



Harvard Pilgrim
HealthCare

your health
Spring 2016

inside this issue



feature

[1] Teens and social media



health notes

[8] Take charge of your health

[10] Addiction treatment



plan news

[2] Save big on eyewear

[11] Health questionnaire

[14] Online tools

Teens, social media and health

HOW YOU CAN HELP KIDS USE THE INTERNET WISELY

Spending time on the Internet or surfing online is a regular feature of daily life for many of us. Research looking at how children ages 12 to 17 spend their time found that 92 percent are online. Twenty-four percent report using the Internet “almost constantly.” Much of this time is on social media.

Social media are web sites and mobile applications (“apps”) that allow people to make and share information, pictures and videos with others. Using devices such as laptops, smartphones and tablets, teens use

(continued on page 4)



(continued from page 1)

social media to build and maintain relationships with their peers. Research shows that 75 percent of American teens use social media; many of them using more than just one. It's not uncommon to have multiple accounts on social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.

It's a big frontier out there, with new specialty sites and services popping up daily.

Consider the thrilling, often untamed wilderness to which our children have such ready, constant access. What power! Now consider their stage of development. Common sense is anything but common for most teens. And no wonder. They are dealing with quite a lot, all at once: rapid growth and physical change, mood swings, emotional uncertainty — all with still-unformed powers of judgement.

Just as these online connections are important features of a teen's life and social well-being, they also have a profound impact on overall mental and physical adolescent health.

We spoke with the experts at the Boston Children's Hospital's Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH) to learn more about three common areas of concern: cyberbullying, life balance and sleep.

Cyberbullying

Bullying takes on a new and menacing shape when it shifts from school grounds and neighborhood settings to the cyber galaxy. Online, bullies have 24-7 opportunity to cause distress.

Cyberbullying can be direct and personal, such as upsetting pictures sent through Snapchat or threatening messages posted on an individual's Facebook wall. It also can be very public, with viral humiliation potential, like hateful comments on a YouTube video post.

In whatever shape or form, bullying can have damaging mental health consequences. Potential effects on the victim include not only lower self-esteem, but significant anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and/or long-term



Vault Apps: "Sexting" technology disguised as more ordinary apps like calculators or productivity tools.



Nearly 1 out of 6 teens has cyberbullied someone

Adolescent girls are just as likely, if not more likely than boys to experience cyberbullying (as a victim and offender)



psychological problems. Like so much activity online, the vicious behavior can be viral and take on an unstoppable life of its own.

What YOU can do

- Check in often and provide an approachable atmosphere: Talk with your teen about cyberbullying, both in the context of being a victim or an aggressor. Many teens are afraid to speak up and worry that their devices or Internet access will be taken away. So create an understanding of safe, honest communication that makes it clear your door is open to their concerns and conversation.
- Look out for warning signs such as hiding online activity, or becoming upset after checking a phone or other device. If need be, seek outside help from a school counselor or other professional in order to identify the problem and work toward a solution.

A sensible balance

Many adolescents believe that they can accomplish more in less time when they multitask with social media. In fact, a recent report from Common Sense Media found that half of all teens and tweens use social media while doing their homework. In truth, this practice com-

promises focus on a task (such as homework assignments), making distraction and mistakes more likely. That's because true "multitasking," as we think of it, is actually impossible for the human brain.

What actually occurs is this: the brain must toggle back and forth between competing cognitive tasks, such as texting and studying, since

each requires different parts of the brain. In reality it takes longer to complete multiple activities than it does to complete one focused activity. (Of course, many of us are just figuring this out!)

The time teens spend

FOMO ("Fear Of Missing Out"): The need to stay constantly connected for fear of missing any social media activity.



on social media also may take valuable time away from other important activities such as time outdoors, physical activity, enrichment opportunities like after-school clubs, and even the old school face-to-face socializing (they've heard tell of from grandparents). And it seems that teens get it: a 2015 study conducted by CMCH and iKeepSafe found that teens believe the time they spend with screen media detracts from other daily activities they enjoy and those they need, such as time for sleep and homework.

What YOU can do

- Make it clear that you understand the value of social media in your teen's life.
- Talk about the importance of focusing on one task or activity at a time.
- Model these healthy behaviors yourself.
- Establish "no fly zone" times, like turning off all devices/background media during family meals.
- Keep devices in the common areas of your home so you can keep an eye on the online activity and, with homework, help kids stay on task.
- Encourage face-to-face interactions with her friends, whether through sports, extracurricular activities or other in-person outings.

Sleep

Though many don't get it, adolescents need an average of eight to ten hours of sleep each night to function at their best. One study found only 15 percent of teens report getting even 8.5 hours of sleep on school nights. Lack of sleep not only makes it hard to fully engage in life, but can lead to mood swings, obesity and poor school performance.

For most teens, social media use can go into the wee hours, as their desire to stay connected to their friends and peers sometimes trumps the need for quality sleep. With a “Fear of Missing Out” (or “FOMO”) teens often keep their Internet-connected devices nearby at bedtime so they won’t miss any alerts or posts, further limiting the opportunity for quality REM sleep, so important in adolescent development.

Many electronic screen devices also radiate blue light, which can interfere with individuals’ melatonin levels and natural circadian rhythms – vital biological features of sleep. Using such devices as close to an hour before bedtime is another way to compromise a good night’s sleep.

What YOU can do

- Make bedtime and bedrooms device-free.
- Make sure all blue-light-emitting electronic devices are off an hour before bedtime, and encourage other activities for winding down, such as reading a paper book or an eReader (which uses blue-light-free ePaper). Set up a device charging station in a common room (such as the kitchen) where all devices can charge overnight.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Boston Children’s Hospital Center on Media and Child Health cmch.tv

American Academy of Pediatrics healthychildren.org

Digital Gov digitalgov.gov

Common Sense Media commonsensemedia.org

WHEN IS YOUR TEEN READY FOR SOCIAL MEDIA?

Thinking about letting your teen open a Snapchat, YouTube or Instagram account? Be sure to consider the following:

AGE By law children must be at least 13, although there is no magical threshold and no concrete data. CMCH suggests that parents set up all accounts together with their child and have all their child’s passwords. The decision is ultimately up to the parents since only they know best their own child’s individual level of maturity.

PREPAREDNESS Even when your child is emotionally mature enough to handle interactions in cyberspace, take the time to discuss what it means to be a “good digital citizen,” and that the use of social media is a privilege and responsibility, not a right.

SAFETY Set up all social media accounts together with your teen and stay tuned in. Make it clear that you need to have the passwords and ready access to all accounts for safety reasons. Explain that you don’t want to police, but as a responsible parent you want to be vigilant.

media use plan

Setting smart limits on media usage can prevent harms, from obesity to troubled sleep to problems at school and home.

One way to do it: Create a family media use plan. Together, draft a document that lays down basic rules. Consider:

- No screens in bedrooms.
- unplugged family mealtimes.
- A “media curfew” before bedtime. Pick a time to plug all devices into a central charging station – and leave them there for the night.
- Sticking to age-appropriate content, as determined by movie, game and TV ratings.