

WTNS Radio OSU Extension Update for June 8, 2020
Healthy People. Healthy Finances. Healthy Relationships.

On today's OSU Extension update for Healthy People, Healthy Finances, and Healthy Relationships we'll talk more about digital wellness. A few weeks ago I shared about the need to unplug. Today we are going to continue the conversation and cover what parents should know about teens and screens.

I recently participated in a virtual reunion for a group I spent time with while we were teenagers 25 years ago. As we reminisced, interwoven in our conversation were comments about how different our use of technology was then. We wrote letters to one another instead of sending emails. We made very short long-distance calls rather than texting. We even took photos on a camera with film that had to be developed.

To say that teenagers are growing up in a completely different world than we did is certainly an understatement. I can hardly believe that in five short days I will become the parent of a teenager. I heard once long ago that as parents we are trying hard to work ourselves out of a job. We want to raise young people who can not only function on their own but make good and wise choices and be of benefit to others and society. Therefore, it must be about more than rules when it comes to screens and our teens. Here are some considerations for parents.

Cyberbullying: Bullying is a tale as old as time, but technology allows for increased opportunities to harass others without limitations of time and space. This often leads to silent and continued suffering for some teens. One of the best resources that I have found on this topic is from the Cyberbullying Research Center. This is co-directed by two professors of criminal justice from the University of Wisconsin and Florida Atlantic University.

They define cyberbullying as: "willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. This includes incidents where adolescents use technology to harass, threaten, humiliate, or otherwise hassle their peers." According to their research, 37 percent of students have experienced cyberbullying in their lifetimes.

The website cyberbullying.org has resources available for educators, parents, youth and adult victims. This is a quality site that is research-based and includes fact sheets on digital dating abuse, teen sexting, standing up to cyberbullying, and much more.

Online predators: A 2015 Oklahoma State University study explored teacher and counselors' perceptions of preventing sexual assault from online predators. They identified five themes that contribute to this problem including lack of parental supervision, social networking websites and chat rooms, teenagers need for relationships, instant gratification among teenagers, and lack of education for parents. A Cornell University study from 2013 showed that many parents were underestimating risky online behavior of their children.

One resource I find particularly interesting is an "Internet Use Contract" from the Cyberbullying Research Center. One side lists expectations for the child and the other side lists parent expectations. This sets the stage for some great discussions about boundaries. Having "parental controls" turned on is not the same as having conversations with your tweens and teens about expectations while online.

Know the lingo: Teens have always had their own language. One way to decode or to better understand abbreviations and acronyms is through the Digital Glossary at commonsense.org. This page also describes the latest digital apps. It can help you understand vamping and doxing, the difference between TikTok and Yik Yak, YOLO, FOMO, PAP and POS.

All in all, the worst thing we can do as parents is hand our kids a tablet, phone or laptop and just hope they will be safe. We wouldn't say, "Here's a bike. Ride it whenever you want, however you want, any time you want." The most important thing we can do is to talk with our tweens and teens about the good and the bad and set clear expectations. Adolescents don't think about the future or consequences the same way that adults do. That is why they have us in their lives. It is both a great privilege and challenge to be in this interdependent coaching phase of parenting a teen.

In closing, at OSU Extension, we are proud to work for Coshocton County to help improve our families, farms, and businesses. Please feel free to contact OSU Extension for more information at 740-622-2265 or visit our website at coshocton.osu.edu. Make it a healthy day!