NYU Langone Medical Center

Parenting in the Digital Age: Talking with Your Teenager About Internet Safety

Douglas Brodman, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychology Post-doctoral Fellow
Clinical Instructor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

NYU Child Study Center

Pandora's box - an artifact in Greek mythology.

The "box" was actually a large jar given to Pandora, which contained all the evils of the world.

Is this a brave new world?

Not necessarily…

NYU Langone Medical Center

The Internet… as a Tool

- Some are just toys, similar to toys from the past which are tools for entertainment

- These tools can be in the form of:

-Connecting and communicating

-Sources of information and education

- Just like all tools, they have positive and negative qualities and can be put to positive and negative uses

- Consider some examples:

A Tool

A Tool?

TEXAS CHAINSAW 3D

The Parents' Role in Managing Children's Entertainment, Social Contacts, and Information Acquisition

- Parents should be setting the rules about entertainment, social contacts, and exposure to information

    - Parents decisions can be guided by:
        - Youth's developmental level
        - Teen's disposition
        - The parents' and family's values

- Parents today face similar questions that parents have faced in the past

- Parents need to know: what, when, where, with whom, and how much their kids should be involved with entertainment, social contact, and information acquisition

NYU Langone Medical Center

How to Categorize The Issue

CONTEXT (how it fits into teen's world?)

↑

PROCESS (interactive or passive?)

↑

CONTENT (book, game, information, etc.)

Context

– Throughout this talk we **MUST** consider:

FUNCTIONAL IMPAIRMENT

"Is it clearly getting in the way more than it would for other teens his/her age?"

Issues to Consider

- Safety
  - Physical, psychological, social
- Time spent
  - How much time should they be used?
- Content and values
  - Do they teach the right actions and correct values
- Are they really as benign as the manufacturers suggest that they are?

Amount of Exposure - I

- The total amount of media use by youth 8 to 18 averages 7+ hours a day

- There is extensive multi-tasking

- Today more than 30% of US children first play with a mobile device while still in diapers

- Almost 75% of US 13-17 year olds have smartphones, and 24% admit to using their phones "almost constantly". (Pew Research Ctr)

- Over 1/3 of teens text over 100 times a day.

Old
Academy of Pediatric Guildeline

- Limit screen time to two hours a day for children over 2

- Not feasible in a *lifestyle* of screens

The Example of Television and Video Viewing

- Increases in media involvement are associated with reduced grades
  - Light vs. Heavy Use – C's or worse – 23% compared to 47%

- Multiple impacts of content

NYU **Langone Medical Center**

Impact of Television and Video Viewing - II

- Content Tested
  - Violence
    - Increased exposure results in:
      - More aggressive behavior
      - More aggressive thoughts
      - More angry feelings
      - Less empathy
      - Less helping behaviors
      - Increases fear
  - This content is:
    - Unrealistic – no punishment in 73% of scenes, only 16% of programs showed negative consequences
    - Frequent in children's programming (25 acts per viewing session)

Facts to Consider

- The impact of extensive electronic interactions are unclear

- Higher level of involvement is likely to detract from other areas of development

- More and more access is available away from parental supervision and monitoring

- We live in a world where "screen time" is becoming simply "time." Policies must change.

Normative Risk-Taking in Teens

- Risk taking is greater in teens than in adults
- Teens **focus more on the benefits** than the costs of risky behavior
- Teens make riskier decisions when in peer groups than alone
- Peer effects on risk taking and risky decision making were stronger among adolescents than adults. (Peer pressure).
- Adolescents naturally inclined toward risky behavior and risky decision making
- *THEY ARE EXPLORING*

- Steinberg et al, 2012

NYU Langone Medical Center

Social Media
Tools for Connection & Communication
Positive & Negative Considerations

- Social contact network is expanded
- Social contact is extended across distances
- Social contact can be more varied
- Positives and negatives are:
  - Faster, broader, more permanent
- Potential Negatives of increased social media use:
  - Conversation skills
  - Speaking skills
  - Spelling skills
  - Writing skills
  - Capacity to think in an ordered fashion
  - ***Increased Social Risk***

Areas of Concern: Social

- What is inappropriate use?: Bullying, Teasing, Sexual content, Inflammatory comments, etc.

- Smart Phones and Social Media
  - Remember content that is put onto the net:
    - Spreads quickly
    - Spreads farther
    - Is permanent
    - Becomes of great concern to teens

- Remember- Teens are naturally more impulsive and less likely to consider downsides. Need to *supportively* remind/discuss the dangers.

Parenting in the digital age

- ***STOP: Before I click "send"… is this something that I:***
  - *Want to share with strangers?*
  - *Am willing to show my parents/friends?*
  - *Want to remain on the internet forever?*

- Use *occasional* mistakes as teacheable moments.
  - Validation and Empathy. Plan for the future.

Electronic Games
Toys
Tools for Entertainment
Positive & Negative Considerations

- They can improve some fine motor skills
- They can provide some relaxation and a break
- They can occupy time constructively
- They can lead to new interests

- They can hinder development of other skills if overused
- They can have harmful content
- *May monopolize social interaction*
- *May become addictive*

Reality Check: Famous Thinkers on New Technology

- "It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity."

  -Albert Einstein

- "It is a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time, and yet remain lonesome."

