

Screen abuse by the numbers

By Lauren Shanley

Wish you knew what to worry about? We've sifted through the scary stats to get the lowdown on trends in teens and technology. Here's what you need to know to help your child.

More screen time for teens

Cell phones, FaceBook, and gaming — oh my! Technology, that ever-expanding sea of teen temptation, isn't going away anytime soon. Even if they wanted to, teens can't avoid it: They not only use it for casual conversation (and reporting back to their parents) but keeping track of their homework assignments, too. According to Media Literacy Clearinghouse, white teenagers spend about 8.5 hours a day using screens while Asian teenagers average more than 13 hours a day — including more than two hours on the TV and up to three hours on mobile devices. With all this screen use comes its evil twin — screen abuse. We've sifted through the stats on tweens' and teens' love affair with technology to help you help your child navigate these charged waters and keep their minds afloat.

More log-ins and log-ons

21 million — Number of U.S. teens who use the Internet

According to recent studies conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project survey, teens are logging on with increasing frequency. Of those that reported use, half say they go online daily and a quarter go online multiple times a day. While teens do use the Internet for positive activities, such as school projects and reading

news, the most common use of the Internet among teens is social networking, which accounts for almost a quarter of total teen Internet time. Curiously, almost half of high schoolers report that their parents neither moderate their Internet use nor do they know what they're doing online, while 73 percent of parents report they know "a lot" about what their children do online. To learn how to be more involved in your child's online activity, check out our tips for Internet safety.

Social networking

73 — Percent of teens who are on a social networking site

While nearly a third of teens believe it would be difficult for someone to identify them from their online profiles, nearly half of these profiles are public, meaning that anyone with access to the site can view them. A majority of teens post pictures of themselves, their real ages, and the cities they live in, and many include their cell phone numbers or their current or future locations. In addition, four in 10 teen social networkers report posting something on their profiles that they later regret, including 13 percent who posted nude or semi-nude pictures. Read tips on GetNetWise.org to make your child's profile safe and secure.

Instant messaging, instant woes?

90 — Percent of all sexual solicitations that are made in chat rooms or via instant message

Of the teens who are already online, approximately half say they use instant messaging daily.

There's good news and bad news on the instant messaging front: Encouragingly, teens are still spending more time with friends in real life than online. Specifically, they're clocking in about 2.5 more hours of face time with friends than talking with them via technology. But more than four in 10 teens who use instant messaging use it to say things they wouldn't say in person, leading to increased reports of cyberbullying. One in five teens has been solicited sexually online, and 75 percent did not report it to a parent or authority figure. CyberBullyHelp, which is dedicated to preventing bullying in the digital age, provides quick-read tips for protecting your child while using email, instant messaging, or chat rooms.

Texting obsession

55 — Percent increase in number of texts teens sent in the past two years

TTYL BFF 4ever? While other forms of communication teens use for daily contact with their friends have remained stable over the past five years, texting has taken off, increasing its ranks by 16 percent and becoming the most ubiquitous way for teens to talk to their friends. About a third of cell-phone-toting teens send more than 100 texts a day. (Teens are three times more likely to be texting friends than a parent.) Teens between 15 and 18 years old spend up to two hours a day texting and nearly a quarter of the texts are sent during class time. Although teens report that most texts are relatively banal — checking in on what a friend's doing or where she is — texting can have detrimental consequences. One in three teens reports texting while driving, one in four teens has been bullied or harassed via text, and one in seven teens has received a “sext.” (Conversely, only 4 percent of teens claim to have sent a sext.) States are struggling to make laws to keep up with the dangers associated with these behaviors. Sexting is punishable under federal law and 34 states have banned texting while driving. You can check the laws of your state here and read the resources provided by KidsBeSafeOnline.com for additional texting-related questions.

Video games: violence galore

97 — Percent of teens who play computer, web, portable, or console games

Not surprisingly, boys maintain a slight edge over girls in overall gaming, with 65 percent of boys playing screen games daily. The most worrisome part of video games is the cycle of violence from screen to seat: 63 percent of teens who play games report that fellow gamers become mean or overly aggressive while playing with them. Additionally, there's a wealth of evidence that playing violent video games makes teens less empathetic to others' suffering. Researchers at Columbia University Medical Center have even shown that after playing violent video games, players' brain networks responsible for suppressing inappropriate or unwarranted aggression become less active. In an effort to improve the media landscape for kids, CommonSenseMedia.org has launched a site that includes reviews and age-specific searches for appropriate video games and more.

TV land

5 hours and 11 minutes — Average amount of time per day a teen spends watching television

The most frequently used screen continues to be the television, which has reached an eight-year high. In fact, time in front of the tube has increased by 38 minutes over the past five years. Kids might be complaining about their homework load, but three of every four U.S. middle school students spends over three hours a day watching TV. Even more damaging: Between 55 and 78 percent of teens report that the TV is on during family dinners, increasing their exposure and taking away from conversations between family members. Read our article on kids and screen time for tips on how to limit their time plugged in.

From: <http://www.greatschools.org/students/media-kids/slideshows/4358-screen-abuse-by-the-numbers.gs?print=true&fromPage=1>