

Behind the Screens

EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN THE DIGITAL WORLD
PRESENTED BY LISA GANZ LCSW, CASAC

Adolescents – “Digital Natives”

- The average 13-24 year old spends anywhere from 11-84 hours/week in front of the “3 screens” often simultaneously (TV, computer, cell phone)
- **“The pre-frontal lobes evolve in sync with technology; what they perceive to be- a relationship, dating, mating, a work ethic, etc. is evolving in direct relationship to the electronic devices we put in their hands.”** – Robert Weiss, LCSW, CSAT-S
- 93% of teens are online
- 80% use social networks
- 87% sleep with their phones



Timeline

- 1965 – the first commercially successful minicomputer
- 1971 – email invented
- 1979 – Atari introduces two microcomputers shortly after it's VCS game console
- 1981 – IBM introduces it's PC
- 1995 – the number of U.S. homes with one or more personal computers increases by 16% to about 38 million households
- 2000 – 60% of U.S. Households own at least one computer
- 2001 – Apples releases the iPod
- 2006 – Twitter introduced, a micro blogging site
- 2007 – Apple introduces the iPhone
- 2012 – The number of smart phones worldwide reaches 1 billion. This took only 14 years.

Speed of Technological Change

- This chart represents the number of years it took to reach 50 million people.
- Not only has technology increased the speed at which the world moves, but the speed at which new technologies are introduced into society is increasing as well.
- Humans will not be any more harmed by technological advances now, than in past times, but the problems will show up increasingly faster. – Robert Weiss, LCSW, CSAT-S

Technology	Years to reach 50 million people
Radio	38
Television	13
Internet	4
Social Networking	16 months
Smart Phone Apps	9 months

The Basic Reasons for Improving Technology

- **Extend Physical Strength or Ability**

- The plow, hand tools, etc.

- **Extend The Senses**

- Microphones, microscopes, eye glasses, etc.

- **Reshape Nature**

- Birth control pill, genetic engineering, man-made dams, etc.

- **Extend or Support Mental Powers and Abilities**

- “Intellectual technologies” – the typewriter, the library, the Internet

“Every technology is an expression of human will.”

– Nicholas Carr, The Shallows

CHALLENGING BIASES

The written word.

The clock.

The washing machine.

We are simultaneously limited by AND enhanced by technology.

Identity

Identity: our sense of who we are as individuals and members of a group

THINGS TO CONSIDER: How you talk to young people can influence how they conceptualize their identity. Focus on validating and acknowledging **ACTIONS** rather than **TRAITS**.

- Teenagers seek identity validation via social media – the number of people they can compare themselves too is much larger
- Identities are tailored according to the medium (Facebook has to be more general and widely accepted)
- Focus is more on an external image (brand) than a true identity – there is less time given to internal reflection

Friendships

THINGS TO CONSIDER: Are online friendships as healthy/valid as real-time face to face friendships? How do you talk to young people about what friendship is?

- The ability to make new friends requires risk-taking (in real time) – there is less at stake with online friendships
- Some research shows that just the presence of a device during a face to face interaction makes the other person feel unimportant. **THIS IS SO IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS TO BE AWARE OF!**
- Most research indicates offline friendships are not being impacted negatively by online friendships and that online friendships foster the same needs:
 - time spent together (virtually)
 - sharing secrets
 - doing favors for one another
 - and sharing intense emotional experiences.

Relationships

“We look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves at the same time.” – Sherry Turkle

- Intimacy vs. Isolation
- The idea of online relationships as being “better”
- A comment on human disappointment in matters of love, sex and friendship
- People are beginning to prefer “no-risk” relationships
- We are lonely but fearful of intimacy (i.e. vampire movies)
- Hook-up culture

Self Esteem and Body Image

THINGS TO CONSIDER: Try asking young people about their social media use (including things like Snapchat). What do they like about posting pictures of themselves? How often do they post pictures without filters? How many selfies does it take until you feel beautiful?

- People with lower self-esteem spent more time online and posted more “self-promotional” content (2010 York University)
- Women who spent longer periods of time on Facebook had higher incidence of “appearance-focused behavior” (including anorexia) and were more anxious and body conscience.
- 20 minutes on social media was enough to contribute to a user’s weight and shape concerns. (International Journal of Eating Disorders, 2014)

Time

“Things that happen in real time, take too much time.”

