do you think about being comfortable with others seeing this photo, including people who didn't directly receive the photo from you? Why or Why not?

- Why does the caption of a photo matter?

- Why should you consider the photos you post prior to posting them?

- What communication advantages do online communication or social media tools have? Disadvantages?

- What are some boundaries that you may need to consider when interacting or posting online?

- What happens when you do not put words or emojis with a photo?

- Why do people make assumptions about a photo and possibly take it out of context?

- If you do caption a photo you post online, can the image be separated from the original caption later and have a new caption or be misinterpreted? How would you feel if this happened?

KEY POINTS REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA:

- Social media is a tool that people can use to communicate with one another. You can use social media sites to continue discussions that were started face-to-face, share ideas about activities, set meeting times, give feedback to others and communicate in many other ways.

- Remember when sharing information online, it is permanent. Even if you delete it, other people could have seen the information and shared it. Even deleted pieces of information can be found and recovered online.

- Text speak, poor grammar and consistently poor spelling sends a message. It may cause people to second-guess your communication and writing skills.

- If you wouldn't say something face-to-face, you shouldn't write it online. There have been many instances of gossip started because of information shared online – when in doubt, don't write it.

- When you use apps such as Snapchat in which photos disappear, you need to understand the photo you post isn't necessarily gone. Once you send a photo to another person, that person can easily share the photo with others. You should never assume your content is 100 percent safe from other people taking the information and sharing with someone else.

- The pictures you choose to share online help paint a picture for others to make judgements about you. Potential employers, college admission officers, scholarship selection committee members and others could possibly see the photos you share online. That could mean you may miss out on a job, scholarship or another opportunity due to your poor decisions regarding your use of social media.

- Others can use the photos that are shared online and make assumptions about the person sharing the photo.

- Social media tools provide people with ways to stay connected with the 4-H organization, 4-H members or adult volunteers. It is a great avenue to plan and promote activities.

- Social media allows us to do things we never thought possible and its applications are endless.

- Sharing photos online is a great way for you to express who you are as well as your interests, passions and changes you would like to see happen in the world.

REFERENCES:

Lenhart, A. (2015, April). *Teen, social media and technology overview 2015*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Author: Christine Heverly, MSU Extension educator