

# TEENS & SCREENS

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Since the announcement to shelter-in-place to limit the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) some three plus months ago, paired with remote working for many parents and the introduction of virtual schooling; the amount of time that teens spend on their screens has significantly increased.

Many parents believe that excessive screen time will negatively affect their child's development. Yet, the reality is that parents have limited options to keep teens occupied, when venturing out of the house is discouraged, and the need to attend zoom meetings or simply get work done arises. Are parents right to be worried about the amount of time teens spend on their devices? What does the scientific literature have to say about the relationship between screen time and 'normal' teen development? Are we 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' or are there benefits to digital interactions that are being overlooked?

The human brain is designed for social interaction and not for isolation. What the research is showing is that for teens, their friends, peer group, and social network is central to their identity and sense of well being. Teens are disproportionately affected compared to young

children or adults during shelter-in-place. Teens have very limited opportunity to interact with friends other than through their screens, for many their phone or computer is a 'lifeline' to their world. It's a way to stay connected and reduce the stress of not knowing when they'll see their friends again, if they'll become sick or someone they care about does, when school will reopen and normal life resume. Healthy social-emotional development is predicated on building close positive relationships with peers, if that needs to be via the internet at present; so be it..

The infographic summarises over 35,000 research studies across the world and has tested over 350,000 children, overall there is very limited evidence of the negative impact of screen time per se. Research findings that factor in childhood neglect and abuse, or pre-existing mental disorders does not seem to support the intuitive idea that screen time negatively impacts a child's development. Moreover, research studies that do report a negative association between screen time and well-being, those effects are insignificant when teens get sufficient sleep, exercise and eat a balanced diet. Parents are encouraged to not worry about the amount of screen time, but discuss with their teens what videos they watch on YouTube, online games they play and with whom, and get them to FaceTime a friend.

## TEENS & SCREENS 9 Facts

[www.TeenBrain.info](http://www.TeenBrain.info)

- Statistics**
  - In the US, the average 8 to 12-year-old spends under 5 hours per day on screen media (4:41), and a 13 to 19-year-old under 6 hours (7:22) — excluding time spent using screens for school or homework.
  - 80% of teens personally have or have access to a laptop.
- Phone Use & Texting**
  - Over 90% of US teens have a cell phone, and report using it to keep in touch with friends, make plans, and to get to know others. With 76% using their phone to video chat with friends and family.
  - Up to 92% of teens send multiple text messages daily.
  - Research has shown that teens who reported sending more text messages reported feeling better (less depressed) than teens who were less frequent texters.
- Studying & Music**
  - A teenager's preferred activity is to listen to music, followed by watching videos, playing video games, TV and using social media.
  - Research has shown that teens show increased concentration while listening to music. Listening and playing music is essential for brain development. There is limited evidence that classical music is better than any other type for brain development.
  - Teens should listen to music they enjoy.
  - There is strong research evidence for the mood benefits of music.
- Social Media**
  - Over 92% of teenagers are active on social media. Girls are more likely to use social media than boys, particularly Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok.
  - There is limited evidence on any negative impact of social media on behavior, with some studies showing benefits from expressing thoughts and feelings, and receiving social support.
  - Experts indicate teens benefit from guidance on what their posts online, as many are not aware of the permanence of posts even after they are deleted.
- Brain Development**
  - Between the ages of 10 and 24 years, the brain undergoes a period of pruning and maturation. The objective is to increase connectivity across brain regions and to cut back on brain pathways that are not being used.
  - Social interactions are a fundamental piece of healthy adolescent brain development.
  - The teen period is defined by friendships and social connections and preparing for adulthood. With social distancing guidelines in place, the teen's need for social connections is greater than ever. Teens should be encouraged to remain in contact with friends and peers in any way they can, that is consistent with the COVID social distancing recommendations.
- Mental Health**
  - At the population level, there is little evidence that digital technology use is negatively associated with adolescents' well-being.
  - A very limited number of studies show very small negative associations between the amount of daily digital technology use and an adolescent's well-being, but do not distinguish causes from effect.
  - Any reported association between screen time and depression is complicated by impaired sleep and lack of exercise on mood associated with being sedentary from device use.
- Sleep Deprivation**
  - Teenagehood is typically associated with changes to sleep routines, with later onset sleep times and delayed waking.
  - The clearest association shown by research between the use of screens for teens is a disruption to their sleep cycle.
  - Teens routinely sleep with their cell phone, tablet, laptop or television on leading to night waking to respond to notifications and poor sleep quality and outcomes. Interrupted and disrupted sleep is associated with a lack of energy and concentration, and mood changes. Teens should be encouraged to turn off their devices and ideally not have them in the bedroom.
- Virtual Learning**
  - Teens are digital natives, and many are visual learners. Research has shown that recall and comprehension of interactive content is often superior to in-class teaching.
  - The quality of the educational content is robust, clarifies complex concepts and presents abstract ideas that are impractical to do in the classroom.
  - As many as 90% of teens report watching YouTube videos every day. Including content to support homework, school projects, learning a skill such as instrument or getting tips on a sport they play.
- Computer Games**
  - Over 70% of boys report enjoying all types of gaming, including mobile games, computer games, and especially console video games.
  - Research evidence on the impact of computer games is mixed. Teens that engage in online games that are collaborative and involve playing in teams show greater social connections and skills.
  - Online gaming has been shown to increase a range of positive qualities including: responsibility, teamwork, a sense of belonging, creativity, multiculturalism, personal virtues and values, emotion management, learning new information and skills, improved motor skills development and professional orientation.
  - Teens should be discouraged from playing competitive or violent or aggressive games as these have been associated with negative behavior.