- The fear of phone conversations and face to face interactions
- Anticipation and anxiety
- Patience vs. instant gratification
- New social etiquette – “interruptions”
- Success vs. productivity
- Emphasis on quantity vs. quality

SIDE NOTE: The average American spends 40 minutes on Facebook every day. That may sound like a lot, but we spend an average of five hours watching TV.

Performance

THINGS TO CONSIDER: Young people must now act as their own Public Relations Specialist. What pressures come along with that? Talk to them about “image” and what they believe their image to be. Challenge them to consider how realistic their image is to maintain. How stable is it?

“Whenever there is time to write, edit and delete, there is room for constant performance.”

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- New possibilities for experimenting with who one is
- Balancing the “life-mix”
- Shame in the virtual world can lead to shame in the real
- Preference for hearing “bad news” via text

Separation

- Answering machines – 1970s
- We have bi-passed the parental monitoring system that was “the home phone.”
- Ironically we can monitor MORE and yet feel more anxiety
- We can always be somewhere else
- Separation anxiety from lost phones or forgetting phones
- Anticipation and lack of patience
- Fears the worst and Fears of missing out
- We now know when we are being ignored
- Cellphones described as similar to “phantom limbs”

Anxiety

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

- Difficulties in relationships
- Difficulty sleeping
- Obsessions and compulsions
- Expectations that are not inline with reality
- Episodes of panic
- Avoiding situations or experiences (i.e. school)
- People who are predisposed to anxiety are more likely to experience digital pressures

THINGS TO CONSIDER: It is crucial to talk to young people about emotions and how to regulate emotions. “Anxiety” has become too diluted of a word. What is the emotion behind anxiety? What are healthy ways to manage it?

Why Might This Be Even MORE Important for Immigrant Youth and/or ELL students?

- Depending more on technology for connection to native country / community / culture
- Different cultural beliefs / understanding about technology use
- Increased screen time limiting non-verbal cues for second language learning
- Increased screen time may equal increased vulnerability to cyberbullying / online predators

What are the Benefits of Technological Advances

- Companionship where one would otherwise be alone
- Well-programmed robots can improve a child's mood and encourage social interaction with other children
- Unenjoyable tasks may be completed quicker or with little or no effort
- Children and adults can find validation and support online for almost any kind of struggle or problem
- People with fetishes or hobbies that may seem odd, humiliating, or inappropriate can find like-minded people online
- Awareness of social injustices is readily available and people can mobilize easier
- Communication with both like-minded and different people of various cultures and backgrounds can interact
- There is more acceptance of differences among digital natives
- Robots/Avatars don't judge or become impatient

What are the Benefits of Technological Advances

- Significant opportunity to reach young people for social reasons
- Opportunities for education and awareness
- Creative opportunities to get young people involved in social movements
- Ability to reach people who otherwise would be unreachable
- Counseling services can be provided 24-7 via online conversations and texting
- Immediate communication for quick results
- Opportunity to have more time for social wellness and health when technology is able to do tasks for us
- Apps and websites can provide health and wellness related resources to people immediately

Things to Remember: Engaging Young People

- They grew up with technology. To them “technology” is not a thing all its own but rather integrated into every day life.
- Virtual communications can be just as validating for them (if not more so) than face to face or phone conversations. They do not understand a life without it.
- Technology and advances are not going anywhere. We can either successfully or unsuccessfully adapt and integrate.
- Empathy and compassion – try to see the world through their eyes
- Remember that no matter how real technology becomes, most emotionally healthy people will eventually find digital/robotic relationships unfulfilling

For Parents

- Monitor your own consumption of technology first – modeling behaviors
- Establish technology free zones in the house
- Establish technology free hours
- Give your kids your full attention when you get home and when they get home
- Be your child's "Google" so you can answer questions in an appropriate way with accurate information
- Delay age of first use as long as possible (just like drugs)
- Don't spy on your kids or lie to them
- Get kids involved in something they are interested in – sports and music
- Taking away their phone may actually be detrimental – only take the phone if the rule broken is directly connected to phone use
- "connect before you correct." We must teach children how to have a healthy relationship with technology just as we would anything else.

THANK YOU

THRIVE RECOVERY COMMUNITY OUTREACH CENTER

(631)822-3396

www.thrivelife.org

PRESENTED BY:

Lisa Ganz, LCSW, CASAC

lganz@familyandchildrens.org