

Youth & Technology – Information for Parents

Youth and Technology

Youth today have grown up using cell phones, computers, and other related technology as a means to stay in touch with people, to learn, and to express themselves. Keeping up with their use can be challenging, as there is always something new. Focus on how your teens are using media and how they balance the pros/cons of technology.

Most youth use technology to enhance their lives.

Technology can:

- Provide a source of information, advice and entertainment.
- Enhance learning opportunities; growth of ideas.
- Extend their current peer friendships.
- Increase socialization and communication.
- Provide an environment to explore friendships, interests and receive external validation from their peers.
- Provide access to support groups for teens who feel marginalized.
- Provide a platform to share their creative activities.
- Develop and expressing individual identity.

Possible Impact of Technology on Mental Health

- **Multitasking:** Multitasking is actually quickly switching attention from one task to another. This is costly to the efficiency of the brain and can increase fatigue and errors.
- **Sleep:** Technology can negatively impact sleep by altering or disrupting our sleep schedule – making it hard to get enough.
- **Physical Health:** Technology has impacted the way teens spend their free time and can impact their likelihood to engage in physical activity. Physical health can be a protective factor and supportive activity for one's mental health.
- **Emotions:** Social media can foster an environment of social comparisons. For some, this can increase the risk for reduced self esteem, negative body image and low self worth.
- **Disconnected:** Many forms of technology have changed the way we create social interactions and communicate with others. It can be a barrier to certain forms of social interaction that can lead to feeling disconnected. It can also negatively impact the development of social skills in some kids/teens. <https://childmind.org>

What are Some of the Potential Risks of Technology for Teens?

- **Cyber bullying:** This is when you use social media and/or the internet to harass or harm an individual. Cyber bullying can range from reoccurring, hurtful comments and messages to humiliating and "stalking" an individual.
- **Exposure to Violence:** Some forms of technology, particularly videogames, show realistic images of killing, criminal behavior, sexual exploitation, substance use and exposure negative messages through stereotypes, foul language and gestures.
- **Sexting:** This is sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photos, or images using digital media.
- **Internet and Technology Addictions:** Some youth have trouble limiting their use of technology and as a result this interferes with their quality of life. <http://mediasmarts.ca/>

Is my teen "addicted" to technology?

There is no clear diagnosis criteria for a technology addiction however there may be signs of problematic media use when someone feels they can't be away from their technology, experience significant distress when unable to connect, and their technology use is impeding their ability to function at work, school or in relationships.



If you are concerned regarding your teen's problematic media use seek out a mental health professional for early and individualized support and treatment.

What can parents do?

It is important to teach our teens to be smart with their media use. The goal is to promote a healthy balance to maximize the benefits of technology and reduce the potential risks.

Consider the suggested strategies for parents:

- Educate yourself about technologies and its risks. Check out the social media platforms your teen is using. Look up the sites online safety center for safety and privacy features.
- Supervise via active participation and communication. Consider creating your own account but remember to also respect your teen's need for privacy on the site.
- Talk about what's appropriate to share on social media and what isn't. Make it clear that there can be serious consequences for online bullying, making threats, or engaging in sexualized behavior via social media.
- Warn about scams and educate about personal security. Help your teens create secure private passwords.
- Keep computers and other media devices in common areas, such as the family room. If this is not possible, then consider a re-charging station in the house where handheld electronics stay overnight – out of the bedroom.
- Create limits and rules in the house about appropriate use. This may have to do with time limits or expectations around when technology use can occur after chores or homework.
- Enforce appropriate and fair consequences if rules are broken.
- Encourage activities that develop social skills and promote physical activity.
- Have technology free zones/times. This might be meal times or family time.
- Set a good example. Model a balanced media/technology habits in your own activities.

<http://www.common sense media.org/>

References for Youth & Technology

- <http://www.common sense media.org/>
- <https://childmind.org/article/how-using-social-media-affects-teenagers/>
- <http://mediasmarts.ca/>
- www.teenmentalhealth.org