



# Tech Smart

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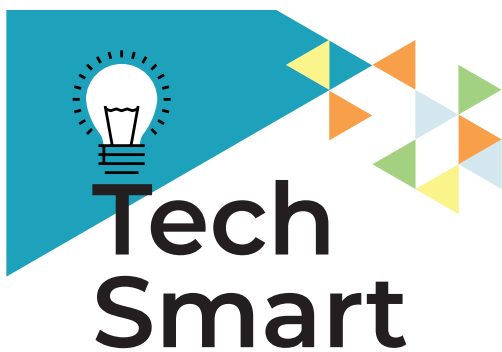
What Parents  
Need to  
Know About  
Technology

## Dear Parent,

As you know, technology is everywhere today. Your child has access to all kinds of information and images 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

While this access opens up many wonderful doors, the explosion of technology and social media also brings new challenges.

This booklet goes over the various benefits and risks that come with technology use. It also provides tips to ensure that your child has a positive, healthy relationship with today's technology.



What Parents Need  
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# Technology

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## Upsides & Downsides

There are many benefits—and pitfalls—to the technology that's available today. If you're unsure how much freedom to give your student, think about the following.



### The upsides

**Efficient communication.** Having the ability to contact your child, and they being able to contact you, is one of the biggest benefits of technology. Young people can also stay more connected with friends and extended family—and build a bigger support network.

**Easy access to information.** News, weather, and information on virtually any topic or subject are available 24/7.

**Entertainment.** There are endless ways to entertain ourselves online—movies, games, videos, sports. Boredom is seldom an issue when technology is available.

### The downsides

**Inappropriate information and unsavory people.** The internet doesn't distinguish between children and adults, which means that children have access to a wide range of information that's inappropriate—and possibly harmful to those under a certain age.

**Not the whole story.** When we see the edited versions of people's lives online, we begin to believe that our own happiness and good times don't measure up.

**A constant disruption.** Smartphones and continuous internet access can create relentless disruptions—and the temptation to answer a ringing phone, or to check texts, emails, and social media notifications is ongoing.

# Screen Time & Tech Addiction

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Many parents are concerned about the amount of time their children spend using technology, including the long-term impact of screen time. Here's what you need to know.

## How much screen time is OK?

Today's young people spend, on average, 6–9 hours a day consuming media—watching TV, listening to music, scrolling through social media, browsing the internet, and playing video games. However, according to experts, children and teens should ideally have no more than **two hours** of recreational screen time per day (not including school work).



## What is tech addiction?

Nearly 80% of teens say they check their phones hourly, and over 70% say they feel the need to immediately respond to texts and DMs. Getting new likes and follows, watching a funny video, or completing a task in a video game gives the brain a hit of feel-good chemicals. This can quickly lead to a desire to do it again and again—and feeling anxious or even angry if that isn't possible.

### Technology and mental health

When you consider the downsides of technology and the amount of time many teens spend online, it's not surprising to learn that research shows a clear link between technology use and the declining mental health among young people.

# Social Media

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Young people generally use social media for fun, entertainment, and to connect with their friends. Social media, however, presents opportunities that parents should be aware of, and look out for.

## Platforms to know

**Facebook.** While less popular with young people nowadays, Facebook remains the most popular social media platform.

**Instagram** is a popular photo- and video-sharing platform.

**Snapchat.** Most popular for fun photo filters and disappearing stories and conversations, Snapchat is a favorite of young people.

**Twitter** is known as a “microblogging” social networking site, as tweets are limited to 280 characters without a paid subscription.

## What to look out for

Social media users can easily view inappropriate photos and videos, and young people can also engage with strangers in comment sections and with direct messages.

Also, seeing only the best and most exciting snippets of other people’s lives has been shown to negatively impact the mental health of young people, especially girls.

## Texting and chat apps

Many texting and chat apps, like Kik and WhatsApp, allow for anonymous messaging. They often do not have robust parental controls, making them popular—and risky—apps for teens.

# YouTube, TikTok, & More

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Video-sharing platforms like YouTube and TikTok are popular for entertainment, education, and connecting with others. With a constant stream of user-generated content at their fingertips, young people often spend a lot of time on these platforms.

## Platforms to know

**YouTube.** One of the most popular video platforms worldwide, YouTube provides access to online videos on a wide variety of topics. Users can watch and comment on user-uploaded videos, and also upload their own.

**TikTok** is the source of numerous viral videos, trends, and challenges. TikTok features short videos (ranging from 15 seconds to 3 minutes) in a variety of genres, many of which involve music, comedy, and/or dance.

