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Know! to Support Healthy Digital Well-being

Young people today are more digitally connected than any previous generation. Digital connection comes with many benefits – young people can easily stay up to date with weather and news, complete school assignments, discover new things, and connect with peers worldwide. In fact, moderate screen time may even enhance young people’s creativity and communication skills.¹

However, we know that excessive screen time and access to certain content online can harm people of all ages. Building healthy technology habits and cultivating healthy digital well-being are more important than ever. Disconnecting from technology may be especially difficult for young people who have always had access to technology. As a caring adult, you can use your skills and experiences to help young people develop a relationship with technology that keeps them safe, healthy, and happy.^{1,2,3,4}

What is digital well-being?

Digital well-being refers to the way we interact with the internet, social media, and technology. Our digital well-being includes how being online impacts our emotional, mental, physical, and social health. Healthy digital well-being occurs when using technology enhances our lives and contributes to our sense of fulfillment and safety. Unhealthy digital well-being occurs when the use of technology negatively impacts how we feel about ourselves and causes distraction or worry. Unhealthy digital well-being can contribute to isolation, anxiety, depression, and stress, while healthy digital well-being can create a sense of satisfaction with our lives.⁵

What can caring adults do to improve digital well-being?

Help youth identify how their social media use makes them feel

Ask the young people in your life how their use of social media affects their thoughts, feelings, and activities in real life. Help them to notice which aspects of technology make them feel happy and satisfied and which ones leave them feeling upset or unsatisfied. Perhaps spending a lot of time on TikTok makes them feel unhappy with their body image, but spending time on Instagram inspires them because they get motivated to try a new hobby. When young people are able to recognize how their time online affects other aspects of their lives, they are better equipped to make changes to protect their mental health, like deleting an app or setting time limits on their usage.^{2,4,5}

What can impact your digital well-being?

Online content

Not all online content is appropriate for young people. Consuming violent, adult-oriented, or discriminatory content can decrease young people’s sense of safety, both online and in real life.⁵

Screen time

Excessive use of technology and social media has been linked to mental health issues and feelings of loneliness among young people. Spending too much time online can also negatively impact schoolwork, sleep, and desire to participate in extracurricular or social activities.^{1,5}

Work together to create a media usage plan

Adults and young people often have different views when it comes to technology usage but can work together to make a plan that suits both of their needs. Creating a media usage plan involves reflecting on your relationship with technology and developing guidelines for how you want to use technology to achieve a safer, healthier relationship with it. You might consider a maximum screen time or device-free zones in your house. The American Academy of Pediatrics has a [template](#) that you can use to formulate your plan together.^{3,6}

Start with small changes

Changing your habits is difficult, and that difficulty extends to disconnecting from technology. Start small by taking 30 minutes to an hour each day to set aside as screen-free time. Young people might not know what to do during their screen-free time, so work with them to develop a list of alternative activities they can do instead of using their devices. The possibilities are endless – maybe they would enjoy painting, going on a nature walk, listening to music, playing a game, cooking a new recipe, or riding a bike. If they enjoy and are excited about the activity, making this small change should be much simpler than ditching their devices altogether.^{1,4,7}

Model appropriate technology use

Adults should set a positive example of technology use for the youth in their lives. Young people are watching and learning from you, so try to practice what you preach. If it's important to you that your young person takes screen-time breaks or doesn't use their device during dinner, use yourself as an example for them to follow. If you've created a media plan together, do your best to stick to it. Don't be afraid to discuss the challenges you face and the successes you achieve with your youth. Be honest about how difficult it can be to unplug and remind them that you're in it together when it comes to building healthy habits. You might even start to feel better about your relationship with technology along the way!^{1,3,4,6,7}

Stay Informed

Technology changes quickly and it can be tough to keep up with how young people are using technology. Take time to understand the apps your young person is using. Download them yourself and get a sense for what using them is like. Continue to check in with the young people in your life about their digital well-being. Remember that this isn't a one-and-done conversation – you and your young person's needs will change over time. Additionally, knowing where to go for help is important if a young person has experienced something upsetting or worrying online. See the list of resources below for more support and information.^{5,6}

Resources

[Birth - Preschool - The Digital Wellness Lab](#)

[AAP Media Plan \(healthychildren.org\)](#)

[Inappropriate content on social media | NSPCC](#)

[How to Handle Finding Disturbing Content on Your Teen's Phone \(verywellfamily.com\)](#)

[Superscript sources are hyperlinked at the start of this document](#)

For additional Know! Prevention Tips for Everyone, scan the QR code:



What can impact your digital well-being?

Digital drama

Disagreements and breakups that occur online can be more complicated than those that happen in real life. Without body language and facial expressions, misunderstandings between friends are more frequent and can escalate more quickly. Additionally, social exclusion and bullying can intensify online and contribute to negative mental health outcomes for young people.⁵

Negative pressure

Being active online can create pressure to receive many likes on a post, to look a certain way, or to have an 'aesthetic' lifestyle. The pressure to achieve an unattainable goal can decrease young people's self-esteem and leave them feeling inadequate.⁵

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