

Raising Healthy Kids in a Digital Age

Madeira School Board Planning Commission

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Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine how to raise healthy kids in a digital age:

- What does the research say about how much screen time is too much?
- How can we as parents and a school community effectively manage all that comes with social media and our kids?
- How can we as parents model effective and productive communication on social media?
- What resources do we have available to help parents navigate healthy digital habits with their child?

Process (Methodology/Research)

Our approach was the research was to collect existing data from the following:

- Madeira City Schools (current resources)
- Online Resources
- Presentation from Former High School Teacher, Coach and Subject Matter Expert - Stephen Smith

Background: What we currently do at Madeira

Students get an email address in second grade. They are only permitted to correspond with the media/computer teacher at this time. In the last quarter of second grade, students are able to email other teachers and classmates to prepare them for third grade.

In third grade and fourth grade, students are only able to correspond within the Madeira domain. In other words, they are unable to send emails outside of the madeiracityschoools.org network. This is primarily for safety. Most app/email users have to be at least 13 years old. Keeping the gmail account within the school teaches students how to use email, but also protects them because it is managed by the tech department.

Students are taught about internet safety starting almost as soon as they start accessing devices. K-2 uses a specific program called Netsmartzkids which offers videos, games and activities. In the 3-4th grades, they use a program called Cyber Surf Island which focuses a lot on internet safety, not giving out personal information, etc. The computer teacher is cautious to do an informal assessment with students to see what apps they are using and know about, prior to giving information about apps that students have not yet heard about.

There have been some PTO meetings about internet safety and dangers; however, there is not an annual consistent program in place. All students gain knowledge through computer class.

In middle school there is some information given on the middle school parent night and when students come to pick up their Chromebooks. Students and parents also have to sign a contract about proper computer usage which touches on social media. The middle school principal talks about this, and there are sometimes some PTO events discussing social media. However, there isn't a consistent parent and student communication about specific social media dos and don'ts.

At the high school there is a freshman orientation and Chromebook pick up. There is a contract that parents and students must sign about proper usage; however, there isn't typically a formal process in which students and parents are educated and informed on internet safety. After the initial pick up in 9th grade, there is typically no follow up with do's and don'ts of internet safety after entering the ninth grade. There have been speakers in the past including the police or lawyers who have come in to discuss social media; however, there isn't a regular program. The high school views this as an area of improvement because there should be more regular follow-up with the constant changes of social media.

It appears that the most education provided to parents comes when parents have students who are entering middle school and first receiving a 1-to-1 device that goes home. This responsibility is discussed then, and parents and students are both present to sign contracts about appropriate use. After entering the fifth grade, students will revisit the signing of the contract every time they are issued a Chromebook for the year; however, they may only have a formal discussion about it upon entering the middle school. Computer classes and health classes likely focus some of their time on internet safety; however, there isn't direct instruction about it in other areas.

In addition, we looked into the digital resources on the Parent Resources link on www.madeiracityschools.org. There was one link to an article on "[Keeping Kids Safe in Cyber Space](#)."

