Constantly Connected: Adverse Effects of Media on Children & Teens

Today's children and teens are growing up immersed in digital media. They are exposed to media in all forms, including TV, computers, smartphones, and other screens.

Media can influence how children and teens feel, learn, think, and behave.

What We Know:

Here are facts about digital media use.

- Almost 75% of teens own a smartphone. They can access the Internet, watch TV and videos, and download interactive applications (apps). Mobile apps allow photo-sharing, gaming, and video-chatting.

- 25% of teens describe themselves as "constantly connected" to the Internet.

- 76% of teens use at least one social media site. More than 70% of teens visit multiple social media sites, such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram.

- 4 of 5 households (families) own a device used to play video games.

Why It's Good to Unplug:

Overuse of digital media and screens may place your child or teen at risk of

- **Obesity**. Excessive screen use, as well as having a TV in the bedroom, can increase the risk of obesity (/English/health-issues/conditions/obesity/Pages/Obesity-Prevention-AAP-Policy-Explained.aspx). Teens who watch more than 5 hours of TV per day are 5 times more likely to be overweight than teens who watch 0 to 2 hours. Watching TV for more than 1.5 hours daily is a risk factor for obesity for children 4 through 9 years of age. This is in part due to the fact that viewers are exposed to advertising for high-calorie foods. Viewers are also more likely to snack or overeat while watching screen media.

- **Sleep problems**. Media use can interfere with sleep (/English/healthy-living/sleep/Pages/Healthy-Sleep-Habits-How-Many-Hours-Does-Your-Child-Need.aspx). Children and teens who spend more time with social media or who sleep with mobile devices in their rooms are at greater risk for sleep problems. Exposure to light (particularly blue light) and stimulating content from screens can delay or disrupt sleep, and have a negative effect on school.

- **Problematic internet use**. Children who overuse online media can be at risk for problematic Internet use. Heavy video gamers (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Video-Games-Set-Your-Own-Ratings-System.aspx) are at risk for Internet gaming disorder. They spend most of their free time online, and show less interest in offline or "real-life" relationships. 4% to 8% of children and teens may have problems limiting their Internet use, and almost 10% of US youth 8 to 18 years of age may have Internet gaming disorder. There may be increased risks for depression at both the high and low ends of Internet use.

- **Negative effect on school performance**. Children and teens often use entertainment media at the same time that they're doing other things, such as homework (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/Developing-Good-Homework-Habits.aspx). Such multi-tasking can have a negative effect on school.

- **Risky behaviors**. Teens' displays on social media often show risky behaviors, such as substance use (/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Is-Your-Child-Vulnerable-to-Substance-Abuse.aspx), sexual behaviors, self-injury, or eating disorders (/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Is-Your-Teen-at-Risk-for-Developing-an-Eating-Disorder.aspx). Exposure of teens through media to alcohol, tobacco use, or sexual behaviors is associated with earlier initiation of these behaviors.

- **Sexting and privacy and predators**. Sexting (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/The-New-Problem-of-Sexting.aspx) is sending nude or seminude images as well as sexually explicit text messages using a cell phone. About 12% of youth age 10 to 19 years of age have sent a sexual photo to someone else. Teens need to know that once content is shared with others they may not be able to delete or remove it completely. They may also not know about or choose not to use privacy settings. Another risk is that sex offenders may use social networking, chat rooms, e-mail, and online games to contact and exploit children.

- **Cyberbullying**. Children and teens online can be victims of cyberbullying (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Cyberbullying.aspx). Cyberbullying can lead to short- and long-term negative social, academic, and health issues for both the bully and the target. Fortunately, programs to help prevent bullying may reduce cyberbullying.

What's Your Plan?

Children today are growing up in a time of highly personalized media use experiences, so parents must develop personalized media use plans for their children. Media plans should take into account each child's age, health, personality, and developmental stage. All children and teens need adequate sleep (8-12 hours, depending on age), physical activity (1 hour), and time away from media. Create your Family Media Use Plan here. (/English/media/Pages/default.aspx#planview)

Additional Information & Resources:

- Healthy Sleep Habits: How Many Hours Does Your Child Need? (/English/healthy-living/sleep/Pages/Healthy-Sleep-Habits-How-Many-Hours-Does-Your-Child-Need.aspx)

- How Virtual Violence Impacts Children's Behavior: Steps for Parents (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Virtual-Violence-Impacts-Childrens-Behavior.aspx)

- Kids & Tech: 10 Tips for Parents in the Digital Age (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Tips-for-Parents-Digital-Age.aspx)

- Obesity Prevention: AAP Policy Explained (/English/health-issues/conditions/obesity/Pages/Obesity-Prevention-AAP-Policy-Explained.aspx)

Last Updated 10/7/2016
Source Digital Media and Your Children and Teens: TV, Computers, Smartphones, and Other Screens (Copyright © 2016 American Academy of Pediatrics)

 (https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx)