



Turning Life On - by keeping tech in check.

Turninglifeon.org

CHNA15 - Social Media's Impact on Mental Health

November 12, 2020

Turning Life On is a grass-roots movement that embraces digital wellness and promotes the human experience by uniting, informing and empowering parents, youth, professionals, schools and local communities.

Parenting in the digital age is overwhelming and communities need support and access to **information** to make the best choices. At Turning Life On, we realize that all communities are different and that **a coalition of parents is more effective than a single voice**. Our goal is to **bring local people together** so they can inspire positive change in their families and in their communities.

Our resources are extensive and intended to **inform many different communities** on the possible risks and impacts of technology. Our suggestions are meant to be comprehensive in an effort to **empower** communities to **create and adopt** informed, healthy, and appropriate societal norms to ensure kids are using technology safely.

SUGGESTIONS AND SOLUTIONS FROM TURNING LIFE ON

NURTURING ADULT RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUTH

Embrace your inner Mr. Rogers, tell youth that they are enough, just the way they are.

Be available and **model active listening**

Establish a list of situations that may be encountered online that are **too big to handle** without the support of an adult..

For parents, establish a list of **trusted adults** that youth can talk to. Educators, be available.

For parents, **follow your child on social media** and share social media posts and memes.

Show a genuine interest in what youth enjoy about digital media.

Seek **support**, support others, and feel **empowered** to say no.



ENCOURAGING CONNECTIONS WITH FRIENDS

Prioritize different types of screen time with a focus on balancing time online and offline.

Reinvent “Live” communication with family and friends. Teleconferencing can be exhausting so listen to your body and disconnect when needed. Some kids, especially extroverts, will become dis-regulated if they aren’t given opportunities to connect with friends. Set aside time for this.

Get creative with screen time. For example, bake together and play board games, virtually

Encourage offline connections. For example, letter writing, pen pals, multi-age/generational buddy programs, phone calls (or FaceTiming with the video off or the phone down).

PROTECTING SLEEP AND IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH

Middle schoolers need 9-12 hours of sleep and high schoolers need 8-10 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period. According to a study by the CDC, 58% of middle schoolers and 73% of high schoolers don’t get enough sleep. Studies conclude that screens interfere with melatonin, which interferes with sleep and can negatively impact mental health and potentially cause disease. Screens also interfere with sleep by causing external and internal distractions. (To learn more about how technology interferes with sleep and mental health visit <https://www.turninglifeon.org/mental-health>.)

For adults, avoid sleeping with your phone. If that’s not an option, setup “Do Not Disturb” and turn your phone to “Airplane” mode while you sleep. And whatever you do, do not let yourself pick it up in the middle of the night. It WILL disrupt your sleep.

Encourage families to adopt family rules that maintain bedrooms as peaceful sanctuaries, free from digital devices out of bedrooms. Allow technology use where it can be monitored. At night, keep devices close to parents. Use alarm clocks.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends powering down at least 1-2 hours before bed to protect sleep and to ensure teens are getting the break they need from the pressure to be connected.

Help students prioritize homework so online homework is done first. Support students by replacing online homework with analog options. Parents have the right to set the expectation with teachers that their child will complete homework on paper if it’s too late to be online. Parents also have the right to “opt out” of online work in support of their child’s physical health.



Give youth an out. For parents, give them words, “Tell your friends that I’m the worst and I won’t allow it.” For school staff and other people who work with youth, establish guidelines. Require that phones are turned off and put away, kept in lockers, or collected at the door.

Encourage parents to delay social media until high school when bullying tends to slow down and youth are less obsessed with social media profiles, followers, likes and streaks. This also delays the internal distraction to respond to social media posts when youth should be sleeping. **Establish rules and guidelines that restrict or prohibit the use of social media during the school day or while at activities.** Avoid using social media to communicate information with students, either through sports teams or clubs.

Establish a “People Come First” rule around device use in places that are ripe for conversation and relationship building (in the home, car, cafeteria, bus). Create a “Cell Motel” and collect devices during events and/or class. Face-to-face interactions improve feelings of well-being and mental health.

Keep devices off the dinner table and put away. Meals are a time for families to disconnect from technology and connect with each other. Studies show that family mealtimes contribute to healthier eating and living habits. Adopt this same policy at school and encourage youth to disconnect from devices and reconnect with peers in the cafeteria.

Encourage kids to be bored, cultivate a tolerance for discomfort. Avoid using devices as a distraction. Teach kids how to deal with stress and boredom, and how to behave appropriately in a restaurant. Recognize good parenting when you see it.

Encourage mindful use of technology. Teach kids the importance of choosing to engage vs. responding to alerts. At the start of class, encourage youth to close their eyes and focus on the breath, even for just 1-2 minutes.

Encouraging self-reflection will support youth in developing a healthy relationship with technology. Talk to youth about how social media makes them feel and how it feels to disconnect. Provide opportunities for them to come together and share. Offer alternatives, offer support and then self-reflect. Recognize the positive feelings and the negative feelings. Disconnecting can cause anxiety. Lean in and find a solution.

Find more suggestions at TurningLifeOn.org.