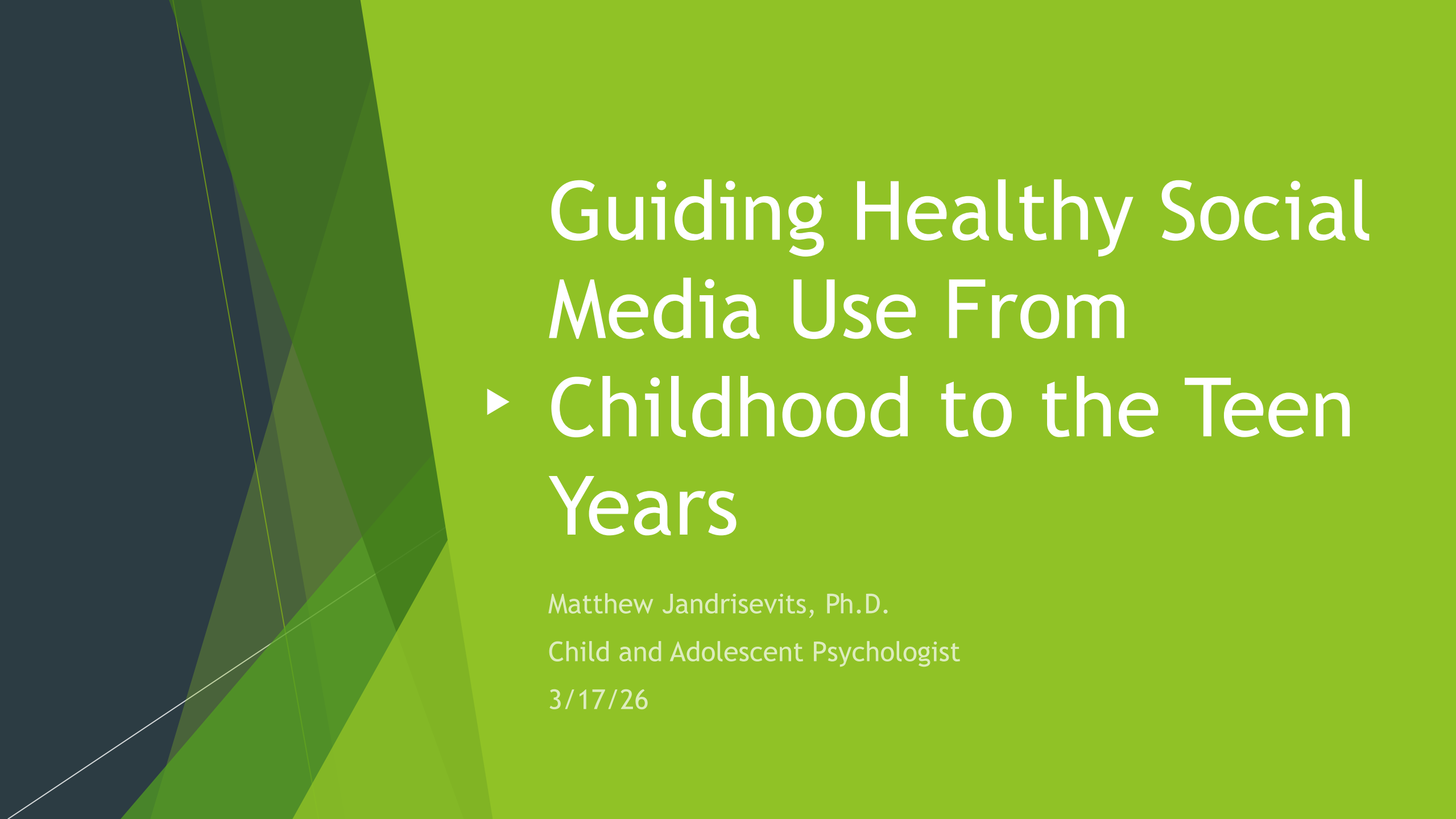




Guiding Healthy Social Media Use From ► Childhood to the Teen Years

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3/17/26

Disclosures

- ▶ There are no relevant financial interests to disclose related to this presentation.
- ▶ Each family has its own experiences and rules for technology use. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach.
- ▶ This presentation considers when and how to limit technology use for kids at various ages, and how to engage children in the process of learning healthy utilization/enjoyment of social media/technology.

Objectives

Identify risks and benefits of social media use on the overall health of children and adolescents.

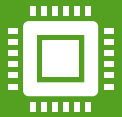


Discuss strategies for promoting effective social media “health hygiene behaviors” to ensure safety, physical health, and responsibility for youth of all ages.



Risks and Benefits ▶ of Social Media Use in Youth

Social Media Use



Technological innovation is an inherent component of lived experiences.



Like any technology, social media carries opportunities for improvement of health and well-being, as well as risks of harm.



