Problem Gambling
Institute of Ontario

Youth, family and interactive technology

Snapchat

Twitter

Online gambling

WhatsApp

Voice messaging

Mobile gaming

Instagram

Facebook

Virtual worlds

Live streaming

Video gaming

YouTube

Not so long ago, parents worried about their children's television viewing or time spent chatting on the home phone. Today, while most parents have come to terms with the new technology—laptops, tablets, iPads, iPods, gaming systems, smartphones and smartwatches—many are still overwhelmed by how easy it is for young people to access almost anything with a touch of their fingers.

We're all connected

Most people like connecting with friends and what's going on with them, and technology has made that easy. Now it's difficult to keep track of the growing number of ways we have of connecting and the easy, instant access we have to people and information globally.

The Internet has become a huge part of young people's lives. They use it for schoolwork, keeping up with friends, playing games, shopping, sharing photos and videos, and streaming music, TV shows and movies. With Internet access on all smartphones, young people can interact with their social networks around the clock.

Children are using technology more and more. Learning through interactive games is engaging and fun. School-age children can join parent-vetted online communities that are great for practising social skills. The parent's role in guiding the family's use of technology starts early!

Young people use technology in ways that enhance their lives

Technology gives young people quick access to information that can help with their schoolwork. It can allow them to collaborate with classmates online. It can connect them with friends and family. It can be a way of relaxing.

Technology can provide new ways for young people to develop their identity by exposing them to situations and people from diverse cultures and places. It can open up communication with a variety of people and lets young people see inside the lives of others from diverse backgrounds and experiences. It allows them to develop their individuality and define their role in relation to their own circle of friends, family and community.

Some young people can develop problems with technology

Technology use presents a problem when it interferes with young people's ability to do the things that are expected of them, such as attending school regularly and on time, maintaining good grades, participating in family life and engaging in face-to-face friendships.

Important questions to consider are: Where do young people use technology? What are they doing with it? How much time do they spend using it?

Place—Do young people use the Internet in a space where parents can monitor their use (for example, in a family room where others can walk by and see what they're doing)? Or do they use it in a place where others can't see what they're doing (for example, in their bedroom or away from home)?

Content—Are young people's technology-related activities dangerous? Do they connect with strangers online and then arrange to meet them? Do they post inappropriate pictures of themselves or others? Do they text or talk on cell phones while driving? Do they use the technology to bully others or spread gossip and lies? Are they choosing activities that are appropriate for their age?

Time—Do young people use the technology as a tool to accomplish goals (such as doing their homework)? Or are they sleep-deprived from spending too many late-night hours on the computer instead of going to bed? Has technology become central to their lives? Do they use it to the exclusion of other activities?

Some young people are more likely to develop problems

People live complex lives. Blaming the development of problems on overuse or inappropriate use of technology can be misleading.

Some young people may use technology as a way to cope with a mental health problem or other stressors. For example, youth who feel lonely, have a physical disability, are being bullied or are dealing with family upheaval may escape their problems by immersing themselves in games or online communities.

Here's how some of these types of challenges may lead young people to use technology in harmful or inappropriate ways:

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)— hyperfocusing on a task that they enjoy such as gaming. When they spend a lot of time gaming, they may experience increasing skill that makes them feel good about themselves when they may not feel confident at school or in social situations.

Autism spectrum disorder (which used to encompass the diagnoses of autism, Asperger syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified [PDD-NOS], and childhood disintegrative disorder)—constantly researching a topic because of the need to know everything about it (compared to researching a topic for a school project).

Gambling problem—constantly accessing casino and other gambling sites.

Learning Disabilities—spending time online to avoid thinking about school or doing homework. There are many forms of learning disabilities with varying degrees of severity. Some youth may not even know they have a

CAN YOU BECOME "ADDICTED" TO TECHNOLOGY?

Technology addiction is an umbrella term that may include excessive behaviours related to playing video games, watching YouTube, streaming movies and sports, accessing social networks, cybersex and online porn, gambling; eBay and other online auctions or shopping; social media; excessive texting; or smartphone overuse. Excessive use of technology may not produce physical symptoms in the same way as excessive use of alcohol and other drugs does, but it can lead to significant negative impacts on the life of a young person, leading to poorer physical and mental health.

