

TECHNOLOGY AND YOUTH: GUIDANCE FOR HELPING YOUTH ACHIEVE BALANCE WITH SCREENS

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Today's youth are involved more than ever with technology. Since 2019, screen media use has increased by 17 percent, with tweens (8-12 years) spending an average of 5.5 hours per day, and teens (13-18 years) averaging 8.5 hours each day with screens.^[1, 2] With the constant and everchanging influence of technology on our lives, it is important to encourage youth to adopt healthy practices when interacting with technology. This fact sheet provides information on current technology trends, pros and cons to youth screen use, and recommendations to promote balance with screens.

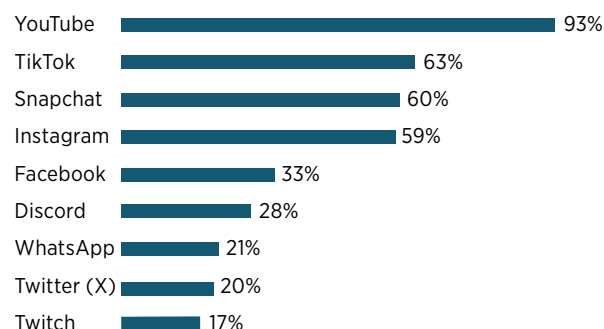
How Are Youth Using Technology?

Technology has advanced considerably, with a noteworthy change being how technology helps to accelerate communication at a distance. For example, social media is one of the most popular technologies globally as it enables instant connection with others at any time or location. About 84 percent of youth, in particular, engage with many social media platforms throughout the day, with YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram being the most favored. ^[3]

Social media is not the only way that youth spend time online. Other types of screen media account for additional hours that youth interact with technology each day. Screen media refers to any electronic screen or tool that is used to create, store, display, or communicate information. Screen media includes:

- smartphones
- television
- gaming
- web-based apps
- video streaming
- virtual learning platforms
- teleconferencing software
- social media

**Most Favored Social Media Platforms
Among Teens (13-17 years), 2023**



How Does Screen Media Affect Youth's Development?

One of the primary milestones of adolescence is identity formation – or forming a sense of self. This involves understanding who an adolescent is as a person and who they want to become in the future independent of their families. Because of this, youth are often looking towards others to help shape their sense of self. As screen media is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, youth are impacted both positively and negatively.

Pros & Cons of Screen Media Use [7-10]

Not all screen media is bad. In fact, one of the major benefits of screen media is how quickly information can be accessed to expand our learning. Yet many of the benefits of screen media also serve as a challenge, as shown in this chart. To give an example, one benefit of screen media use is that many youth use media to answer questions that they otherwise may feel uncomfortable posing to their parents or peers. A challenge, however, is that if youth are not educated on how to find reputable and reliable research-based sources to answer their questions, they may be misled or worse, make unsafe decisions based on false information.

Teaching youth to find an appropriate balance for their screen media use will help them make healthy, informed decisions.

	Pros	Cons
Communication	Interact with new friends and maintain relationships at a distance	Interact with cyberbullies or people who spread rumors, lies, or share personal information.
Entertainment	Source of recreation through gaming, movies, or television.	Problematic use can compromise brain development, learning, & impulse control. It may mask a mental health problem.
Networking	Expands educational or business opportunities with others across the world.	Increased likelihood of deception through scams, both financial (i.e., fraud) or relational (i.e., stalking), that can put someone in danger.
Education	Learn from those who are different or expand one's knowledge on an unknown subject from reliable online periodicals, scientific organizations, and other research-backed resources.	Encounter misguided information that is not backed by legitimate, science-based evidence.
Convenience	Enables quick access to reliable and reputable information, services, and resources.	Enables quick access to impulse purchases or around-the-clock connection to inappropriate content or predatory behavior.
Self-Esteem	Access to a community of influencers who share similar interests, which gives youth a sense of purpose, builds self-confidence, and makes them feel valued and empowered.	Access to a community of influencers who pressure youth to believe false information or adopt risky, unhealthy behaviors. May lead to comparison to fake profiles or photo filters with unattainable body images that worsens self-esteem and creates mental health challenges.

Recommendations: Encouraging Youth to Achieve Balance

Teaching youth to seek out high-quality content online that is both interactive and balanced will help them make healthy choices when engaging with technology. Use this checklist to spark additional ideas to achieve balance:

- ☐ Prioritize high-quality content and interactions with screens, rather than monitoring and setting screen time limits. Quality screen time includes use of online learning systems, educational podcasts, audiobooks or online games, creating digital art, music, or other content, video-chatting with loved ones, and more.
- ☐ Schedule screen-free breaks at designated times each day.
- ☐ Create a “Family Media Plan” together to involve youth in making decisions and posing limits on tech use for the entire family (not just youth).
- ☐ Stop screen-use at least 30 minutes before bed time.
- ☐ Adopt screen-free hobbies.
- ☐ Encourage youth to be mindful of how they feel while interacting online and suggest taking breaks.
- ☐ Get plenty of rest.
- ☐ Get outside to interact with nature, screen-free; walk the dog, hike, or jog with a friend.
- ☐ Show youth compassion and openness so they feel comfortable coming forward if problems arise.
- ☐ Provide youth a journal to record their thoughts and make it routine.

Additional Resources

Learn more about Family Tech Planners: <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/family-tech-planners>

Take a digital citizenship course to learn about online responsibility and safety: <https://www.commonsense.org/education/family-resources>

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