



Tech Smart



**What Students
Need to
Know About
Technology**



Dear Student,

This is not your typical book on technology. We aren't going to talk about programs and apps—they're always changing anyway.

While we will go over some of the things you've heard adults discuss, this book will ask you to think more deeply about these issues, and to reflect on how technology, the internet, and social media are affecting your life.

So...this book is really about *you*, and how you can enjoy the things that are positive about technology—while also enjoying a meaningful life offline.



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introduction

There's so much to love about technology, but like everything in life, it's not perfect. While technology can add a lot to your life, it can also have some negative effects, especially on things that truly matter, like your relationships and your future.

It's important for you to pay attention to how you're using technology, and to also consider the impact it's having on you.

how are YOU being influenced?



When you're growing up, what you are exposed to influences how you think and who you are.

Perhaps your style is influenced by the images you see online. Perhaps your posts are influenced by what your friends are posting. Perhaps all the negative news and the violence you see in movies and video games is affecting your mood, or how you view the future. *No one except YOU knows how you are being influenced by technology and social media.*

So, what should you do?

Every now and then, stop and think about how technology and social media are affecting your life—and if something is having a negative effect on you, make a change.

be smart



You probably know that the internet contains a lot of information that's distorted or incorrect, as well as images and information you shouldn't see. There are also people online who want to do harm to others.

The adults in your life want to keep you safe from all that's negative, false, or harmful online, but there's only so much they can do. When it comes to technology, you need to be responsible.

Be smart and be safe online

- ▶ Don't put personal information (like your address or school name) anywhere online.
- ▶ Do not send or share inappropriate photos or messages. If you receive an inappropriate photo or message, delete it immediately.
- ▶ Create hard-to-guess passwords, change them regularly, and don't share them with anyone other than your parents.
- ▶ Don't download copyrighted music or videos—it's illegal and they can really mess up your devices.
- ▶ Do not meet face-to-face with someone you've met online.
- ▶ Not all communities and forums on the internet are positive. Choose the discussions and communities you participate in wisely.
- ▶ Double check the facts and information you read online—especially information found on social media.



permanent means permanent

Every message or photo you send or post online becomes permanent. This means that somebody will always have access to what you've sent and that it can always be recovered, even if you delete it.

The danger here is that one moment you may think sending a mean message or a revealing photo of yourself is okay to do, but once you press *send*, **YOU CAN NEVER GET IT BACK!** Even after that moment passes and you regret sending it, there is no way to make it disappear.

And remember...

- ▶ What you send or post can be forwarded to other people, including those you wouldn't normally share messages and photos with.
- ▶ Colleges and companies look at online activity to help them decide if they should accept or hire someone. This means that what you send or post could prevent you from getting a job, a scholarship, or acceptance to a college.
- ▶ What you send or post can become evidence that can be used against you by the authorities.

**In the online universe,
PERMANENT means PERMANENT,
but DELETED doesn't mean DELETED!**

healthy and unhealthy habits



When it comes to technology and social media, it's important that you create healthy habits. For example, if you're rushing through your homework so you have more time to play video games, this would fall into the "unhealthy habit" category. However, if you work out to an exercise video every evening to stay in shape, that would be considered a healthy habit.

You may not want to admit that your technology habits are causing you problems (perhaps with your relationships or your grades), but if they are, then they are habits you should break.

To know whether you have healthy or unhealthy habits, ask yourself if what you are doing online is making you feel better or worse; less stressed, or more; closer to others, or more isolated.

If what you're doing isn't making your life better, maybe it's time to make some changes.

Set some ground rules for yourself.

Allow yourself to only use technology for a set amount of time, at specific times of the day, or only after all of your responsibilities (such as chores and homework) are taken care of. That way, technology becomes a reward.



is it true?

Today it's more important than ever to fact check the information you read, and to question the motivations of those who wrote it.

It can sometimes be difficult to determine whether or not information is true, biased, satirical, or another kind of "fake news."

The following tips will help you figure out whether or not the information you read can be believed.

Read the whole story. Don't get your information from headlines only.

Look into the author. What is their goal or purpose? To inform? To persuade? Something else? Do they have expertise in the area they are writing about?

Consider the supporting information. Does the author have evidence to support their claims?

Check the date of the publication. Is the information recent?

Review your own biases. Are you more likely to believe biased information because of your own biases?

Be your own person and think for yourself.

If something doesn't sound right to you, it probably isn't. Use common sense and double check the facts and information you read online—especially information found on social media.

real life **versus** online life

For some teenagers, real life is amazing. Fun is being had, lessons are being learned, and goals are being accomplished. For others, real life isn't so amazing. Home is stressful, school is not going well, and the future doesn't look so bright.

Before the internet, there wasn't an easy way to escape from real life. But now, with movies always available and video games looking more and more lifelike, many young people are relying on the internet for a "vacation" from their real lives.



In video games, when you do the "right" thing, you quickly "level up." But in real life, sometimes it feels like it takes forever for things to get better.

Here are a few things to keep in mind...

