

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH: TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND DIRECTIONS FORWARD

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April 16, 2024

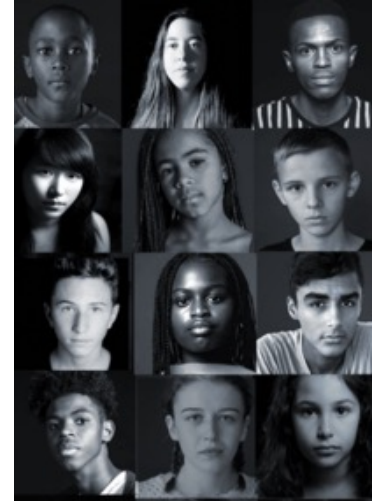
University of Minnesota Retirees Association

Objectives

You will learn:

- Rates of mental health concerns in past 15 years
- Goals of healthy Child Development
- What has gotten in the way of healthy child development
- How to address concerns about parent over anxiety
- How to address concerns about child screen time

COVID & the Mental Health Crisis



MENTAL HEALTH

Youth in Crisis

Pandemic Ratchets Up the Stress on Kids, Teenagers

By JOSEPH BIGNAR

As new Oregon begins to shake the cobwebs, "It's not normal for kids to be fearful all the time."

An alien obsession of the Benelli Foundation Health & Wellness Center, a program of MHS Inc., Oregon is one of many healthcare providers heavily impacted by how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted young people, and by extension to everyone.

"This has to be real. They like to socialize. Most kids like to be with friends," she said. "COVID has isolated us as a lot of people. They haven't been able to go to school, to volunteer, to be involved with activities that we break, like sports. Community spaces haven't been open."

It's not surprising, she added, that this isolation has contributed to an uptick in anxiety, depression, frustration, and a tendency to act out in negative ways.

Indeed, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between April and October 2020, hospital emergency department visits rose to the share of total visits from children for mental health needs. Nationwide numbers on suicide deaths in 2020 are still unclear, but several studies indicate a significant uptick.

But there's also been a silver lining, Bignar noted, while the pandemic may be slow to move the needle on long-term and other global programs are slowly opening back up, that doesn't mean the stress of the past year will just fade away.

"Kids are excited to go back and see their friends, but there's more awareness of the importance of mental health," she said. "That's been a big win."

MENTAL HEALTH CONT'D



Jessica Collins says parents sometimes feel less stressed to help their kids to cope — but they need to.

...she was suddenly hearing at home, and many of their parents were suddenly working from home. It has been a challenging time, particularly for working parents with young children who usually rely on school.

But as everything back to normal will pass for the very second year, the new challenges, she said, "It was originally going to be two weeks, and weeks turned into months, and months became a year. Then, they're going back out into a world that's changed. It's not going to be the same — there will be needs and social distancing and limitations on clubs and activities."

Socially, certain young people — those with a more extroverted personality — found their friends in the months before, and an overall trend of staying in contact. Bignar added, Collins found the home setting to be an escape from bullying, and one parents found about going back.

Meanwhile, some students, depending on how rigorous their remote learning experience was, might find themselves overwhelmed or feeling more down than before as they get back to school.

And for a certain group, affecting many families who lost income or jobs — a definite stressor on kids — it's not always easy to hear.

Tamara Croteau, a clinical psychologist and founder of Tools for Success Counseling in Irvington, said she's especially passionate about mental health in anxiety populations, a demographic disproportionately affected by mental health issues — because, again, there's increased isolation by factors like economic stress, who's been able to hold on to their jobs during COVID-19.

"Kids are excited to go back and see their friends and have some sense of structure, to be in society again. But there are definitely a lot of adjustments to be made."

There's more to be said, Bignar added, as the pandemic has been a greater problem for communities of color because of issues of technological access and family needs over financial matters, she added. "There's not necessarily the most consistent learning environment — and COVID just exacerbated it."

