Ways Parents Can Manage Teens' Technology Use

Technology—such as social media, texting and online gaming—can be very appealing to teens. It helps them connect with peers and learn new things.

However, teens are spending more and more time online, according to studies. Too much time spent doing certain types of activities can negatively affect their schoolwork, health, activity levels and face-to-face communication skills. And it can also disrupt family time.

Managing teens' digital media use can be quite challenging. Luckily, there are some tips that can help.

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Here are some tips on managing your teen's use of technology:

👍 Tip #1:

Work with your teen to develop a media plan. Experts recommend developing a consistent media plan to fit each family member. It should include:

- Positive ways to use technology.
- Amount of recreational screen time allowed each day.
- Times devices should be turned off at night.

Our Family Media Plan

When you work *with* your teen to create this plan, your teen shares the responsibility and is more likely to stick to it.

👍 Tip #2:

Designate device-free times and traditions. Establish device-free activities, such as mealtimes and family get-togethers. And set aside special time when you and your teen can *really* focus on each other, without the distraction of devices. This may be when you:

- Drive in the car together.
- Do home and garden projects.
- Play sports or board games.
- Go on a walk or hike.
- Cook together.
- Volunteer with a local organization.
- Talk and relax in each other's company.

👍 Tip #3:

Give your teen the tools to make good choices. Talk about basic online courtesy, safety and appropriate behavior. Make your expectations clear, such as:

- Be respectful.
- Never engage in online bullying and always get help if feeling bullied.
- Do not share inappropriate content.
- Be careful about interacting with people you do not know and trust in real life.
- Do not give out private details that can put security at risk.

To make it a two-way conversation, ask what your teen already knows. Discussing these issues ahead of time can help your teen make better choices when tough situations *do* arise.

A Positive Online Presence

Another thing to discuss with your teen is how to create a positive online presence. This is the social media presence that possible employers, college recruiters and others may be able to view. What does your teen want that first impression to be? And what posts, photos or videos has your teen shared that could negatively impact that impression?
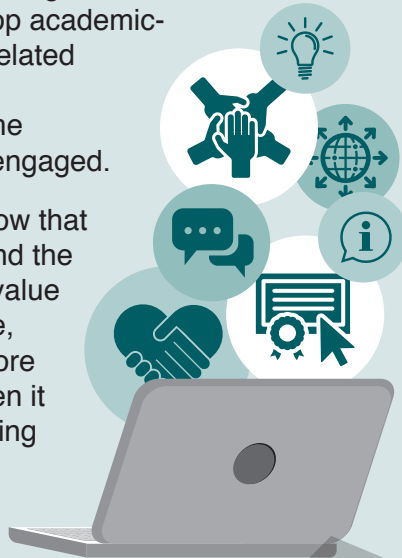
Tip #4:

Embrace the benefits of technology. Your teen may stop listening if you talk only about what's *wrong* with the use of devices. Instead, show that you understand how technology can be used positively, such as:

- To build social connections.
- To seek out support.
- To be exposed to new ideas and knowledge.
- To develop academic- and job-related skills.
- To become civically engaged.

When you show that you understand the benefits and value of screen time, you'll have more credibility when it comes to putting limits on it.

Tip #5:

Be a positive role model. Put down your phone, tablet or laptop when you are spending time with your teen. When you limit your own screen time, you teach the importance of moderation by example. You also show that your teen is your number one priority!

The Impact on Teen Health

First and foremost, too much screen time can have a negative impact on teens' physical and mental health. This can lead to:

- **Sleep loss.** Teens who use digital devices in the hour before bed often have trouble falling asleep. And teens need eight to 10 hours of quality sleep each night to learn and thrive.
- **Depression.** Teens who compare their lives with others' social media posts may feel bad about themselves.
- **Academic problems.** Teens who use multiple devices while doing their schoolwork tend not to learn or perform as well.

Other Health Concerns

Research has shown that too much screen time can also lead to:

- Lower psychological coping skills.
- Problems handling stress.
- Weight concerns.
- Physical "text neck" issues.
- Dangers of distracted walking or driving.
- Addiction to online activity.
- Decreased interest in real, in-person relationships.

Guidelines for Managing Teens' Screen Time

Ask yourself:

- Where will devices be allowed and where will they be off-limits?
- How much time will my teen be allowed to use them, on which activities?
- Will any rules be different if my teen pays for the device?
- Will the same rules apply during weekends and school breaks?
- What consequences will there be for misusing devices?
- How will I maintain consistency?
- What example am I setting through my own use of technology?

Without a doubt, technological devices are an important part of our world. By setting reasonable limits on their use, you can help your teen become a responsible digital citizen, as well as a healthy, balanced, thriving person!

Resource: Additional screen time guidelines can be found on the American Academy of Pediatrics' and Common Sense Media's websites.