Findings

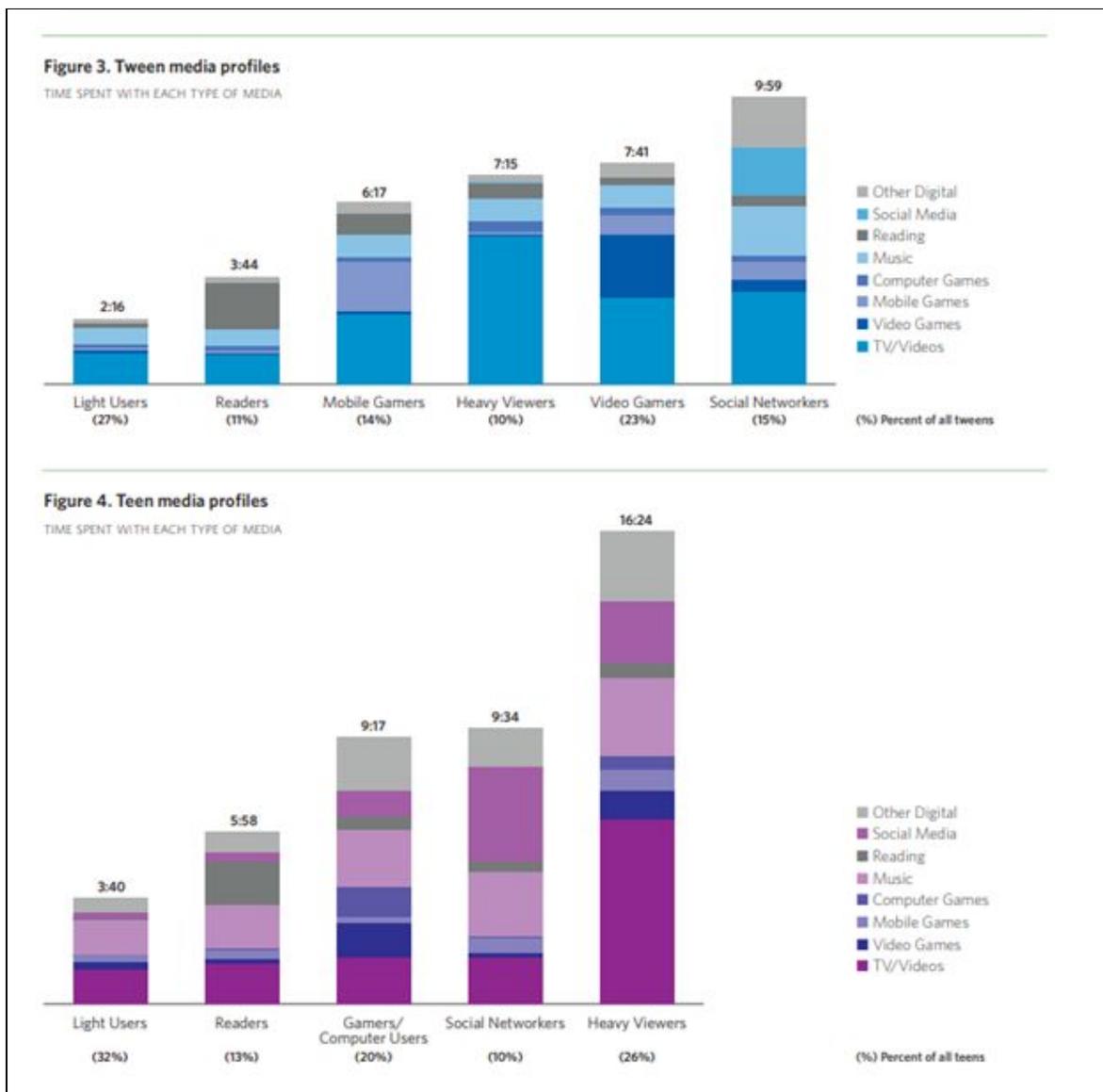
What does the research say about how much screen time is too much?

Parents worry that screen time will negatively affect mental health or social skills. The research on this is not so clear cut. You can find studies that claim to support both the positive and negative impact of screen time on our youth. Some research points to depression, poor sleep, lower interpersonal skills, poor school performance, unhealthy diets, and becoming victims of bullying.

Other studies may boast greater happiness, connection, and better mental health. One recent study published in *Clinical Psychological Science* found "no connection between the amount of time that young people spend online using digital technologies and mental health symptoms like depression (or) anxiety."¹ In her book *Untangled*, clinical psychologist Lisa Damour explains

that “Kids aren’t addicted to social media. They’re addicted to each other,” and goes on to explain that students with healthy relationships offline tend to have healthy relationships online (and vice versa).² In 2018, the Director of the National Institutes of Health said, “Empirical research on the cognitive effects of smartphone technology is still quite limited, had not been conclusive, and further study is needed to better understand the short-term and long-term effects.”

On average, 26% American teens (13-18 years old) spend nearly eight hours per day on screen excluding time spent at school or for homework. About 38% of tweens (8-12 years old) spend five hours online per day. This data includes listening to music, watching TV, movies, online videos, Internet and reading. The mix of the media profile varies and usage varies among demographics and there is much diversity in patterns and preferences of screen use.



