



Public Health
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Greene County



Greene County Public Health

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Press Release

For Immediate Release
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4th Article in 6-Part Series “DISCONNECT TO CONNECT” Addresses Risks for High School Students

GREENE COUNTY, OH -- How do we manage teens and screens? This can be quite the challenge. As discussed in the last three articles, too much screen time can have a lasting impact on the health of children. By the time youth are in their teens, they often believe that they have it all “under control” and they do not need guidance or rules around technology. Unfortunately, that is not the case as adolescent brain development continues into the late twenties. Parents/caregivers still need to have a sound understanding of what is going inside the technology their teens are using so they can offer structure, guidance, and suggestions in managing the world of social media.

While devices can provide creative outlets, research tells us that is not where teens are spending most of their time. Much of it is spent on apps for videos, gaming, social media or watching shows/movies. Many games and apps for young people could become addictive. When use is extreme, similar to tobacco, alcohol, and other substances, teens may have difficulty reducing their usage of technology which can have an adverse impact on their mental health and their relationships with others.

Adults need to be proactive. Parents can help set healthy limits and find a balance between real life activities and tech experiences. While technology can have positive impacts, we also know that excessive, unmonitored use can negatively impact social development and growth. Know about the popular teen apps such as *TikTok*, *SnapChat*, *YouTube*, *KiK*, *Omegle*, *Doublicat* and the pros and cons of each before you allow your teen to load them. All of these can have a fun factor but can also have a serious downside to them.

Parents should also be aware of dating apps that teens sometimes load. *Tinder* is one that teens are not old enough to use but often try. Others like *MyLOL*, *Skout*, *YuBo*, *MeetMe*, and *Hot or Not* are some of the more popular apps for meeting/dating.

This may be a surprise to some. . . According to JAMA Pediatrics (www.jamanetwork.com), sexting (sending sexually explicit messages, photos, or videos to others) is a common practice among our youth today. About 25% of teens are receiving sexually explicit messages and at least 1 in 7 are sending them. The key here is for parents to be aware and take the opportunities to have ongoing discussions about appropriate online behavior and about the unintended consequences of sexting. Using current events around this topic can be helpful in starting the conversation. An excellent article to read on this topic is found at www.psychom.net called *Teen Sexting: What Parents Need to Know* by Katie Hurley, LCSW.

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Ask your teens the following questions and involve them in the process. Youth tend to resent adults “taking over” and “doing it for them”. They also don’t want to get their friends or peers into trouble so they will want to know that they can discuss with you in confidence. Encourage and support them to be a part of the solution by helping them teach you about what they are viewing and using online.

Questions to have teens ask themselves and then discuss with you:

- How much time are you spending online?
- Are you involved in “offline” activities?
- What kinds of social media apps are you using? Dating apps? Video games?
- Do you feel like you have to be online? Do you think you will miss out on something?
- How do these apps make you feel?
- Have you ever been bullied online?
- Have you ever been coerced or pressured into “sexting”? Have you ever been pressured to share photos of your body with others via texting or social media?
- Do you believe that you are able to say NO if someone pressures you? Why or why not?
- Are you aware of issues that have arisen from the sharing of photos or sexual messaging?
- Have you ever felt “not good enough” because of what you see online? Your life, your clothing, your face or body image, your personality?
- Do you believe that you have a good balance between tech use and offline activities?
- How much time are you spending doing the following?
 - Exercising
 - Interacting with friends/peers
 - Reading
 - Sleeping
 - Doing schoolwork/school activities

(General information/ideas taken from ***Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory 2021***)

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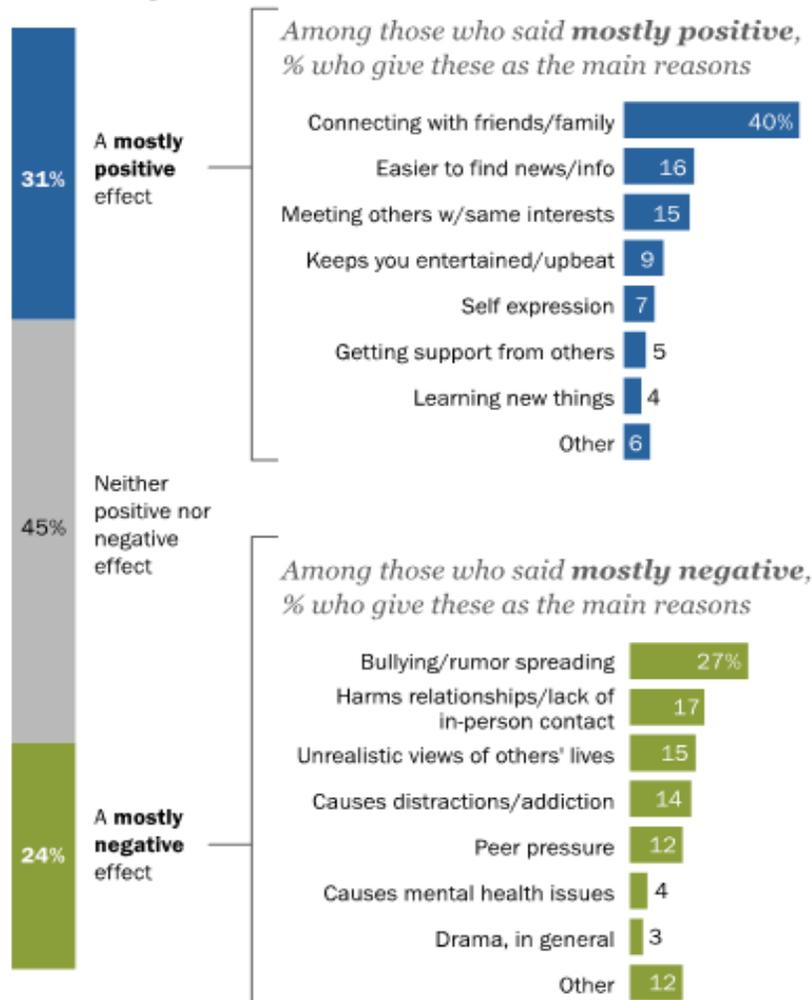


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Teens have mixed views on social media's effect on people their age; many say it helps them connect with others, some express concerns about bullying

% of U.S. teens who say social media has had ___ on people their own age



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Verbatim responses have been coded into categories, and figures may add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed.