The development of healthy social media use is a major task of childhood-into-adulthood

Just like other health behaviors (energy intake, exercise, intellectual growth, skill refinement, spiritual and community connection, etc.)

Benefits of Social Media Use



As appropriate, it offers broad entertainment options



Unprecedented opportunities to build competencies

Academic
Practical
Extracurricular
Social



Tool to learn about health and development (when well-vetted!)



For adolescents, social media can be an effective networking tool

Social Media/Tech Use: Communication

- ▶ Most schools/districts have integrated technology and social media platforms into lessons or communication mechanisms.
- ▶ Social media can offer nearly instantaneous access to information about how to improve sleep, healthy energy intake, stress reduction, exercise, and treatments for minor illnesses or injuries. (Children's WI and other organizations offer Tik Toks, YouTube videos, and others)
- ▶ Technology/social media can also offer tangible ways for youth and families to remain connected, near or far.

Risks Associated with Social Media

Access to
inappropriate
internet content

Predatory behaviors

Inappropriate
communications

Cyberbullying

Addictive
perseveration
toward social media
(and other tech)

Depression or
anxiety related to
comparisons on
social media

Neglect of family,
school, and
extracurricular
activities

Conceptualizing the Risks



The concern for
youth is related to
two domains:

Neuropsychological
development
Psychosocial
development



Understanding the risks will guide
healthy conversations, social media
use, and opportunities for growth.

Development of Youth

- ▶ Developmental tasks across childhood:
 - ▶ Exploring the world (5-8 year olds)
 - ▶ Feeling competent (9-12 year olds)
 - ▶ Developing sense of place in the world (13-19 year olds)
- ▶ Brain development across childhood:
 - ▶ Younger children: Concrete, in-the-moment perspective. Often don't recognize larger risks.
 - ▶ Adolescence: More complex and abstract thought process, though "judgment center" and "self-control" parts of the brain have not fully developed.

How Technology Complicates Development

- ▶ Throughout childhood, the pleasure-seeking area of the brain craves more (and more intense) stimulation. Some potential examples:
 - ▶ **Young children:** Shapes, colors, cartoons, activities are fun to watch. They are interesting and distracting and therefore perceived as ‘soothing’, ‘captivating’ or ‘invigorating’.
 - ▶ **School-aged children:** Social media is pleasurable, entertaining, and promotes sense of mastery (especially when other areas of life aren’t so easy).
 - ▶ **Teens:** Self-expression and establishing/maintaining peer connections can reflect one’s sense of self-worth.
- ▶ Social media is uniquely reinforcing which can be a risk if overused

Examples of Social Media-Related Challenges

9yo: significant increase in arguments, tantrums, and “sneaking” behaviors related to limits on social media

- Watching hours of YouTube videos per week of video game streamers
- This was compounded by arguments regarding limits on video game use

15 yo: Depression and anxiety in the context of peer “drama” on social media

- Perceived personal attacks/”gaslighting” from peers on Instagram and Snapchat
- Ongoing attack/defense/”loyalty tests” during conflict between peers
- Worry that their response/non-response to peers will negatively affect peer mental health



Promoting Healthy

- ▶ Social Media Use in Youth

Social Media Use and Younger Children

- ▶ Younger children may be drawn toward highly stimulating activities without the ability to regulate/turn off either the technology device or their brain
- ▶ Setting limits on devices (access, time, type of content) is strongly encouraged. A matter-of-fact approach is recommended
- ▶ Kids who engage in pretend play (or play with others) exhibit improved cognitive flexibility as older children/adults

Social Media Use and Younger Children

- ▶ Set limits, use parental controls, and emphasize what is and is not ok
- ▶ Kids can show they're able to use tech responsibly when they can show they're able to turn it off
- ▶ Some recommend against taking away tech as punishment for other disobedience, as this may 'prime' children to battle parents about tech use

Social Media Use of Younger Children

1

Keep the child's need for competence and mastery in mind. Learn and talk with children about their preferred games, apps and videos.

2

Place tech in context of wider life. Talk with kids about how they are good at other things, like music, reading, sports, building things, helping others, etc.

3

Talk about the goal of helping kids feel more in control of their own health and well being through moderation of social media.

Lead Positive Social Media Use in Children

- ▶ Technology can be utilized to help develop, learn, and celebrate “real-world” interests, such as watching a video that shows the chord progressions for a song, or creating a short video of highlights to send to grandparents.
- ▶ Practice and demonstrate healthy technology use, including modeling when to turn it off even if we don’t want to!
- ▶ Discuss limit setting with children. Although caregivers will administer the rules, engaging youth in conversations about how and why to monitor their own use will help promote healthy technology practices in the future.
- ▶ Reinforce children’s abilities to maintain responsible behavior. They are striving for competence, and this is an opportunity for them to perceive it.

