



# Teens and Digital Devices

## A Guide for Parents

### Benefits of Digital Devices on Adolescent Development

- Connecting with friends and feeling a sense of belonging
- Building friendships
- Exploring identity
- Gaining autonomy
- Serving as behavior change agents (for example, improve nutritional behaviors by using social media platforms and apps)

(Kranzler & Bleakley, 2019)



### Harmful Effects of Digital Devices on Adolescent Development

- Reduces the ability for the brain to retain information
- Increases mental exhaustion because the brain receives large streams of information during social media use
- Decreases face-to-face communication and social communication skills
- Increases irregular sleeping patterns
- Reduces social interactions in families

(Mills, 2016; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008)



**Communicate directly with your teenagers about their use of digital devices. This will build trust. In the end, you have the right, as a parent, to monitor your teenagers' use of digital devices.**

(Common Sense Media, n.d.)

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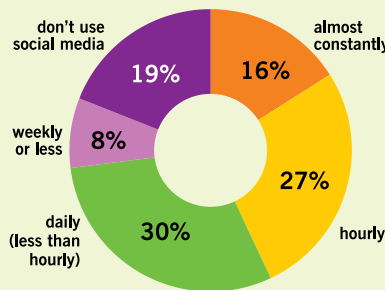
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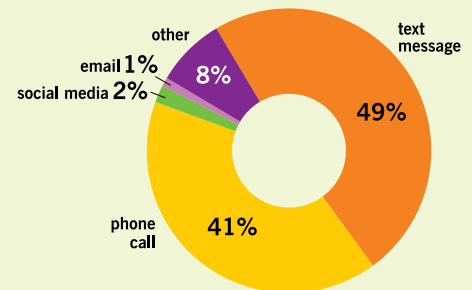
Digital devices play an important role in the daily lives of teenagers and offer many benefits, including relationship building and communication. However, some teenagers have reported that they have experienced cyberbullying through social media via their digital devices (Horner, Asher, & Fireman, 2015). Cyberbullying is harmful to teenagers' health because it leads to depression, isolation and aggression (Martinez, Murgui, Garcia, & Garcia, 2019). Research shows that teenagers are less exposed to harmful online content as well as internet addiction when parents monitor their online activities at home (Vaala & Bleakley, 2015). Parents need to be involved actively in their teenagers' lives by learning about social media so they can provide adequate support for their teens. Providing support greatly reduces the harmful effects related to using digital devices.

### Frequency of Social Media Use in 2018



(Knutson, 2018)

### Methods Parents Use to Communicate with Teenagers



(Anderson, 2016)

### 13 is the recommended age for use of digital devices because:

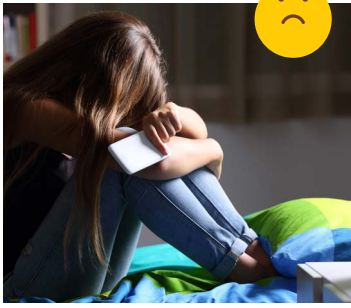
- In compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), the minimum age for youth to have social media accounts is 13.
- 13 is the age when children develop a broad understanding of the world around them.
- 13-year-olds develop a sense of what is appropriate to share online.
- 13-year-olds develop the maturity and desire to control their own activities.

(Common Sense Media, n.d.)



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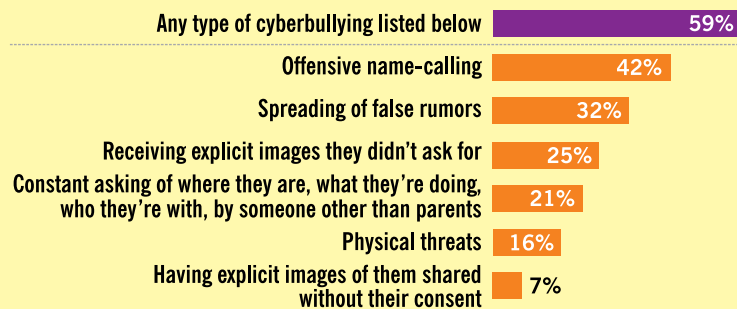
## Cyberbullying

Teenagers may experience cyberbullying through digital devices via social media platforms, emails or text messages. Teenagers may not tell you when this happens, but they will display certain behaviors. As parents, investigating further is important if your teenager is displaying any of the following behaviors:

- Unexpectedly stops using the cellphone
- Appears nervous when using the cellphone
- Feels uneasy about going to school or outside
- Displays anger, frustration and/or depression after going online
- Shuts down social media accounts or opens new ones
- Becomes withdrawn from family and friends
- Refuses to participate in activities previously enjoyed
- Has irregular sleeping patterns
- Avoids discussion about their activities online and becomes unusually secretive
- Shows a decrease or increase in eating
- Frequently texts or calls from school requesting to go home ill
- Experiences a decline in grades
- Makes statements about suicide

(Hinduja & Patchin, 2018)

## Percentages of teenagers in the U.S. who say they have experienced the following online or on their cellphone



(Anderson, 2018)

## What Parents Can Do When Cyberbullying Happens

**Notice** – Recognize your teenager's change in behavior or mood. Examine whether these changes occur when your teenager is using a digital device.

**Monitor** – Although direct communication is best, in this situation, checking your teenager's browsing history, social media sites and apps consistently is necessary.

**Talk** – Ask questions to understand what is happening and who is involved.

**Document** – Take photos of harmful content or posts as a way of keeping records of cyberbullying incidents.

**Report** – Parents can contact social media platforms or apps to report offensive content. If your teenager has received physical threats or illegal behavior is occurring, parents can report this to the police.

**Support** – Try to determine if your teenager may require more professional support, such as seeking the guidance of a counselor or mental health professional.

(Baron, 2018)

## Parental Control Apps for Digital Devices

- Track your teenager's location by using GPS trackers such as FamiSafe or Find My Friends.
- Monitor your teenager's use of digital devices via social networks by using Bark or WebWatcher.
- Block websites or filter inappropriate content by using the most updated versions built into the device's operating system, such as Microsoft or Google.

(Knorr, 2018; Knorr, 2019)

## Managing Digital Devices

- Help teenagers take breaks from their cellphones by limiting cellphone use during study time or at the dinner table.
- Together with your teenager, consider turning off autoplay functions and notifications from certain apps at specific times each night.
- Model the behavior on your own digital devices you expect your teenager to follow.
- Help teenagers identify healthy behaviors. Ask them to notice emotional and physical feelings during the times they use their digital devices, as well as during times when they are not. Ask them questions such as, "Does your heart rate increase when your cellphone vibrates?" or "Do you feel good when you get positive feedback on a post?"
- Request policy information on the use of digital devices from your teenager's school.
- Conduct research together with your teenager on how social media platforms, games and apps get paid. Discuss why companies might want teenagers to spend more time on their platforms and the kind of tricks the companies may use to keep teens' attention.

(Common Sense Media, n.d.)

## Tips for Protecting Family Data

- Use strict privacy settings when signing up for a new app or website by establishing privacy settings immediately. Avoid default settings.
- Enable two-factor authentication on apps and sites such as Facebook by sending a code to your phone when you log in.
- Beware of phishing scams by not opening emails or text messages from anyone you do not know.
- Use antivirus protection from reputable sources. Avoid free antivirus software because it may contain malware, which can be harmful for computers.
- Use strong passwords and change them frequently.
- Cover your webcam to prevent potential spying.

(Knorr, 2018)

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