- ▶ If you have a problem that can be solved, deal with it head on. Avoiding problems by spending your time in the online world will never solve anything.
- ▶ Know that difficult times will pass, and that things will get better.
- ▶ Taking a break to enjoy movies, video games, or social media is fine...but if you spend too much time in the online world, you'll miss out on all the amazing experiences—adventures, accomplishments, and love—that can only happen if you're fully engaged in your real life.

social media and mental health

While social media can add a lot to your life, there is increasing evidence that it's having a negative impact on the mental health of many teens. Here's what you need to know.

Social media is addictive. Social media apps and sites are designed to make you want to stay engaged—and to feel like you're missing out if you aren't continuously checking to see what's new.

Social media increases the risk of mental health issues in teens. There is a strong relationship between amount of time teens spend using social media and the instances of depression and anxiety.

Social media can make you feel stressed. Many teens report feeling pressure to quickly respond to messages, and to always be available. These demands can add to the regular pressures of being a student.

Social media can make you feel "not so great." People on social media edit and curate content to make their lives look like they're more fun than they are, and to make themselves look more attractive. As a result, many teens report feeling worse about themselves after using social media.

Remember...

Not everything you see on social media is real. People edit their feeds to only highlight the most amazing parts of their lives. So if you feel like your life doesn't compare, remember—**what you're seeing isn't real!**

unplug!

According to recent polls and studies...

- ▶ Today's teens spend about nine hours a day consuming media—watching TV, listening to music, browsing the internet, scrolling through social media, and playing video games.
- ▶ 92% of teens report going online daily.
- ▶ Nearly 80% of teens say they check their phones hourly.
- ▶ 50% of teens say they feel addicted to their mobile devices.
- ▶ Approximately 94% of teen drivers are aware that texting and driving is unsafe, but 35% still admit to doing it.



If you see yourself in any of the above statistics, or if you think that social media may already be affecting your mental health, counterbalance your technology use by periodically unplugging. Don't just silence your phone...completely unplug.

- ▶ Put your phone away during family times, and whenever you're interacting with others.
- ▶ To help you get a good night's sleep, turn off all devices an hour before you go to bed, and put your phone in another room to charge.
- ▶ Leave all of your devices at home and spend some time outside. Take a walk or go for a hike. Shoot hoops, or read a book in the park. Enjoy life for a while without the ringing or buzzing of a phone.

cyberbullying

Think of cyberbullying as being mean to others online.



- ▶ Any time you text or post something (including pictures) that another person might consider mean, hurtful, harassing, teasing, or just unwanted, it could be considered cyberbullying.
- ▶ It's important to know that even though YOU might think your words are funny or no big deal, you could still be held accountable if the person reading what you wrote feels insulted or hurt.
- ▶ The safest way to avoid being accused of cyberbullying is to ONLY use social media in a positive way. Using technology or social media to spread gossip or to engage in conflicts never goes well, and it only adds stress to your life.

Remember to be extra polite to people online. They can't see your expression or hear your tone of voice, so what you text or post can easily be misunderstood.



if cyberbullying is a problem for you...

Here are some helpful tips for anyone who is being bullied online.

- ▶ Know that you deserve to feel safe and respected.
- ▶ If you're getting harassed or bullied online, **DO NOT REPLY**, no matter how tempted you are. Save or print all posts and messages, and show them to an adult.
- ▶ Resist the urge to match the bully's aggression with aggression of your own. Bullies want a reaction—it gives them the feeling of having power over you. Do not react.
- ▶ Bullies want you to be afraid to tell anyone, just so they can keep on bullying. Don't let anyone bully you into silence!
Tell an adult you trust.
- ▶ Never accept bullying or get used to being harassed or intimidated online, or in real life.
- ▶ Know that it takes courage and intelligence to get help when you need it—*and know that you have both.*

Don't ever think there's something wrong with you because a bully is targeting you. And remember . . . it is the bully who's weak and should feel ashamed, not you.





how is tech affecting your life?

To determine how technology is affecting your life, answer the following questions:

Yes **No**

- Do you get upset or angry when you don't have access to your phone or the internet?
- Are your grades lower than they should be?
- Has social media ever caused problems with friends?
- Do family members often hassle you about spending too much time on your phone?
- Do you find yourself often comparing your life to other people's lives?
- Do you find yourself reaching for your phone every few minutes?
- Do you visit websites that contain inappropriate content?

If your answer to any of the above is "Yes"...

think about changing how you use technology and social media. And if you can't make the necessary changes on your own, ask for help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of maturity and intelligence.



what really matters


As we've discussed in this booklet, the internet and social media can add a lot of flavor and joy to our lives. They can also help us achieve our goals, and turn our dreams into realities. But at the end of the day, when we close our laptops and shut off our phones, the things that will truly define our health and happiness are our relationships and accomplishments.

You get to define what matters to you, and if you make the choice every day to value people, relationships, education, experiences, and health more than the temporary distraction of technology, you'll know what it feels like to lead an exciting, fulfilling life.

So, enjoy technology, use it responsibly, think before you press *send*, and—as often as you can—look up from your screens. The greatest moments can only be experienced if you are out in the world with other people, appreciating all of the challenges and triumphs that come your way.



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