Please see **Impact**, page 7

Achieve your Goals at Westfield State

- Master of Arts in Applied Behavior Analysts
- Master of Arts in Counseling
- Master of Public Administration
- Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies
- Master of Social Work
- RN to ESN Locations in Westfield, Springfield, Northampton



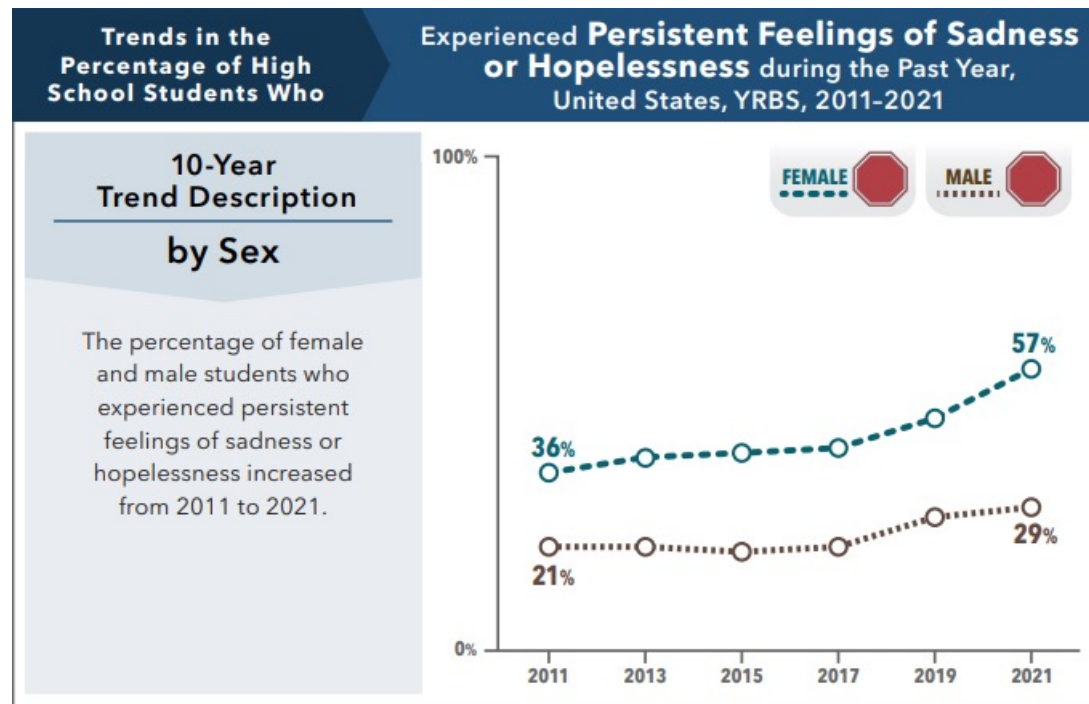
Covid Stress

- 29% of U.S. high school students had a parent or caregiver who lost their job
- 55% were emotionally abused by a parent or caregiver
- 11% were physically abused
- During the 2021–22 school year, 230,000 children were still out of school across 21 states and the District of Columbia, losing access to key resources, like:
 - Counseling
 - Academic help and support
 - Meals

