

Constantly Connected: How Media Use Can Affect Your Child



Today's children and teens are growing up immersed in digital media. It ranges from TV and videos to social media, video games and so much more. And it's all available on multiple devices—computers, e-readers, gaming consoles, smartphones and other screens.

Media can influence how children and teens feel, learn, think and behave. This is why it's important to be understand the risks & benefits of digital media use and how to keep them in balance for your family.

Kids & media use: by the numbers

Recent **Common Sense Media** research shows that media use by tweens (ages 8–12 years) and teens (ages 13–18 years) rose faster in the two years since the COVID-19 pandemic than the four years before. The research found 8- to 12-year-olds spend an average of five and a half hours a day on screens and consuming media. That rate climbs to over eight and a half hours a day for teens.

Among teens, 79% said they use social media and online videos at least once a week, and 32% of these said they "wouldn't want to live without" YouTube. And nearly two-thirds (65%) of tweens said they watch TV, 64% watch online videos and 43% play games on a smartphone or tablet every day.

Average daily screentime rates soared highest among Black and Hispanic/Latino kids and those of lower-income families. These teens and tweens were spending between 6.5 and 7.5 hours a day on entertainment screens.

In another **survey**, 71% of parents with younger children (under 12 years old) said they were concerned about their child spending too much time in front of screens.

Risks & benefits of media use by children & teens

Why use digital media?

Digital media use can:

- Expose users to new ideas and information.
- Raise awareness of current events and issues.
- Promote community participation.
- Help students work with others on assignments and projects.

Digital media use also has social benefits that:

- Allow families and friends to stay in touch, no matter where they live.
- Enhance access to valuable support networks, especially for people with illnesses or disabilities.
- Help promote wellness and healthy behaviors, such as how to quit smoking or how to eat healthy.

Why limit media use?

Overuse of digital media may place your children at risk of:

- **Not enough sleep.** Media use can interfere with sleep. Children and teens who have too much media exposure or who have a TV, computer, or mobile device in their bedroom fall asleep later at night and sleep less. Even babies can be overstimulated by screens and miss the sleep they need to grow. Exposure to light (particularly blue light) and stimulating content from screens can delay or disrupt sleep and have a negative effect on school.
- **Obesity.** Excessive screen use and having a TV in the bedroom can increase the risk of **obesity**. Watching TV for more than 1.5 hours daily is a risk factor for obesity for children 4 through 9 years of age. Teens who watch more than 5 hours of TV per day are 5 times more likely to have over-weight than teens who watch 0 to 2 hours. Food advertising and snacking while watching TV can promote obesity. Also, children who overuse media are less apt to be active with healthy, physical play.
- **Delays in learning & social skills.** When infants or preschoolers watch too much TV, they may show delays in attention, thinking, language and social skills. One reason for this could be that they don't interact as much with their parents and family members. Parents who keep the TV on or spend excess time on their own digital media miss precious opportunities to interact with their children and help them learn.

- **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**. Such multitasking can have a negative effect on how well they do in school.
- **Behavior problems.** Violent content on TV and screens can contribute to behavior problems in children, either because they are scared and confused by what they see or they try to mimic on-screen characters.
- **Problematic internet use.** Children who spend too much time using online media can be at risk for a type of addictive behavior called problematic internet use. Heavy video gamers 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. There may be increased risks for depression at both the high and low ends of Internet use.
- **Risky behaviors.** Teens' displays on social media often show risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual behaviors, self-injury, or eating disorders. Exposure of teens through media to alcohol, tobacco use, or sexual behaviors is linked to engaging in these behaviors earlier.
- **Sexting, loss of privacy & predators.** **Sexting** is the sending or receiving of sexually explicit images, videos, or text messages using a smartphone, computer, tablet, video game or digital camera. About 19% of youth 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 it completely. Kids may also not use privacy settings. 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. Cyberbullying can lead to short- and long-term negative social, academic, and health issues for both the bully and target. Fortunately, programs to help prevent bullying may reduce cyberbullying.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/adverse-effects-of-television-commercials.aspx>