



Screen time and well-being



What the research says:
Screen use can be positive or negative.



“Digital technology can have both positive and negative effects on child well-being, depending on the activity and how much time is spent.”¹

- Very high levels of screen time are connected to poor mental well-being
- Very low levels are as well
- There's a large middle ground with no direct connection to well-being²



Screen time is important...but not as important as what kids do with their screens:



Video games can challenge minds, helping kids develop friendships and build their identities³



Social networks can help teens build a wider circle of friends and deepen existing friendships⁴



Social networks and video-chatting can help teens keep in touch with distant friends or family⁵



The Internet can be used to explore news, interests, connect with peers and mentors, and give and get feedback on creative projects⁶



What the research says:
Screen use can hurt mental wellness



Screen time has the biggest direct impact on sleep:

29%

of teen cellphone owners are often awakened by notifications⁷. This means both less sleep and worse sleep, which can have effects on general mental wellness and on brain development⁸.

Screen use can cause kids to have negative experiences that harm mental wellness, like:



• Cyberbullying⁹



• Unhealthy body image perceptions¹⁰

Using screens can also make it harder for kids to manage their emotions:



• Digital communication doesn't provide emotional cues like facial expression and tone of voice



• Kids sometimes use digital media to escape unpleasant situations



What the research says: Screen use and vulnerable children

The negative and positive effects of screen use are more powerful on vulnerable children.

Teens who report having low mental well-being are more likely to say they:



- Feel bad if nobody likes or comments on their posts
- Have felt left out after seeing friends' posts
- Have had negative experiences on social media

But they're also more likely to say that social media:



- Has an overall positive effect on them
- Makes them feel better about themselves
- Makes them feel less depressed¹¹

Parents of vulnerable youth need to be especially closely involved in their kids' digital lives and make sure they're supporting the positive aspects while helping to handle the negative ones.



What the research says: Signs of problematic use

Because what kids do with screens is more important than how much time they're spending with it, the most important question is whether it's causing problems in other parts of their lives:

- Have they lost interest in other activities?
- Do you often have trouble getting them to stop screen activities?
- Is screen use leading them to spend less time with family or friends?
- Does your child get angry or upset when they can't use screens at a time they expected to?
- Is screen use the only thing that can cheer your child up when they're feeling low?¹²



What the research says: Screen use has its pros and cons, but overall is more positive than negative.

According to kids, screen use:

- Makes them feel less lonely¹³
- Helps them make new friends¹⁴
- Lets them keep in touch with friends and family¹⁵
- Connects them with support and health services¹⁶



But teens also say that screen use can have negative effects – especially on other kids¹⁷:

54%

say they spend too much time on their phones

41%

say they spend too much time on social media

26%

say they spend too much time on video games¹⁸



What kids say: They aren't the only ones with a screen time problem

51%

of teens say their parents are sometimes distracted by their phones when talking to them¹⁹

When kids were asked what screen time rules parents should follow, they said:



- Put down the phone when your child is trying to say something important



- Don't spend all your free time on this stuff



- Don't post anything about me without asking me



- Practice what you preach²⁰



For tips on how to take control of screen use, check out these TELUS Wise tip sheets at telus.com/wise

Tips on managing screen use in your home (for parents) Dealing with digital stress (for youth) perceptions¹⁰.

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