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 10, 2018. "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018"

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According to *Pew Research* and other research organizations, the pandemic has created more online usage amongst teens. One report says that pre-pandemic, online usage by teens was about four hours a day. It has now **doubled** to about **eight** hours a day.

The next thing to ask is if your teen would like your help in supporting them in reducing their online time. You can also talk to your teen about brain development and the prefrontal cortex. If teens understand the lasting impact using technology in excess can have on their own brains, they are more likely to want to protect their own development and growth.

Parents/caregivers and their teens can work together to encourage the technology companies to take the necessary steps to create digital tools, resources, as well as media that are healthy for our young people.

Awareness is key. Devices can disrupt natural interactions between adults and their teens. Real life interactions are key to social skill development and positive mental health. This is true for young children, but also necessary for our teen population.

WHAT CAN TEENS DO OFFLINE?

Try something new. Be creative. Get outside.

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Art Activities
- Music Activities
- Volunteer/Community Service
- Walk the dog
- Ride horses or a bike
- Play a round or two of putt-putt golf
- Take a hike
- Help a grandparent or neighbor with yardwork or housework
- Play board games
- Do a puzzle
- Read by the pool
- Climb a tree
- Write in a journal
- Create a short story
- Take up knitting, painting, weaving
- Talk to your friends and think of new things you can do outside of technology

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Ask your teen to add to this list with his or her own ideas.

WHAT CAN THE ADULTS DO?

Encourage with DISCONNECT to CONNECT!

Maintain daily screen-free times - Set sacred times - try disconnecting for mealtime, homework time, and bedtime. Have teens turn in phones before bedtime for Sunday through Thursday, and keep limits on weekend usage, too.

Help your teen create BALANCE—Encourage teens to develop their own plan for offline activities that promote positive mental health and outlets beyond online activities.

Keep an open line of communication with your teen—Your teen is likely more cell phone and app-savvy than you are. Talk to your teen about the apps on the phone. Ask how they are used and why they like them. Try not to judge or criticize. You want him or her to want to talk openly. Give your teen the opportunity to share with you.

Have rules about loading apps on phones. Know the apps before your teen loads them onto the phone. As part of the plan, make it a requirement that they ask permission before loading.

Talk together - Set aside time each day to interact and communicate.

Follow the school's rules around cell phones- If students are to turn in their phones during the school day, support that rule in the home. If you know your teen cannot handle having a cell phone at school, then do not allow it to go with him/her.

Be consistent with limits - Set limits together and stick to it.

Watch movies and shows together—While screen time should be limited, it does not mean ZERO screen time. Watch a movie together, and then plan to see the sequel. Make a “date” to spend time watching an age-appropriate TV show or series together. Make the popcorn or get the ice cream and make it a fun event that you do together.

Be intentional - Know what apps and games are educational and on your child's level. And be clear about what is “bad for your brain”. Teach children about how the brain can become addicted to the tech and allow them to be a part of the solution.

Model limits- Set limits for your own screen usage and model putting your device away. Put your phone away when you are with your teen. Continue to do this as your children and teens grow into adulthood. You will always want to model this behavior for them.

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Cell Phones for Safety—Load apps like *Life360* on your family phones. You can track whereabouts of your teen using this app and others like it.

Create a Family Media Plan -- A Family Media Plan (www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan), can help all families. Health, academic and social goals are planned first, and then recreational screen time is added. Plans help families make sure healthy practices are followed as part of their daily routine. This includes at least one hour of exercise/activity and **8 to 12 hours of sleep**. Teens should not sleep with any screen devices in their rooms. Families are guided to prioritize these practices, to consider other responsibilities such as homework, sports and time with friends, and then to determine how much time is “left over” that may be considered for device use. For more information, check out this link:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>

Parents/Caregivers and Teens: Do you need more help and support around this topic? It is not an easy one to navigate, so asking for help is okay! Teens or parents may reach out to a High School Counselor or a parent may contact a local therapist who may be able to help. If you believe your situation warrants more family support, you may contact a private therapy provider or a local therapy agency.

About this series:

Greene County Public Health officials, along with the Mental Health Recovery Board of Clark, Greene and Madison Counties, the Greene County Public Library, Greene County Children Services, Greene County Family & Children First Council, and the Greene County Educational Service Center are working collaboratively to raise community awareness of the problem along with providing resources and practical information to help children, youth, educators, parents, families, and community organizations make impactful changes toward improving mental health and wellbeing of Greene County's future: our young people!

Watch for our June article that will focus on high school students.

Other Resources:

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- National Center for Child Traumatic Stress https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/simple_activities_for_children_and_adolescents_4.pdf
- Pew Research Center: www.pewresearch.com
- Parentology: Parenting in the Digital Age www.parentology.com
- PSYCOM: www.psycom.net

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