**Facebook** and **Instagram** also feature bite-sized user-uploaded videos called Reels.

## What to look out for

While the Terms of Service (TOS) of these platforms prohibits explicit violence, sexual content, and hate speech, they still feature a large amount of inappropriate content and misinformation.

There is also increasing evidence that continuously viewing short videos like TikToks and Reels provides a rush of feel-good brain chemicals that makes the viewer want to watch more and more.

# Message Boards & Blogs

Message boards and blogs are a popular way to get creative, find like-minded people, and share ideas. But these apps and websites are usually anonymous, which can create a toxic or risky environment.



## Platforms to know

**Reddit** is a user-generated content site featuring news, videos, photos, and message board posts. Users can browse “subreddits,” or individual message board communities that cater to a specific topic, hobby, or group of people.

**Imgur** users can post and comment on pictures and GIFs (short loops of moving images).

**Tumblr** is a blogging and social networking site that allows users to follow and comment on different blogs that interest them.

**4Chan** is a community of completely anonymous message boards, requiring neither a username or a login to participate. Often containing unmoderated pornography, racism, and sexism, 4Chan is never appropriate for young people and can be dangerous for those who access it.

## What to look out for

While blogs and message boards can seem like a great way for teens to engage with others with whom they share common interests, being exposed to inappropriate content, harmful ideas, and people with bad intentions is always a risk. This is why it’s important to know what communities your child is participating in online.



# Video Games

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Video games are a popular way to have fun, and they can even help improve problem-solving skills and dexterity. There are, however, things parents need to be aware of in order to ensure their children are gaming smart and safe.

## Types of video games

**Console games** are played on systems like Xbox, PlayStation, and Nintendo. Many console games have an online component that costs an additional monthly or annual fee. There are a variety of console games, many of which are only appropriate for adults.

**PC games** are played on a computer. Similar to console games, PC games often have an online component that allows game play with others, including strangers.

**Mobile games** are played on a mobile device like a phone or tablet. Mobile games are especially popular with younger children.

## What to look out for

Many video games contain inappropriate content, including violence, adult language, and sexual content. Most video games also provide the opportunity to play and interact with strangers.

## Ratings and content information

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rates games based on their content and appropriateness for different age groups, similar to how movies are rated. These ratings, along with detailed content descriptions, are found on the back of video game cases. For more information, visit [esrb.org](http://esrb.org). Ratings and content information for mobile games are found in app stores.

# Cyberbullying

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Cyberbullying is the use of electronic communication devices to harass, threaten, or intimidate others.

## What cyberbullying looks like

Cyberbullying includes making rude posts and comments, spreading rumors, posting hurtful or embarrassing photos of someone else, or even outright harassment.

Cyberbullying can be especially harmful because, unlike bullying that occurs face-to-face, it can occur anywhere at any time, including when the target is at home where they should feel safe.

## What you can do

If your child is the target of cyberbullying, take the following steps.

- ▶ Talk to your child about what has happened, but don't jump to conclusions. You may be inclined to see your child as the victim who is innocent of any wrongdoing—which may in fact be true. However, to provide the best support for your child, you need to know the whole story and the chronology of events.
- ▶ Read online comments, print them out or screenshot them, and save them (in case they're needed as evidence). Listen to your child, be supportive, and discuss how to best handle the situation.
- ▶ Be an advocate for your child. Consider contacting your child's counselor or a school administrator and asking for assistance.
- ▶ Talk to your child about how to safely speak up, and stand up, against cyberbullying.
- ▶ Work to help your child strengthen their sense of self to minimize the emotional damage of hurtful words and actions. If you are concerned about your child's psychological well-being, consider connecting your child with a counselor or therapist.

## Be aware

Young people often don't tell their parents they're being bullied because they're embarrassed, worried their parents will overreact, and/or afraid the bully will retaliate. If you see any of the following, ask your child if someone is bothering them at school or online:

- ▶ more anxious, quiet, insecure
- ▶ not wanting to go to school
- ▶ a drop in grades
- ▶ withdrawn or depressed



## If your child is harassing another

If you have been informed that your child may be harassing or cyberbullying another person, you may not want to believe that it's true. But young people—even the ones you'd think would know better—make poor choices from time to time.

If it appears that your child has engaged in cyberbullying, consider taking the following steps:

- ▶ Ask questions to help both you and your child understand what they were trying to accomplish and why. Encourage your child to put themselves in the other person's shoes, and discuss the harm that can result from cyberbullying.
- ▶ Discuss how your child can make amends for their actions, or repair the damage these actions may have caused.
- ▶ Hold your child accountable. Explain that using social media and technology are privileges—not rights—and consider limiting your child's technology use for a period of time.
- ▶ If you're concerned that there may be underlying issues fueling your teen's behavior, consider connecting your child with a counselor or therapist.