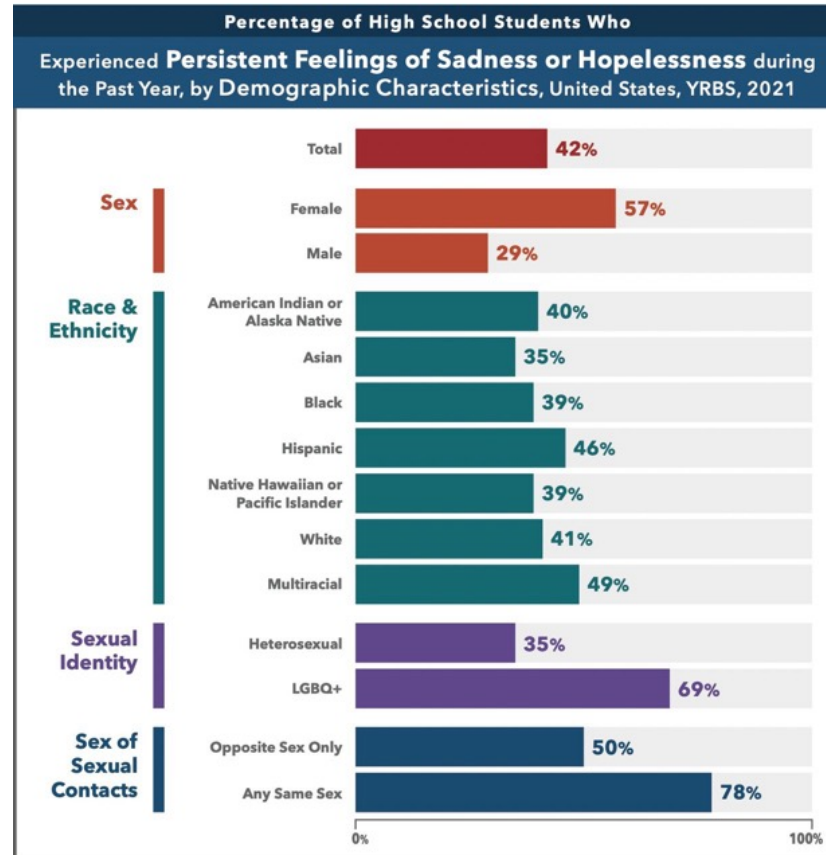
Covid losses

- Academic success: Current scores are the worst on record
- Social Skills: Kids lost access to peers and other adults during key developmental times
- Extracurricular development: Kids lost access to extracurricular programs where they could develop talent, interest, and social cooperation

But the crisis had been there...