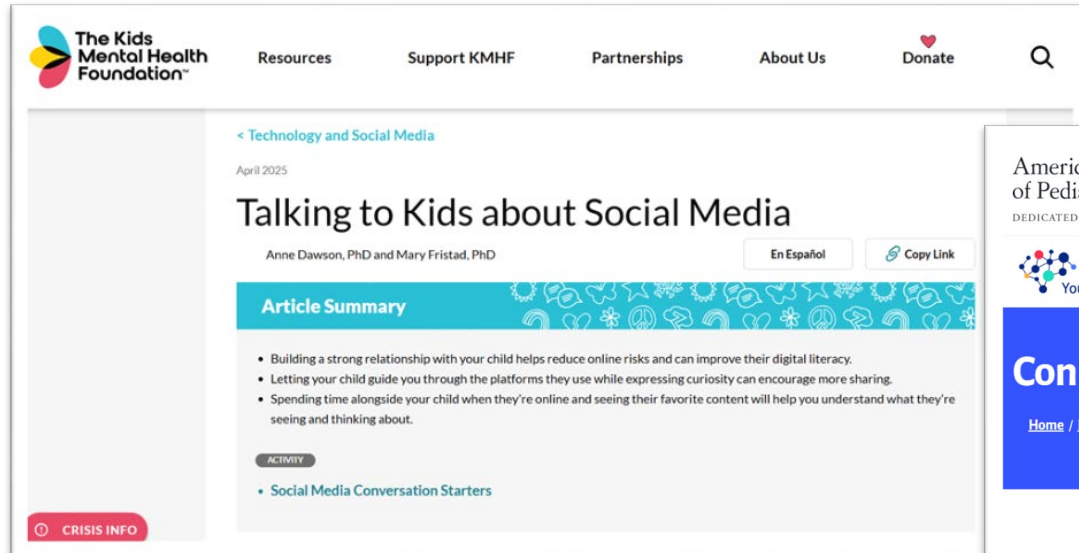
How to Discuss Risks of Technology with Younger Children

- ▶ There is often anxiety associated with direct conversations about risks.
- ▶ The question is: Who would you prefer your children talk to about these issues first: you or someone else (child or adult)?
- ▶ Children do not generally “get ideas” for how to engage in bullying, sexual behaviors, self-harm, etc. through talking about them with their family.
- ▶ The key is to help children feel confident in a template for what to do if any of these issues come up, whether online or not.

Addressing Technology-Related Risks

- ▶ Utilize monitoring mechanisms but also explain why they are necessary.
 - ▶ Emphasize competence. Talk with children about how they understand what and who to trust vs. not. Encourage them to show how they are starting to evaluate content and/or social media interactions.
- ▶ Develop a plan for who children can talk to, and how they can respond effectively, when faced with negative comments from peers.
 - ▶ Consider that it is not if, but when children will face perceived negative feedback. The key is how to respond with discernment and with maturity.
- ▶ Utilize reputable online resources to help guide conversations.

Resources for Talking with Younger Children



The Kids Mental Health Foundation

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< Technology and Social Media

April 2025

Talking to Kids about Social Media

Anne Dawson, PhD and Mary Fristad, PhD

En Español Copy Link

Article Summary

- Building a strong relationship with your child helps reduce online risks and can improve their digital literacy.
- Letting your child guide you through the platforms they use while expressing curiosity can encourage more sharing.
- Spending time alongside your child when they're online and seeing their favorite content will help you understand what they're seeing and thinking about.

ACTIVITY

- Social Media Conversation Starters

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f in x e

Question: How can I use social media to increase connection with my child, particularly when I try to start a conversation and they give one-word answers?



Specific Concerns with Adolescents

- ▶ Fear of missing out (FOMO): Affects more than 50% of users
 - ▶ Belief that reputation on social media is ‘everything’ leads to anxiety/depression
 - ▶ FOMO is a major driver of adolescent social media use
 - ▶ Positive communication patterns with parents can mediate FOMO
- ▶ Negative interactions from others
 - ▶ Both familiar and unknown
 - ▶ “Drama” and antagonism can seem unrelenting
 - ▶ Real and perceived need to respond

Talking with Adolescents

1

Acknowledge the realities and challenges of adolescent experiences

2

Consider social media within the context of broader conversations about ensuring one's own safety, health, and well-being

3

Identify trusted supports that the adolescent can rely on if sensitive issues come up

Reviewing Healthy Social Media Use

01

Discuss
permanency of
online data

02

Review
recognition of
warning signs
from predators

03

Discuss sexual
abuse laws

04

Talk about what
to do when
encountering
suspicious or
unwanted contact

05

Review steps to
take when a
friend confides
troubling
information

Adolescent Social Media Use

- ▶ As children get older:
 - ▶ Continue to emphasize rules of the family, but more than that...
 - ▶ Maintain open conversation about social media trends and platforms
 - ▶ When possible, shift the conversation from “I can’t trust you” to “I want you to maximize safety and health”
 - ▶ Emphasize ways to help adolescents feel more competent and in control of their own behaviors
- ▶ Example: The power of not immediately responding/clicking