The two main on-screen activities that tweens and teens prioritize are watching TV and listening to music. Consumption trumps creation when it comes to screen time (78% of tweens and 64% of teens) are watching, listening, reading and playing with content created by others.

One thing is certain, an enormous time is spent on a device and it is worth continued attention and discussion. Parents should get involved with what kids are doing during their screen time. According to Common Sense Media, 38 percent of those with a high school-educated parent say that their parents know “a lot” about what they do or see online, compared with 24 percent of teens with a college-educated parent.³ “Parents need to focus less on policing technology and instead be digital mentors to their kids,” says Devorah Heitner, Ph.D, founder of Raising Digital Natives and the author of Screenwise.⁴

Because all screen time is not created equal, we must examine further to learn what our kids are doing on screens. Where are they spending time? Are they being passive, viewing and scrolling, or are they engaged commenting, posting, and creating? It could also be good for everyone in the family to find ways to limit screen time and unplug .

How can we as parents and a school community effectively manage all that comes with social media and our kids?

From a survey of the literature, five key pieces of advice surfaced.

The first is that adults should keep social media usage in perspective. While it can lead to sleep issues, stress, mental health problems, addiction, cyberbullying, etc., it also provides users with a way to share their voices, find communities, and connect across distances.¹ Adults should also keep in mind that kids may be tech-savvy but naive about the intricacies of the social media world. We need to make things explicit for them that they may not otherwise consider.^{2, 3}

The second piece of advice is that adults need to help kids self-assess. We need to guide them to reflect on how they feel when using social media. If they are left with negative feelings, we should help them figure out what to get rid of or avoid online. We also need to coach kids to evaluate what kinds of things they’re reading and/or posting. Is the content making a positive contribution to the world? If not, it’s probably not worth sharing.^{1, 2, 4}

Adults also need to help kids preserve real life interactions. We should explicitly teach and then personally model healthy relationship skills. We should also encourage kids to balance their time online with interests unrelated to technology.²

As the authority figure, adults also need to set boundaries. Limits should be set on where and when kids use technology. Parents should know their kids’ passwords and check in on their accounts, and they should not give kids the password to the IOS or App Store so that kids cannot download things without parents’ knowledge. Parents can set up an approval code on

their own devices to approve or decline app downloads. Parents should familiarize themselves with and utilize all privacy settings on kids' devices.^{2, 3, 4} Families can also develop contracts together to make these agreements clear.⁵

Finally, and most importantly, adults need to keep the conversation going. We should make time to talk to our kids about their social media usage so they feel comfortable coming to us with any issues that may arise. We can also watch for warning signs that something is "off," and we can make a plan in advance for what kids should do if something goes wrong.^{2, 3}

How can we as parents model effective and productive communication on social media?

We were surprised to read that, according to Stephen Smith of [A Wired Family](#), 75% of Cincinnati families do not manage their kids' social media accounts. He states that "communicating with our kids about their use of technology and social media is imperative". As was stated earlier, parents need to model appropriate use of technology and social media.¹

In the *Psychology Today* article "4 Tips on How to Post and Share Effectively on Social Media" Utpal Dholakia suggests ways to communicate on social media. Dholakia's four points are:

1. "Identify specific goals you want to accomplish with your social media activity." Your communication should reflect that accordingly.
2. "Every social media platform is unique, use it in ways compatible with its purpose." He adds that "experts suggest distinguishing between personal and professional social media use and using different platforms for these different uses."
3. "Be consistent and persistent in what you post and share about and when."
4. "Be stingy with posting or sharing your private, personal information." Dholakia emphasizes that "what we put on social media can be accessed by any number of unexpected entities, from potential employers, romantic partners, insurance companies, law-enforcement officers, and would-be thieves, for a range of reasons that are not all benign or in our best interests. The easiest solution to this problem is to be stingy with the private, personal information you share on social media, even in the most carefully controlled online setting."³

Parents should help their children put social media in perspective. Remind kids that most posts on social media give the impression that lives are perfect and leave the messy stuff out. Reassure them that everyone has ups and downs. Parents can be real about times in which they were negatively affected by social media.