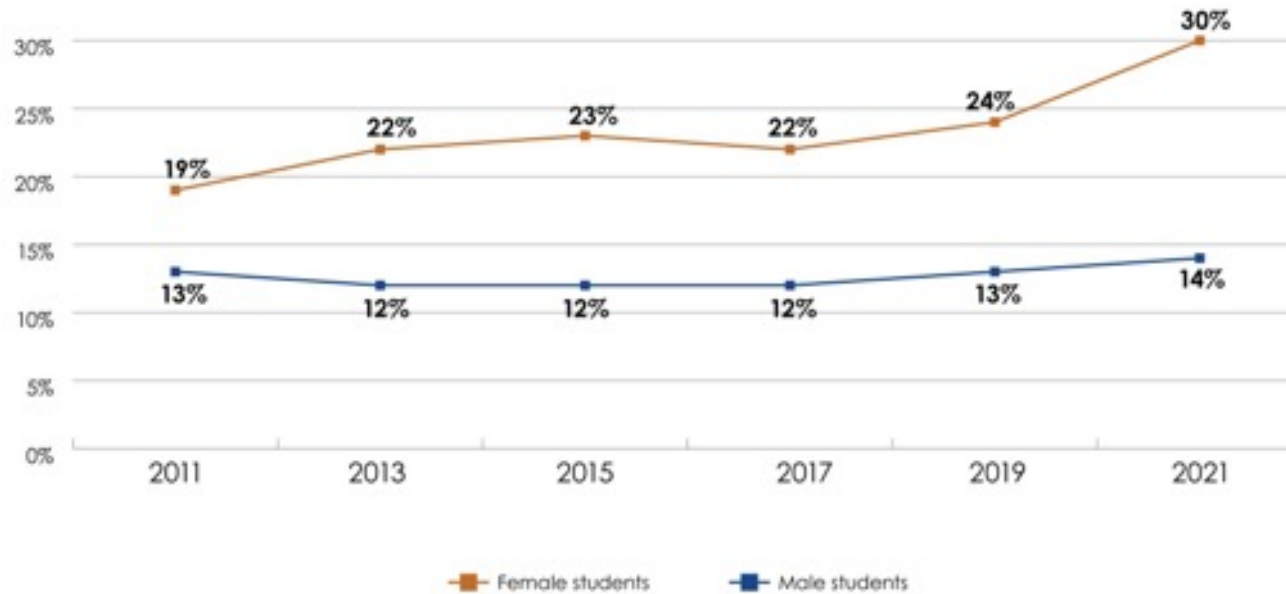


Depression symptoms demographics



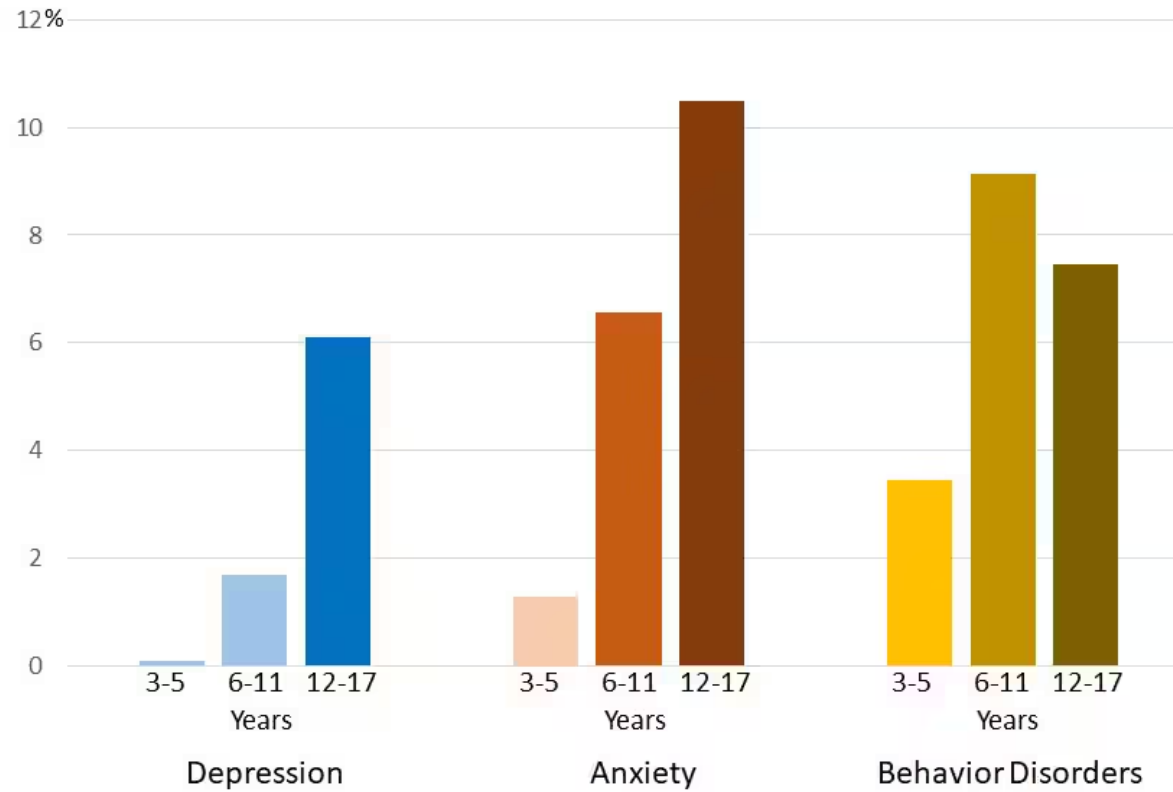
Suicidal Thoughts

SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED ATTEMPTING SUICIDE
AMONG U.S. HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, BY SEX, 2011-2021



Anxiety Trends

Depression, Anxiety, Behavior Disorders, by Age



CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Infants & Toddlers: Development

- Focus on sensory experiences
- Responsive caregiving
- Developing attachment relationships
- Major developmental task is building trust with caregiver

Babies need interaction to learn



Preschool-aged Children: Development

- Task: Individuation from caregiver and developing autonomy
- Independence, self-control, and self-care increase
- Increase in social awareness
- Play, imagination, and creativity are central
- Start to understand symbol representation (e.g., person on screen represents one in life)

Grade School Age: Development

- Focus on rules, self-control, structure
- Relating to and approval from peers becomes significant
- Developing new academic, athletic, and artistic skills
- Beginning to form sense of self based on perceived competence