Using the term addiction for these types of behaviours may make some people feel stigmatized. Stigma refers to negative attitudes (prejudice) and negative behaviour (discrimination) toward people with substance use and mental health problems. Prejudice and discrimination may prevent people from seeking help. But if a behaviour is preventing someone from functioning in the real world, it needs to be addressed.

learning disability but they may struggle with certain tasks at school that may result in poor self-esteem and the desire to escape from homework or thoughts of school, which they can easily do by going online.

Compulsive behaviours— constantly using the Internet because of an obsession with a topic or game (compared to playing the game occasionally).

Posttraumatic stress—connecting with other people in chats to re-enact the traumatic situation (compared to chatting about lots of different things).

Self-harming behaviours—frequenting websites where youth share suicidal thoughts and self-harming techniques.

Social anxiety—constantly entering role-playing video gaming worlds where they pretend they're someone else (compared to doing this occasionally).

Substance use problems—researching ways to use alcohol and other drugs, searching and setting up buys and ordering prescription medication online.

It is important to note that many issues such as the ones listed above are more likely to occur together, for example, many people with ADHD may also have a learning disability.

THE TECHNOLOGY AND WHAT IT CAN ACCESS

The technology that youth use most includes smartphones, tablets, laptops, portable music players (e.g., MP3 players and the Apple branded iPod, iPod Touch, Shuffle, Mini and Nano), wearable devices such as smartwatches, sunglasses and fitness trackers, video gaming systems and media players.

What tweens, teens and youth access with their technology includes:

- social media platforms and services (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, WhatsApp, Vine and Tumblr)

- apps for everything from dating and gambling to Skype and Periscope

- online communities and virtual worlds (Second Life)

- games (from single-player games on their phones to multiplayer role-playing video games—MMORPGs—played on home systems with other people in real time around the world)

- and the list goes on.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Parents play an important role in teaching children how to use technology in safe ways. Rules for eight-year-olds are easier than those for 14-year-olds. Adolescence is an important time of experimentation, discovery and growing independence. It's also a time for taking on more responsibilities.

Here are 10 tips that can help.

1. Consider how you use technology. You are modelling behaviours for your children.

2. Before giving your children access to technology, talk to them about safe use. Communicate openly and honestly. Discuss possible effects and the dangers of using the Internet and social media.

3. Talk to your children about how to integrate technology into their lives in ways that respect others. For example, some families have "no texting" rules during mealtimes and family events.

4. Be aware of your children's Internet activities and what they access. Create rules that both you and your child agree to, based on their age and past Internet use. You can also consider V-chip technology for the TV, which can block access to programs and channels, and parental controls for smartphones and computers.

5. Spend time learning about the Internet and video games popular with youth. Participate with your children in these activities. They are more likely to listen to you if they think you know what you're talking about.

6. Have your children use a shared computer in an open area of your home where you can monitor what they're doing.

7. Help your children lead balanced lives. Set limits around your children's use of technology. Encourage them to take part in "offline" activities such as sports, music, drama and in-person get-togethers with friends and family.

8. Help your children set priorities. For example, doing homework comes before spending time texting or playing video games.

9. Remember that you own the equipment (e.g., computer, cell phone) your children are using—or you've likely given them the money to buy it. If your children are not using the technology in ways that you approve, you have the authority to cut off access or control their use in other ways (such as using a secret password to set the administrative rights on your home computer).

10. If you have seen signs that indicate your child may be developing a problem from their technology use, talk with your child about your concerns. You could also contact a health care professional to get guidance and support for the whole family.

Where to get help

Talk with your children if you have concerns about their use of technology. This includes listening to what they have to say. If you are still concerned, seek help from a health care professional such as your family doctor.

If your child is in crisis, take them to your local hospital.

Here are some services designed for young people that you may also find useful.

CAMH Treatment Services for Problem Gambling, Gaming and Internet Use
(for 16 and older)
416 535-8501, press 2

Children's Mental Health Ontario
www.kidsmentalhealth.ca

Kids Help Phone
1 800 668-6868
www.kidshelpphone.ca

MediaSmarts
A Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization for digital and media literacy.
www.mediasmarts.ca

Mind Your Mind
www.mindyourmind.ca

Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline
www.problemgamblinghelpline.ca

Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario
www.problemgambling.ca

TextED.ca
An initiative of the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, this interactive website is designed to teach Canadian teens how to be safe, responsible and respectful users of texting technologies.
www.texted.ca

For more information on addiction and mental health issues or to download a copy of this resource, please visit our website:

www.camh.ca

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