  -T.S. Eliot, about the **radio**

Steps to Consider

- Set Rules for Use
- Discuss Content Restrictions
- Know What Content is Available
- Discuss Content
  - Put it in perspective
    - Does it agree with your values?
    - Be concerned about how it affects your child's thinking, emotions, and behavior

NYU **Langone Medical Center**

Developmental Considerations

- Internet Use
  - Preschoolers – do it together so that it is controlled, so that they learn useful information, so that you can help them develop language and social skills
  - Elementary – shared location, use controls, discuss content
  - Tweens – continued monitoring through a shared space or its equivalent, discuss content
  - ***Teens – help them establish a balanced approach, gradually increase freedom with monitoring, recognize their interest in exploring, know the likely content and platforms. Continue discussing what to do when encountering trouble.***

NYU Langone Medical Center

Areas of Concern: Sleep

- Light from devices delays release of melatonin -- disrupts sleep

- Need to develop consistent sleep hygiene

- Consider rules for stop time, and charging devices in common area

- Be firm AND warm. Be flexible when necessary

- Lower brightness of blue light on screens.
  - F. Lux
  - Night Filter

REALITY

Worst game ever.

Video Games- Internet Overuse When to be concerned?

- "Why is it that drug addicts and computer aficionados are both called users?"- Clifford Stoll, astronomer and author

- Preoccupation-thinks about previous online activity or constantly anticipates the next online session.

When to be concerned II

- Tolerance-longer periods needed to feel satisfied

- Lack of control-unable to cut back

- Withdrawal-Attempts to cutback lead to irritability, restlessness, and mood changes

- Staying on line- remains online much longer than intended

- Functional impairment, concealment, escape

Intervention for Too Much Use

- Parents *must* be able to establish and enforce clear limits on play time
- "How long is gaming needed to feel good/ be fun?" Start by scheduling some blocks of time.
- Some video games can be quick: Madden NFL
- Some games are typically played for 4+ hours at a time
- Discuss need for development and mastery of other skills. Reward engagement outside of games.
- Set daily schedules with teens – stick to them
- Address academic and school difficulties
- Brief family therapy to change family interactions

Intervention Goals

- Full abstinence model <u>not realistic</u>
- Goal: Abstain from ***problematic use*** while using computer for legitimate purposes

Help your teen *LEARN*

Increase Support and Communication

You need to Learn from Teens

Set appropriate Limits

Guidelines to Consider

- **Parenting has not changed.**

  The same parenting rules apply to your children's real and virtual environments. Play with them. Set limits; Be involved. Know their friends and where they are going with them.

Guidelines to Consider II

- **We learn from each other.**

  Young children learn best via two-way communication. "Talk time" between caregiver and child remains critical for language development. Passive video presentations do not lead to language learning in infants and young toddlers.

- **Co-engagement counts.** Family participation with media facilitates social interactions and learning.

Guidelines to Consider III

- **Content matters.**

  Prioritize how your teen spends their time rather than just setting a timer.

- Look to organizations like Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org) that review age-appropriate apps, games and programs.

NYU Langone Medical Center

Guidelines to Consider V

- **Role modeling is critical.** Limit your own media use, and model online etiquette. Attentive parenting requires face time away from screens.

- **Create tech-free zones.** Preserve family mealtime. Recharge devices overnight outside your child's bedroom. These actions encourage family time, healthier eating habits and healthier sleep.

Guidelines to Consider VI

- **It's OK for your teen to be online.** Online relationships are integral to adolescent development. Social media can support identity formation. Teach your teen appropriate behaviors that apply in both the real and online worlds.

- **Kids will be kids.** Kids will make mistakes using media. These can be teachable moments if handled with empathy.

Parental Involvement

- Kids who are educated in the importance of online safety are more likely to take steps to keep themselves safe online than kids who aren't educated

- Need for open communication and rule setting – ahead of time

- This is about teaching/training for the brave new world!

Parental Involvement II

Communication:

- Talk to your kids about what to do when something inappropriate or scary pops up.

- Nothing can replace involvement and supervision by adults.

- Stay involved without getting into the role of internet traffic cop. Goal is to promote learning and education!

Other Ways to Be Involved: Become Technology Savvy

- Take a class (we are digital immigrants)
- Learn from your children (they are digital natives)
- Join a social network-friend your children
  - 39% of parents have friended their teenager on social networking sites
  - Friending parents on social media is associated with an increased likelihood of parent-child conflict over social media

Have discussions with your child

- What are your favorite things to do online?
- What is personal information? Why to keep it private.
- Problem Solve (e.g., "What could you do to be safer online?")
- Discuss hypotheticals (e.g., "What would you do if anyone online asked to meet you face-to-face?")
- Plan ahead

Bringing it all together…

- **Have conversations.** Sit with them. Participate in their online activities. Learn about their context.

- **Set expectations.** The earlier the better. This involves teaching appropriate behavior/content. Discuss what to do if they come across inappropriate content. Use rewards/punishment sparingly.

- **You all will learn together**

Thank You!

Feel free to contact myself at
douglas.brodman@nyumc.org
For more information or to request services

Douglas M. Brodman, PhD
Postdoctoral Fellow, Clinical Psychology
Clinical Instructor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
The Child Study Center at NYU Langone Medical Center
One Park Ave, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10016
Phone: 646.754.5074 | Fax: 646.754.9538
Ilana Hyman, Staff Associate: 646.754.4902
douglas.brodman@nyumc.org | www.AboutOurKids.org

Providing: Parent Management Training; Parent-Child Interaction Therapy; Parental Friendship Coaching; Organizational Skills Training, and more broadly, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for youth and parents struggling with ADHD, disruptive behavior, anxiety and depression.

NYU Langone Medical Center

Resources

- [The Kaiser Family Foundation](#)
- [The American Psychological Association](#)
- [The American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [www.AboutOurKids.org](#)
- NYU Child Study Center
  - 212-263-6622
    - Manhattan
  - 516-358-1808
    - Lake Success
  - 201-465-8111
    - Hackensack