Youthwell
Tips for navigating the digital & gaming world with our youth

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ONLINE HELPFUL LINKS
- **YouthWell.org/resources**... find tips, sample contracts, & links to other great digital resources
- Visit **MHMYouth.org** to learn the basic facts, symptoms and warning signs of mental health disorders
- Visit **BeTheDifferenceSB.org** to sign up for Youth Mental Health First Aid training (free classes offered)

TIPS & STRATEGIES
1. Parents **need to be in alignment** with each other when establishing limits.

2. Parents need to be **role models** setting limits on how they are using their devices. You can set an example by disengaging from media during any family activities. If you are on your device during dinner, it is hard to enforce a "no phones at the table" rule. Consider what you say and share online.
    a. Teach **cell phone etiquette...** Don't pick up the phone when you are spending time with other people.
    b. Encourage youth to think through the **consequences of their online actions.** Teach them not to send or forward mean messages or inappropriate photos which publicly embarrass others. Consider before you text or share: *"How would I feel if it were me?"*
    c. Encourage youth to ask before taking or sharing someone's picture. (Do you ask your child for permission before posting their photo on your account? They may not like having their photo posted).

3. Determine **healthy screen limits** (phones, gaming, tv, etc) first as parents, then as a family.
    a. It is important when you are setting up rules around cell phones to do it early so it is established as a family rule and not seen as a punishment.
    b. Empower your child by engaging them in the conversation which also gives you an opportunity to better understand why their devices and online interactions are so important.
    c. Talk about the positive uses of their phones and find ways to praise them (ie: taking great photos).
    d. Empathize with their need to feel socially connected through their devices. Listen and don't judge because although as parents, FOMO (fear of missing out) and social media stress can seem superficial, this is the reality of their social life. FOMO can be feeling left out if everyone is posting pictures of a party they didn't attend. It's the sense that exciting stuff is happening online constantly and if they're not online too, they're missing out. It can also be the worry that a friend might be upset if they don't respond to a message or post right away.

4. Talk to your kids about **safety**. Understand what **online bullying** & **harassment** looks like.
    a. Ask your children if they actually know **who they are following** and who is following them. Who are they gaming with online? Who are their social media "friends"?
    b. Encourage youth to only respond to phone numbers they know and to take a screenshot of anything inappropriate that they either witness or that is sent to them and to report it.
    c. Understand how teens use their **devices in their relationships**. Talk to them about not sharing passwords even with their best friends. Talk about the importance of boundaries in any relationship and what is not appropriate: Friends that demand passwords to email and social media accounts. Tampering with a partner/friend's social media account without their permission. Anyone that continues to bully, harass, or stalk online. Anyone who encourages them to send explicit selfies.

5. Empower your child to learn **time management, balance**, and **focus** by including them in the process of talking about digital responsibility. Encourage your child to be honest with themselves about how time spent on social media makes them feel and to disengage from interactions that increase stress or unhappiness. Help your child learn to self-regulate their own behavior by setting time limits, taking breaks with their devices or while gaming, and turning screens off an hour before they go to bed. FOMO can chip away at their self-esteem so encourage youth to engage in social interaction offline and create time for activities that help build identity and self-confidence.

6. Talk to your kids about the permanence of their **digital footprint** and how that may impact future job interviews, college applications, and first impressions. Assume that even private texts can become public.

Age Restrictions for Social Media Platforms
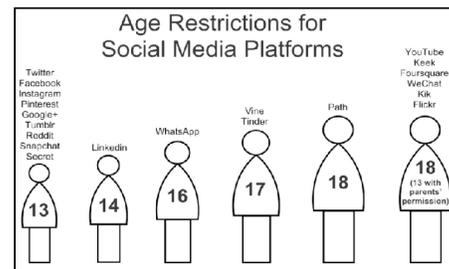
7. Create a **digital boundaries contract** with your youth that includes agreed upon limits. Where, when, and how do we use our devices? Be consistent and follow through with the rules and consequences.
   a. Create cell free zones in the home & no computers in bedroom.
    b. Set a specific time before bed for kids to hand over their phones, & charge them in a neutral space overnight to promote better sleep and help kids resist the temptation to stay up late texting. (Scientific proof that the blue light emitted from cell phones disrupts sleep.)
    c. Check cell phone usage together weekly using the features provided on the phone.
    d. Car time is a great time to connect with your child. Ask them to put away their devices during this time so they can share about their day or engage in conversation with other kids in your carpool.
    e. Be a "friend/follower" on your child's social media accounts. Try to refrain from posting comments **:)**

8. Set up **parental controls on devices**.
    You are the parent and you have a right and responsibility to check your child's phone. Many teens engage more in private chats via Instagram & Snapchat and less through texting.

    a. Look at **privacy settings** on all apps, social media sites, and game sites & update privacy settings after downloading apps and limit location sharing.
    b. **Turn off notifications** so youth are not constantly alerted.
    c. There is less conflict when you __restrict access__ to installing apps.
        Have them 'pitch' to you why they should be able to download a new app.
        "Vault" is an app that some use to hide apps they don't want parents knowing about.
    d. **Check safety ratings** & age requirements for apps & gaming. (**CommonSenseMedia.org** or **ESRB.org**)
    e. Explain to kids that they are violating app user agreement when they lie about their age to create an account. And that the **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act** (COPPA) is there for their protection.
    f. **Parental Controls** for both Android & IOS let you control how long your kids spend on their devices. Once you set up their phone, you can use your phone to check when your child is on their device and what apps or websites are used. **You can restrict apps and choose when all apps shutdown.** Use the settings to filter out age-inappropriate content, restrict downloads, and prevent in-app purchases. **Android:** Google Family Link app • **IOS/APPLE:** Screen time settings and Family Sharing Use a **router** or router accessory to **manage access to WiFi** and cellular networks from home.
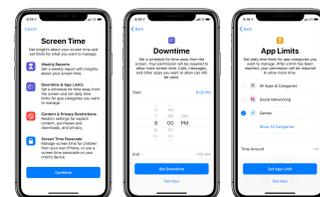
SIGNS & SYMPTOMS • technology addiction vs problematic use

Technology addiction and problematic use look similar, but they are different. Devices can become problematic when they get in the way of other important activities, such as school and family time. Problematic media use may cause difficulties, but limits can help. When people are addicted, their brains and bodies won't let them stop using or engaging in something even when it hurts them. **Changes to look for in your teen...** Anxious and on edge after being online. More irritable and prone to emotional outbursts. Secretive in general and about time online, hiding the screen, glued to phone. Withdrawn and wanting to be alone more than usual.

START THE CONVERSATION by asking your child open-ended questions...
- What is it that you enjoy most about gaming? Or your cell phone? Or social media?
- What are the pros and cons of using Instagram and other social-networking apps?
- What would happen if you unfollowed someone who was making you feel bad on social media?
- Do you notice whether reading through posts can change how your feeling at that time? Or whether your reactions to posts change depending on how you feel that day?
- Are there any habits you might want to change in how you use your screens?
- What would happen if you turned off your phone? For an hour? A day? Have you considered challenging yourself to not game or check your phone or social media for a certain amount of time?