# What You Can Do

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The following tips will help you help your child enjoy the benefits of technology, while minimizing the risks.

## Talk about being smart and safe

- ▶ Discuss what information is appropriate (and inappropriate) to share online and on social media. Don't shy away from discussing the dangers of sexting (sending sexually explicit photos or video to someone else).
- ▶ Remind your child that people online may not be who they say they are, and to never share personal information online (such as their phone number, address, school name, or favorite hangout).
- ▶ Make sure your child understands that when you send a message or post a photo, it becomes permanent. This means that somebody will *always* have access to it.
- ▶ Discuss the importance of being respectful and kind to others online. Also remind your child to never put anything online that they would not want a parent, teacher, college admissions officer, or potential employer to see.

## Be interested

Tap into your child's interests and expertise. Ask your child to show you some popular websites and apps, and to share some of their favorites with you. This is a great way to stay connected, keep up on technology, and bond with your child.



## Provide structure and set limits

- ▶ If left on their own, many young people will spend hours and hours on their electronic devices. Have an open dialogue about how much time your child should be able to spend with technology, and about how much time they feel is fair—but be comfortable knowing that you have the final say.
- ▶ Know what apps your child is using, what games they are playing, and how frequently they use them. Insist on transparency.
- ▶ If you don't entirely trust your child to be transparent with you about how they use technology (not because they are untrustworthy, but because inappropriate content is so easily accessible online), there are ways to monitor and limit your teen's cell phone and online activities. You can, for example, check your child's browsing history to see what sites they have visited.

If you need assistance with parental controls, contact your phone and/or internet provider, or search online for "parental controls."

## Set times to unplug

Insist that all communication devices be turned off and put away during dinner and other family times.

To help your child wind down for bed, set a time in the evening when your child must stop using technology—ideally an hour before they fall asleep.



## Technology should be a privilege

Your student should only have access to online games and electronic devices if they are meeting your standards at home (chores and homework) and at school (grades, conduct, and attendance).

## Monitor use

- ▶ If you're checking up on your child, it's best to be honest about it. Remind them that you're not trying to meddle, but that one of your jobs as a parent is to protect them and ensure their health and safety.



- ▶ Ask your teen questions, such as:

*"What sorts of things do you post online?"*

*"Are you using privacy settings?"*

*"Is it okay if I check your accounts?"*

*"Can you show me the apps you use?"*

- ▶ Talk to your teen about how social media never paints an accurate picture, and about why your child should never compare their everyday life to someone else's highlight Reel.
- ▶ Consider creating a technology/internet contract that lays out your expectations for your teen's use of electronic devices. You can find sample contracts online, or you can create your own.

## Expect resistance

Imposing technology limits on young people is often met with resistance—sometimes a great deal of it. This resistance can take a variety of forms. It can be a loud tantrum, the silent treatment, or emotionally manipulative/guilt-provoking statements such as "none of my friends' parents are doing this."

If you face strong resistance in response to setting technology limits, it's important to keep the following in mind:

- ▶ Your teen likely has an unhealthy relationship with technology.
- ▶ No matter how angry your child is or how much they complain, you do not need to react. In fact, it's better to let the anger burn out on its own rather than to engage in the battle. Eventually the displays of anger will stop, but only when your teen realizes that calm conversation works better.

## Impose consequences

Your teen should understand that inappropriate and/or excessive use of technology will be met with limits on devices and/or time spent online. Depending on the issue, you can take a device away from your teen for a period of time, limit the use of a device to certain hours of the day, and/or add parental controls.

If you take away privileges, write up a plan that clarifies when privileges can be earned back, and what your child needs to do to earn them back.

## Be a good role model

Parents forfeit the right to preach and lecture if they don't exhibit the self-control and self-discipline they're expecting of their children. If your face is buried in your devices rather than interacting with your loved ones, then you have no credibility. Reserve your online use to specific times, and—when possible—try to use your devices when you're not in the company of your children.

## If you have serious concerns

*If you're noticing behaviors or changes in your child that concern you, be sure to act.* If at any time you're worried that your child's use of technology is harming them, be sure to talk to your child about your concerns. If your talks don't lead to a noticeable change, don't hesitate to reach out to a trained professional (counselor/therapist) to help you understand the problem and devise a plan.

## Closing words

Technology isn't inherently good or bad. It is what we make it. If we set limits, provide guidance, and have open lines of communication, our children will learn proper boundaries and grow up healthy and strong.

For more on screen time and internet safety, watch this short video.





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