

Navigating Technology Use across Childhood and Adolescence: Supporting Healthy Development and Well-being

Natasha Parent, PhD
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Welcome! We will begin the presentation shortly. Please note that your microphones have been muted and your cameras are turned off.

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre

We help families across the province by:

- Helping with understanding and navigating the mental health system
- Listening and offering peer support, and
- Connecting families to resources and tools



BC Children's Health Promotion & Schools Team

The BC Children's Health Promotion and Schools team works collaboratively to enhance capacity for system-wide changes in school communities that improve student mental health and well-being by providing ***coaching***, ***resources*** and ***professional learning***.

For resources and
information, visit
[keltymentalhealth.ca](https://keltymentalhealth.ca/school-professionals)
[/school-professionals](https://keltymentalhealth.ca/school-professionals)

Housekeeping

- **Attendees are automatically muted and cameras are turned off.**
- **Please submit questions for the speaker through the “Q&A” function. There has been an option enabled where you can vote for questions that you want answered.**
- **Please submit technical questions or comments through the “Chat” function.**
- **At the end of the webinar, a survey will pop up that we invite you to complete.**
- **The webinar will be recorded and made available at KeltyMentalHealth.ca/Events**
- **This information applies to the context in British Columbia. If you are in another jurisdiction please consult your local health authorities for further information.**

Speaker



Natasha Parent, PhD

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Land Acknowledgement

Tech use is an integral part of daily life

- 93% of teens own a smartphone
- Half of teens received their first smartphone between the ages of 11 and 13
- Half of teens say they are online “most of the time”

Smartphone Ownership by Age (2021)



The Moral Panic of Screens

Moral Panic: When there is widespread belief that something evil is threatening the wellbeing of society.

Belief that screens and screen time are damaging for children and youth

In the media

Among
educators

Among parents

Among policy
makers



But what does the evidence say?

In this webinar, we will dive into the research on the following questions:

- Should I be worried about my child's screentime?
- How does tech use (e.g. smartphones, social media, etc.) affect mental health?
- What does "healthy" and "unhealthy" tech use look like? What are the benefits/risks?



Learning objectives

By the end of this webinar, you should be able to:

1. Describe the role of the developmental context in youth technology use
2. Identify some of the benefits and risks of technology use
3. Define “healthy” and “unhealthy” technology use
4. Describe ways to support your child’s “healthy” relationship with technology



Developmental context

What kids are doing online changes as they are changing **cognitively, socially, and emotionally**



Child technology use (5-10 years old)

- Focused on entertainment; use technology for playing games and watching videos
- Typically parent-controlled
- Lots of co-viewing





Adolescent technology use

- **Younger teens (10-13 years old):**
 - Focused on entertainment
 - More autonomy
 - Increased social needs
 - Quantity over quality in friendships
- **Older teens (14-18 years old):**
 - Need for intimate relationships
 - Quality over quantity



Parent & Peer Relationships in Adolescence

- In adolescence, teens begin to focus their attention outside the family
- Peers become important sources for intimacy and social and emotional support
- While parents continue to be an important source of support and protection, they begin to share this significance with peers



Developmental context helps us understand what motivates youth to use technology

This can help us communicate with them about tech use and teach balance

When developmental goals are met online leads to positive outcomes and wellbeing





What is “healthy” technology use?

Technology use that contributes to positive development and well-being

→ “Healthy” technology use might look different across development



Positive outcomes of tech use in childhood

- Learning about the world
- Digital literacy skills
- Creativity and problem solving
- Communication and social development

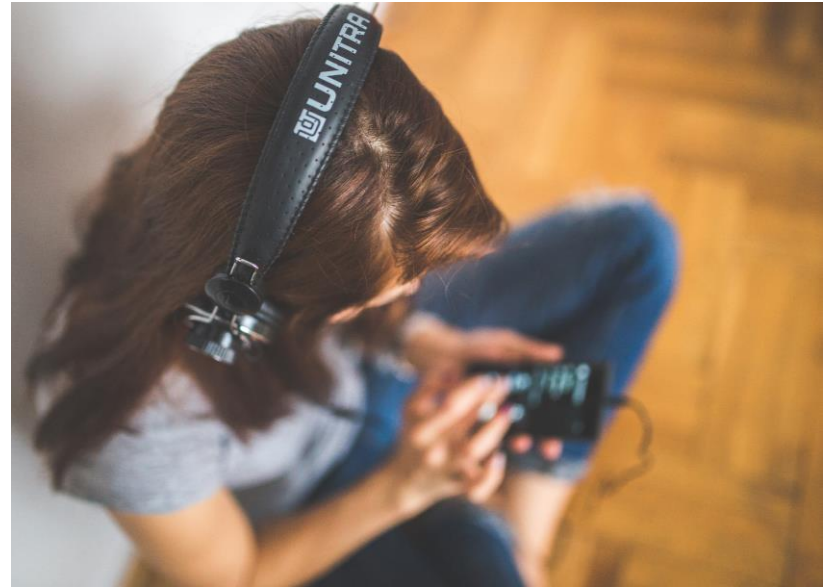
Positive outcomes of tech use in adolescence

- Sense of autonomy
- Identity development
- Social connection



Autonomy and identity development through technology use

- Agency in what to read, listen to, or watch
- Control over self-presentations and target audiences
- Exploration of emerging identities



Technology use to meet social goals in adolescence

- Need for social connection is heightened in adolescence
- Teens use technology to connect with others and foster intimacy and friendship
- Online spaces can provide sense of belonging for minority youth





What does “unhealthy” use look like?