Addressing Concerns with Adolescents



Ask adolescents about their own concerns about social media experiences of teens



Emphasize personal agency: Discuss algorithms, “features” that result in loss of self-control, and influencers



Consider the potential harmful effects of “chasing likes” or other forms of validation

Model Healthy Social Media Use

- ▶ This includes acknowledging one's own “pull” toward the phone
- ▶ Practice and talk about taking breaks from social media
- ▶ Also provide insight into how to disengage from “doom scrolling” or perseverating on negative/antagonistic content
- ▶ Talk about the positives of maintaining self-control

Strategies to Decrease the Significance of Social Media for Adolescents

- ▶ Acknowledge the role of social media in the adolescent's experience
- ▶ Talk with adolescents about meaningful relationships and activities outside of social media
- ▶ Emphasize/foster these broader talents, connections, interests and goals
- ▶ Reinforce adolescent insight and judgement re: social media use
 - ▶ Teens often have balanced attitudes toward social media
 - ▶ They often don't want to admit it out of fear of restrictions

Cyberbullying

- ▶ **Persistent** - Digital devices offer an ability to immediately and continuously communicate 24 hours a day, so it can be difficult for children experiencing cyberbullying to find relief.
- ▶ **Permanent** - Most information communicated electronically is permanent and public, if not reported and removed. A negative online reputation, including for those who bully, can impact college admissions, employment, and other areas of life.
- ▶ **Hard to Notice** - Because teachers and parents may not overhear or see cyberbullying taking place, it is harder to recognize.

How to Help Adolescents Who Experience Cyberbullying

- ▶ Support the adolescent
- ▶ Try to maintain a nonjudgemental attitude
- ▶ Contextualize the situation as an opportunity to build effective responses
- ▶ Do not respond to the cyberbully. Block, report, and sign off
- ▶ In some situations (but not all), it may be helpful to save evidence
- ▶ Empower the adolescent to reach out to positive social or other supports

Resources for Talking with Adolescents

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SEARCH

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Keeping teens safe on social media: What parents should know to protect their kids

A multipronged approach to social media management, including time limits, parental monitoring and supervision, and ongoing discussions about social media can help parents protect teens' brain development

Date created: May 9, 2023 5 min read



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Take Action

Understand the problem. Know the threats. Take action.

These are the three ways you can fight online [child sexual exploitation and abuse \(CSEA\)](#). Together, we can help prevent this crime and get victimized kids and teens the support they need. The following sections explain how you can take an active role in protecting the kids you care about.

[Close all](#) [Open all](#)

Have the Talk

It's never too early to start talking to kids and teens about the risks they face online and continue talking about them at every age. Like teaching a child how to safely cross the street, continuous discussions and reminders are *key to safe online habits*.



Resources to Address Cyberbullying



RESOURCESLAWSRESEARCHPRESENTATIONSBLGBOOKSCONNECT



Cyberbullying Resources for Educators

Educators, here are numerous free PDF tip sheets, activities, and strategies to reduce tech misuse and promote its positive use.



Cyberbullying Resources for Parents

Parents, promote the positive use of technology with these free PDF resources.



Cyberbullying Resources for Youth

Students, here are resources to keep your online experience safe and fun.



Cyberbullying Stories

Read the experiences of those targeted online, in their own words.



Most Popular Social Media Apps

Description, history, user count, and age restrictions for any social media app you can think of.



Report Cyberbullying

Need cyberbullying help? Here's the contact info of every site, app, and gaming platform.





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Cyberbullying

DefinitionWays to Help YouthFAQsStatisticsPublications

Definition

Just as the use of technology itself has evolved, so has the ability to bully. Bullying, once restricted to the school or neighborhood, has now moved into the online world. Bullying through the use of technology is referred to as "cyberbullying."

Cyberbullying is bullying – unwanted, repeated, aggressive, negative behavior – that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, tablets, and computers. Cyberbullying can happen over email, through texting, on social media, while gaming, on instant messaging, and through photo sharing.



Summary

- ▶ Social media use is a normal experience for youth and adolescents
- ▶ There are benefits but also risks involved with social media use
- ▶ Rules and limits are typically involved when considering social media
- ▶ Broader conversations with youth based on development can promote healthy social media use
- ▶ There are several resources available for youth and families



Questions/Comments?

Thank you!

Resources to Promote Healthy Social Media Use For Young Children and Adolescents

Resources for talking with younger children:



American Academy
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Resources for talking with adolescents:



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



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