

Device Use

DFi



Social Media & Adolescent Health

Our sense of mind and self is created through multiple interactions across everyone we come into contact with; particularly from those in our early/adolescent environment. These intimate interactions result in the construction of our personality. Personality becomes, in time, the consistent features of who we are, what we believe and how we act. About age 3, your personality begins to emerge. It is developed throughout our early and teen years, becomes consolidated in our late teens and early 20's, and in our 30's it becomes relatively fixed. The earlier a child has access to gaming, devices and social media (before late teens) – the greater the risk of detrimental physical and mental health issues arising throughout their life.

- **Physical Health** – Excessive device use is linked to significantly increased anxiety, decreased metabolism, sleep issues, eating disorders, long-lasting posture issues and has proven to physically re-structure / atrophy significant parts of the brain that controls: planning, prioritizing, organizing and impulses.
- **Emotional Health** – social media and gaming directly link to decrease in self-esteem, self-worth and confidence; while linking to increases in isolation, depression, anxiety, escapism, jealousy
- **Addiction** – defined as compulsive behavior leading to negative effects or interfering with other important activities including sleep, school, human interactions and work. Includes dependencies or excess in posting content, checking status updates, stalking profiles, aimless trolling.
- **Social and Functional Impairment** – Coping skills, having quality conversations, functional disagreements in person, in-person interactions, interpreting social cues and more are compromised as digital communications puts everyone in a nonverbal disabled context, where body language, facial expression and even the smallest kinds of vocal reactions are rendered invisible.

Benefits

As parents, we all want to provide the best opportunities for our children. Digital, social media and devices are no exception. With the proper guidance social media can have benefits:

Collaboration and Tolerance of new ideas and experiences

Support Networks especially for kids with illnesses, conditions or disabilities and LGBTQI youth

Connecting with Family/Friends across long distances

Keeping informed of school activities

Civic Engagement – learn, understand and empathize with others.

Challenges

Without proper guidance, access to digital can pose significant risks as well:

Education – multitasking on devices during class/studying decreases academic performance

Self-worth/esteem – peer acceptance is a big thing for kids. Communicating online / indirectly makes it much easier to be cruel

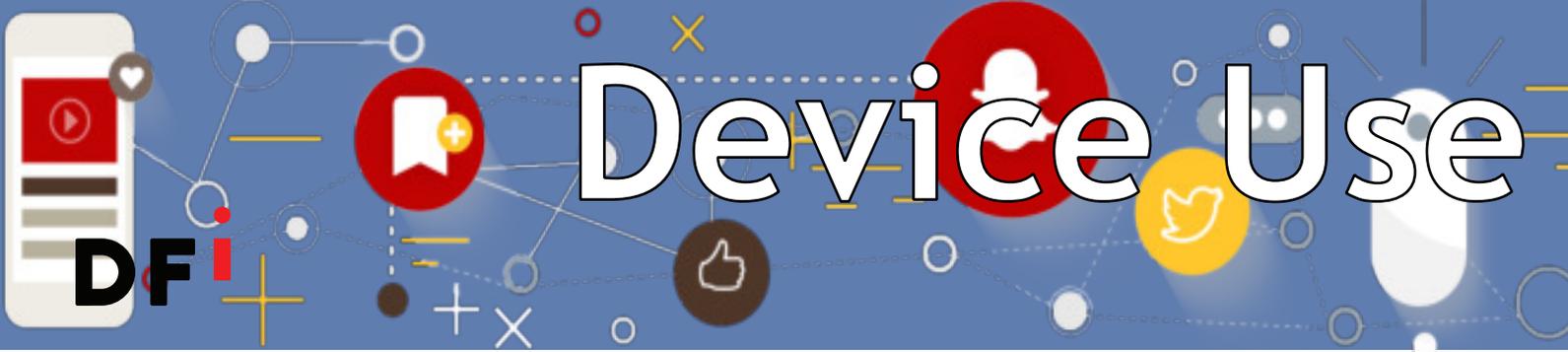
Body Image – Social media projects an idealized image that is impossible for most to live up to in-real-life

Isolation – lower self-esteem and confidence lead to social and physical isolation

Depression – leading to increased suicide rates

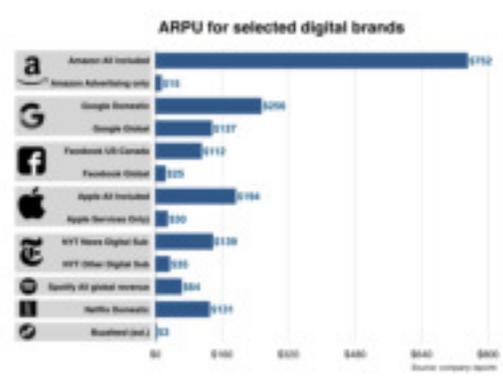
Risky Behaviors – Sexting, Personal data exposure

Predators / Groomers – leading to human trafficking



The Business of Addiction

Social media platforms are not philanthropic. They are in business to make money. While it may not cost you money to use Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp, etc, you pay with the data you create with every like, post, share, update and item you read. Looking at average revenue per user (ARPU) in 2018, Facebook made \$112 per user in North America; Apple \$194; Google \$256; Spotify \$64.



That means every time you log on; your actions are creating significant money for those companies. Therefore, every feature they add, new design, etc are carefully planned to make you spend more time on the site, click on more links, share more things – without regard for your well-being or if the content is accurate.

These companies intentionally make the site, the content, the activities addictive by design.

Digital Parenting Guidance

Being a parent in a digital world does add more complexity. Parenting still takes guidance, controls, discipline and leading-by-example. There cannot be a single list of do's and don'ts as every family situation is different. Here are some guiding principles for you to consider and adopt as appropriate:

- **Set a good example** – most of us are on our phones or computers checking email, social media, etc. Let your kids see your face and not the back of a device.
- **Engage your children** – teach them the nuances of communicating in person, by communicating in person, they need the practice. The alternative is they will turn to the internet for help or to process what is going on and the internet is full of information, but it doesn't filter the information according to your values like you do.
- **Treat social media and devices like you would alcohol** – go as long as you can without it; or like you would driving – would you give your kid the keys to your car without first teaching them to drive?
- **Keep tech “down times”** – no devices during meals, conversations or certainly bed times!
- **Limit tech usage** – even for teenagers. 2 hours for teens and 1 hour for pre-teens per day. Encourage other activities that result in more experiences building skills and/or self-confidence.
- Put **parental controls** on devices at least until they graduate high school
- **Stay engaged with their online lives.** Know their friends online, their experiences, etc.

More resources outside of DFi for information and help:

- DFiNow.org/for-parents
- DQWorld.net
- hhs.gov/ash/oah/tag