Technology use that contributes to negative outcomes and ill-being

→ This may look different for different children/youth



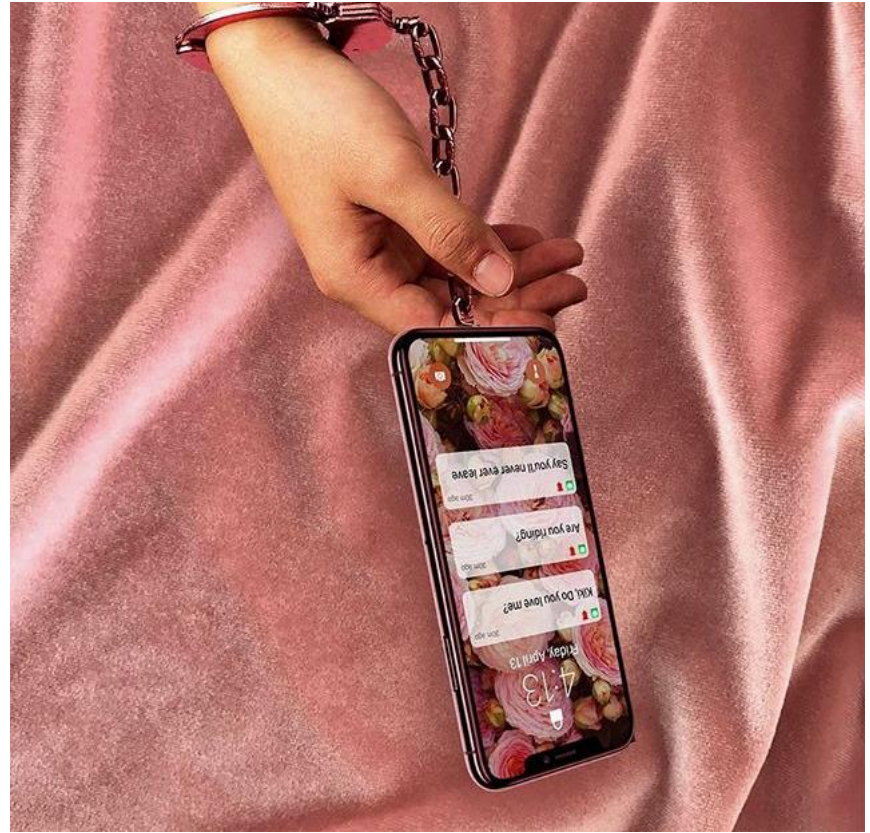
Impact of technology use on mental health

- The increase in teenage depression and anxiety has occurred alongside the widespread adoption of social media and smartphones
- Many studies have found a link between technology use and mental health
- Led many (including some psychologists) to attribute the rise in negative mental health to tech

Most research in this area is correlational

We know there is a relationship between technology use and mental health BUT we don't know if one causes the other:

- Depression and/or anxiety may lead youth to spend more time online
- A third factor could be responsible for the relationship (e.g., cyberbullying, sleep, COVID-19)





The current state of research

Current findings on the causal relationship between technology use and mental health are mixed:

- Some studies find a small effect of tech use on mental health
- Others find an inverse, or no, relationship
- Research is moving away from looking at the direct effect (technology = bad)

Mental health as a multi-process syndrome

- No one stressor is likely the cause of depression or anxiety that leads to depression/anxiety
- What kids are doing online and pre-existing vulnerabilities likely play an important role in determining the impact of screens on mental health





Tech experiences that may contribute to negative mental health

- Social comparison
- Cyberbullying
- Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)



Mitigating risks

- **Cyberbullying and mental health vulnerabilities:** check in with youth and offer support
- **Sleep:** limit tech use in bedrooms at night and before bed
- **Social comparison and FOMO:** encourage active social media use and critical thinking

Supporting “healthy” relationships with technology

- Developmentally appropriate support
- Clear boundaries that encourage balance: family tech plan
- Model “healthy” tech use that supports emotional well-being
- Open communication that promotes critical thinking





Developing a family tech plan

Consider the developmental context

Agree on boundaries and time restraints

Be clear and consistent with tech free zones and times

Be adaptive





Resources

Kelty Mental Health: <https://keltymentalhealth.ca/techincheck>

Children's Screen Time Action Network: <https://screentimenetwork.org/>

Media Smarts: <https://mediasmarts.ca>

Questions?

Submit via Zoom “Q&A” icon

Thank you for joining.

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