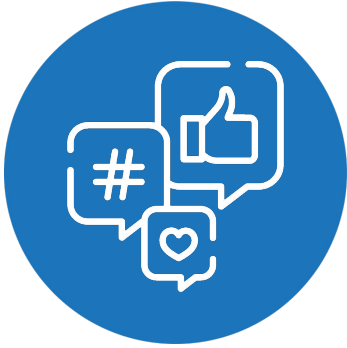


Parent Information/Trusted Adult Information

Social Media Animation



According to a *Common Sense Media* study from October 2019, US teens spend an average of more than seven hours per day on screen media for entertainment. Obviously, this is a significant amount of time spent on-line. Screen media, which includes the many social media platforms that are popular with young people, has the potential to be very influential, in both positive and negative ways. This letter will help you better understand the brain science on social media use, provide some ideas for talking to your child about their media consumption, offer tips for helping your child find more balance in their use of media and suggest ways that kids can use social media in positive ways.

Social Media Use and Brain Science:

We are continually learning more about how social media use impacts the brain. We know that using social media activates the brain's reward center by triggering the brain to release a feel-good chemical called dopamine. This dopamine release tells the person that the activity is pleasurable. Therefore, the person wants to repeat the activity, in this case social media, again and again. Social media platforms are also designed to make people want to come back over and over. Using social media is not the only way to enhance dopamine levels in the brain. Here are some ideas to increase dopamine in the brain without using a screen:

- Listening to music can stimulate a release of dopamine.
- Exercise helps to boost endorphin (another brain chemical) levels and can improve a person's mood.
- Get out in the sunshine. Exposure to sunlight can increase dopamine levels.
- Sleep helps the body to regulate dopamine levels. This is another reason why a good night's sleep is so important.

Does your child need help finding a balance in social media use?

Often young people are looking for the trusted adults in their lives to help put structure and boundaries around their use of social media. Here are a few strategies to consider if you or your child feel the need to create some goals around how much time is spent on social media.

- Keep a running list of tally marks of how many times you check your phone. Try it for one day and then set some goals to help you bring that number down.
- Install an app that can track how much time you are spending on various social media apps. Use that information to make changes if needed.
- If you cut back on social media use and find an extra 1-2 hours each day, how would you choose to spend that time?
- Is your news feed getting overloaded? Maybe you are following too many pages and people or belong to too many groups. Use your goals and values to determine who and what you truly want to follow. Do an inventory and unfollow those pages that aren't relevant to you.

How to talk to your child:

Young people need guidance in how to stay safe on-line and avoid on-line “drama” with their friends and followers. They need to know that they have a trusted adult that they can talk to about the things that they come across on-line. It is also, important to remember that the decision-making area of the brain continues to develop well into a person’s mid-twenties, making impulse control challenging. This can contribute to young people posting or sending inappropriate or unkind pictures and comments that they may regret later. As trusted adults, we can help young people navigate their on-line worlds.

Here are a couple of great resources:

- Use this [social media awareness survey](#) with your child to spark conversation about when and how they use social media.
- [Easy Tips for Using Social Media Responsibly - SmartSocial.com](#)

Positive ways to be active online:

Remember, there are many positive ways to use social media. Brainstorm with your child some of the great ways that social media keeps people connected, gets important messages out, and inspires creativity.

- How could social media be used to bring awareness to a cause that is important to our community?
- What are some ideas that you have for creating content (beyond selfies) to share on social media?
- Think about topics that you are passionate about and learn more about it. Who are some authors, scholars or organizations that would be good to follow on social media?