

Technology, Youth and Technology

Youth and Technology

The internet, and related technologies, have become essential tools for families, providing ease of communication, access to information, learning assistance, as well as entertainment. Youth today have grown up using smart phones, tablets and computers, and have been called 'digital natives,' having never known a world without digital media.

Studies indicate that youth are spending a significant and growing amount of their day in front of a screen. Despite its many benefits, technology is a growing area of interest and concern for those who live and work with youth. **Problematic media use** has been connected to a number of physical and mental health issues.

Warning Signs

Some youth have trouble limiting their use of technology, which can interfere with their quality of life. Look for **warning signs** that technology is becoming a problem, such as:



- sleep difficulties
- poor eating habits
- neglected hygiene
- decreased physical activity
- changes in weight
- increased conflict
- decreased social activities
- decreased interest or performance in school.

Strategies for Caregivers

There are actions you can take as a caregiver to support your child if you feel problems are arising. The goal is to promote a healthy balance, to maximize the benefits of technology while **reducing the negative impacts and potential risks**.

The Canadian Pediatric Society has placed recommendations around screen use in four categories: the 4 M's—**Minimize, Mitigate, be Mindful, and Model**.

Minimize

- Set parameters around the time spent in consuming electronic media.
- Screen time for children under 18 months old is not recommended.
- For children 2 to 5 years, limit screen time to less than 1 hour per day.
- For children 6 years and older, the recommendation is for parents to place consistent limits on screen time.
- Encourage activities that develop **social skills** and promote **physical activity and health**.
- Avoid screens at least 1 to 2 hours before bed. Remove devices from your child's bedroom as the blue light emitted from screens can alter their natural sleep cycle, and notifications can interrupt sleep.

Mitigate

- **Educate yourself** about the technologies, games and social media platforms your child is using.
- Keep devices in common areas and supervise via active participation and communication.
- Know the law. Make it clear that there can be serious consequences for online bullying, making threats, or engaging in sexualized behavior via social media.
- Warn children about scams and educate them about personal security and privacy settings.

Be Mindful

- Become **conscious consumers of media**.
- Turn off screens when they're not being used. Avoid using them as "background" noise.
- Discuss appropriate online behavior, and help your child become **a critical thinker** and to ask questions about what they see and hear.
- Help teens be aware of their habits and their triggers; help them see when they use media and how it affects them.

Model

- Model positive habits
- Monitor your own media use habits. Children are influenced through the choices they see parents make.
- Help your children to use media in active ways such as through music, writing, or art; teach them to become **creative producers** and not just passive consumers.

Remember . . .

Technology use is not a simple issue. Computers, smart phones and our access to instant communication and information have normalized our use of these technologies.

It is important that we practice healthy use of technology as it can affect the mental health of our children.

Resources

- Common Sense Media: <http://www.common sense media.org/>
- Child Mind Institute: <https://childmind.org/article/how-using-social-media-affects-teenagers/>
- Media Smarts: <http://mediasmarts.ca/>
- Teen Mental health: www.teenmentalhealth.org
- Center on Media and Child Health: <http://cmch.tv/>
- Healthy Children: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>