

COUNSELLING CONNECTION: P.Knox

Technology and Youth: Healthy Habits

THE PARENTING CHALLENGE

Children and adolescence are growing up in a rapidly expanding digital age. Parents might feel that they can't keep up, and are unsure of how to manage technology in the home. There is evidence to support the positive *and* negative effects of technology use, which leaves parents with a challenging responsibility. Parents can play a positive role in modeling healthy technology behaviors. This requires parents' initiative to become educated about the impact of technology on children/teen development, self-reflection about their own values and beliefs about technology, and a commitment to engage in healthy technology behaviors.

"Good Habits formed at youth make all the difference." Aristotle

What We Know....

- The way that children interact, play and learn has changed more in the last 15 years than in the last 570 years.
- Average screen time per day has increased and is likely to continue to rise as technology improves and becomes more available.
- Video games/internet/social media can impact and alter the brain's need for constant change and instant gratification.
- Video games stimulate the fight/flight response in children, which impacts their nervous systems and emotional states.
- Perceived danger that is experienced online will stimulate the stress response in the brain/body even though it is not a real event.
- Repeated exposure to video games can create chronic stress, as the body's stress response is repeatedly activated. This can result in increased agitation and inability to return to a calm state.
- Cyber bullying has increased among youth and often goes unreported.
- There are often large discrepancies that exist between parents' perceived technology use among children, and actual use.
- The preoccupation with selfies and online posting is leaving young people out of touch with present experiences and opportunities to build face-to-face relationships.
- Young people are becoming more dependent on their devices to avoid social interactions or feelings of discomfort in new settings.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY!

- Allow children to be part of parameters and consequences you set using a collaborative approach.
- Model healthy face-to-face interactions with others when you are waiting in a lineup, or for an appointment.
- Take time to plan how you will connect face to face with your child each day.
- Leave devices at home or in car when at a restaurant/social event.
- When children begin texting, read their texts between friends. Talk about how all texting conversations are recorded and permanent.
- Refrain from allowing devices in children's bedrooms overnight.
- Know your children's passwords to social media accounts. This is a privilege that requires responsible behaviors.
- Discuss the importance of not immediately reacting on social media when emotionally escalated.
- Discuss how your child will respond to inappropriate requests (online or texts).
- Ensure that your children know *not* to share personal information online.
- Have children become familiar with and show you privacy settings and how to set them appropriately.
- Read peer posts so that you are aware of what your child is viewing. Ask questions about posts, etc. ("Why do you think *Tom* posted that picture? Do you think there are any negative consequences to *Tom* commenting to that post? Etc).
- Validate the positive experiences that technology can provide and show interest and curiosity in some of your child's technology interests.
- Set time limits for tech use when friends are over.
- Have technology free times/days and let child choose some creative ways to spend time with family members or friends.
- Explore apps that monitor and control screen use.
- Engage in physical activities with your children.
- Educate children on how managing screen time is a health issue for brain and body.
- Share age appropriate news articles that report on positive *and* negative technology use for children/teens.
- Read online studies about technology, and the impact on social /emotional health of children.
- Actively observe how you are modeling technology use and what it might express about your values and priorities.

References

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