We would like to encourage parents to talk to their children about their feelings. Ask them what it feels like to look at other kids' feeds. Is there a tipping point from when they feel OK to when they start to feel bad about their own lives? Encourage them to stop before that feeling sets in and do something good for themselves instead.

Adults should let kids know they're there for them. They may not understand everything about their kid's online social life. But recognizing it's important to them makes each kid feel valued -- and more likely to come to a trusted adult when they encounter problems.²

What resources do we have available to help parents navigate healthy digital habits with their child?

Recommended Resources for Madeira Schools and Families	
Resources for Parents	<p>Articles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Common Sense Census ● What Teens Really Think About Their Social Media Lives ● What Parents Need to Know About Social Media and Anxiety ● Social Media Red Flags Parents Should Know About ● So You Got a Parental Control Now What? ● Start Teaching Good Habits Early ● Social media smarts ● Kids Are Not Hurt By Screen Time ● How to Have a Healthy Relationship with Social Media ● Five Tips for Helping Teens Manage Technology ● Tablet and Smartphone Boot Camp for Middle School Parents ● Should Your Child Have a Social Media Account? <p>Other Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family Media Agreement ● Parents' Guide to Helping Teens Navigate Instagram ● Untangled by Lisa Damour ● Video: How Much is Too Much? ● Raising Children in a Digital Age by Bex Lewis
Recommended Parental Control Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet Circle ● Bark

Recommended Websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A Wired Family ● Common Sense Media ● Family Online Safety Institute
Resources for Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Healthy Social Media Project ● How to Teach Your Students to Think Before They Post ● Using Social Media Safely: Lesson Plan ● Five Tips for Helping Teens Manage Technology

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Offer relevant links and resources to the Parent Resources page of the Madeira City Schools website.
2. Bring in speakers, such as Stephen J. Smith from [A Wired Family](#) to present to both kids and parents annually.
3. Produce required webinars and/or videos to train parents prior to students receiving school-issued devices (this is a device that parents cannot put blocks or filters on, and some families may not have allowed their children personal devices before this age, so explaining how it works, what it can do, could be very helpful for some families).
4. Communicate in a way that kids can understand in the form of a Digital Contract (starting in late Elementary).
5. Recommendations at orientation from principal or counselors.
6. Change the language to Digital Tattoo (instead of footprint) - a footprint can easily be erased.

Source Notes

Section 1: What does the research say about how much screen time is too much?

1. Rizzi, Jared. "[Kids are not hurt by screen time.](#)" *Scientific American*. 16 Sept 2019.
2. Damour, Lisa. *Untangled*.
3. [The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens](#)
4. Heitner, Ph.D, Devorah [Raising Digital Natives](#)

Section 2: How can we as parents and a school community effectively manage all that comes with social media and our kids?

1. "[How to Have a Healthy Relationship with Social Media](#)"; National Alliance on Mental Illness
2. "[Five Tips for Helping Teens Manage Technology](#)"; UC Berkeley
3. "[Tablet and Smartphone Boot Camp for Middle School Parents](#)"; UC Berkeley
4. "[Should Your Child Have a Social Media Account?](#)"; *Parents*
5. "[Family Media Agreement](#)"; Common Sense Media

Section 3: How can we as parents model effective and productive communication on social media?

1. Smith, Stephen. "Homepage." *A Wired Family*, 25 Feb. 2020, www.awiredfamily.org
2. Knorr, Caroline. "What Parents Need to Know About Social Media and Anxiety." *Common Sense Media: Ratings, Reviews, and Advice*, Common Sense Media, 30 Apr. 2018, www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/what-parents-need-to-know-about-social-media-and-anxiety.
3. Dholakia, Utpal M. "4 Tips on How to Post and Share Effectively on Social Media." *Psychologytoday.com*, Sussex Publishers, 11 Feb. 2019, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-science-behind-behavior/201902/4-tips-how-post-and-share-effectively-social-media.

Section 4: What resources do we have available to help parents navigate healthy digital habits with their child?

1. As listed in report