Tweens & Teens: Development

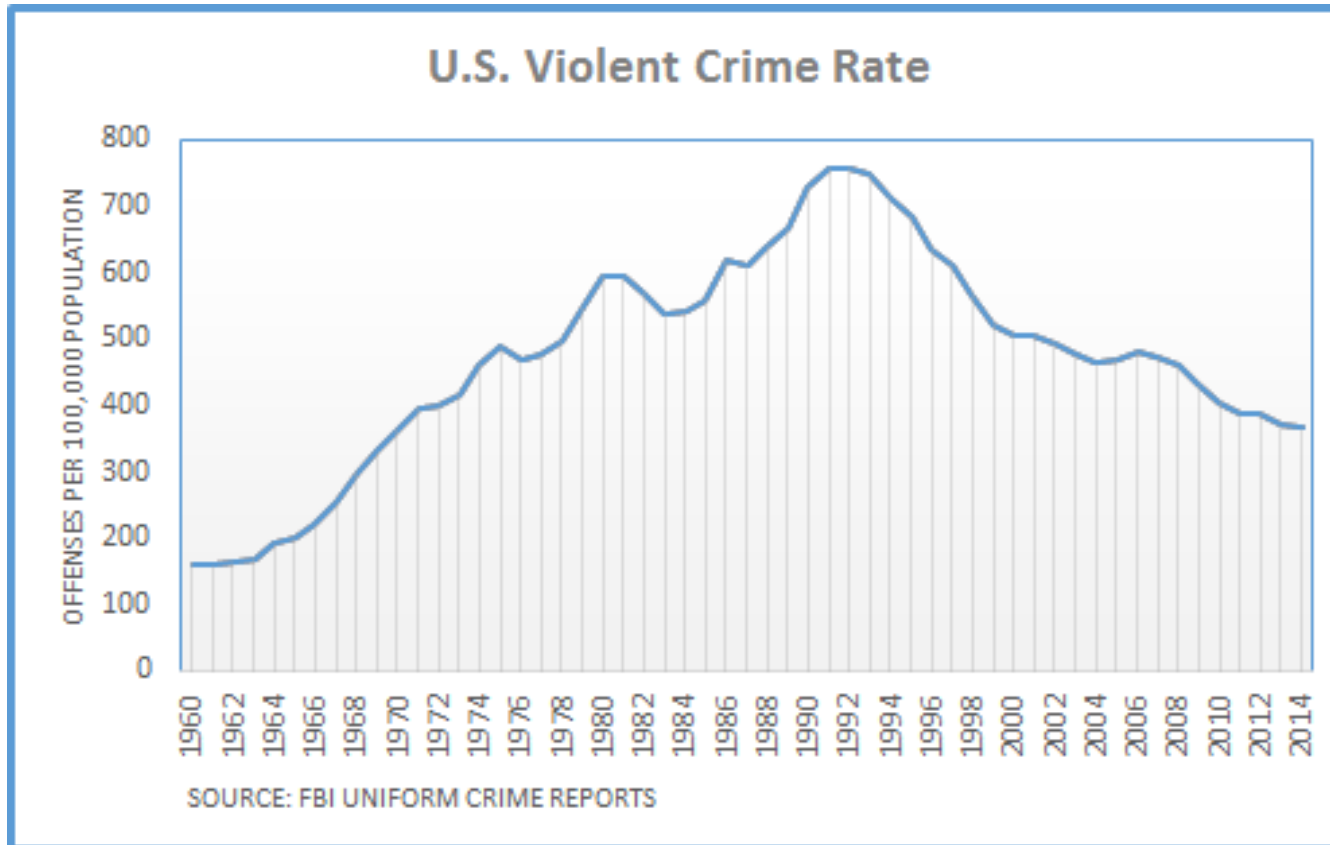
- Major goal is autonomy, independence, and development of self-identity
- Time with peers becomes highly important developmental context
- Teens typically spend much more time away from home than they used to
- Hot and cold cognition

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY OF HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT?

What happened?

- Possible decrease in stigma has allowed increased comfort in talking about mental health concerns
- Increase in broad stressors such as the 2008 financial crisis, rising income inequality, racism, gun violence, and climate change
- The age of puberty has been dropping for decades, especially in girls.
- **Parents more anxious, safety/security conscious, engage in social comparison**
- **The Ubiquity of digital access and social media**

Safety has improved...



Safety Fears lead to...

- Increase in structured activities
- Increase in supervision, less time for free play
- Less time outside
- Less opportunity to learn problem solving and independence
- Increased child anxiety

Why are parents worrying so much? Information overload from news and social media!

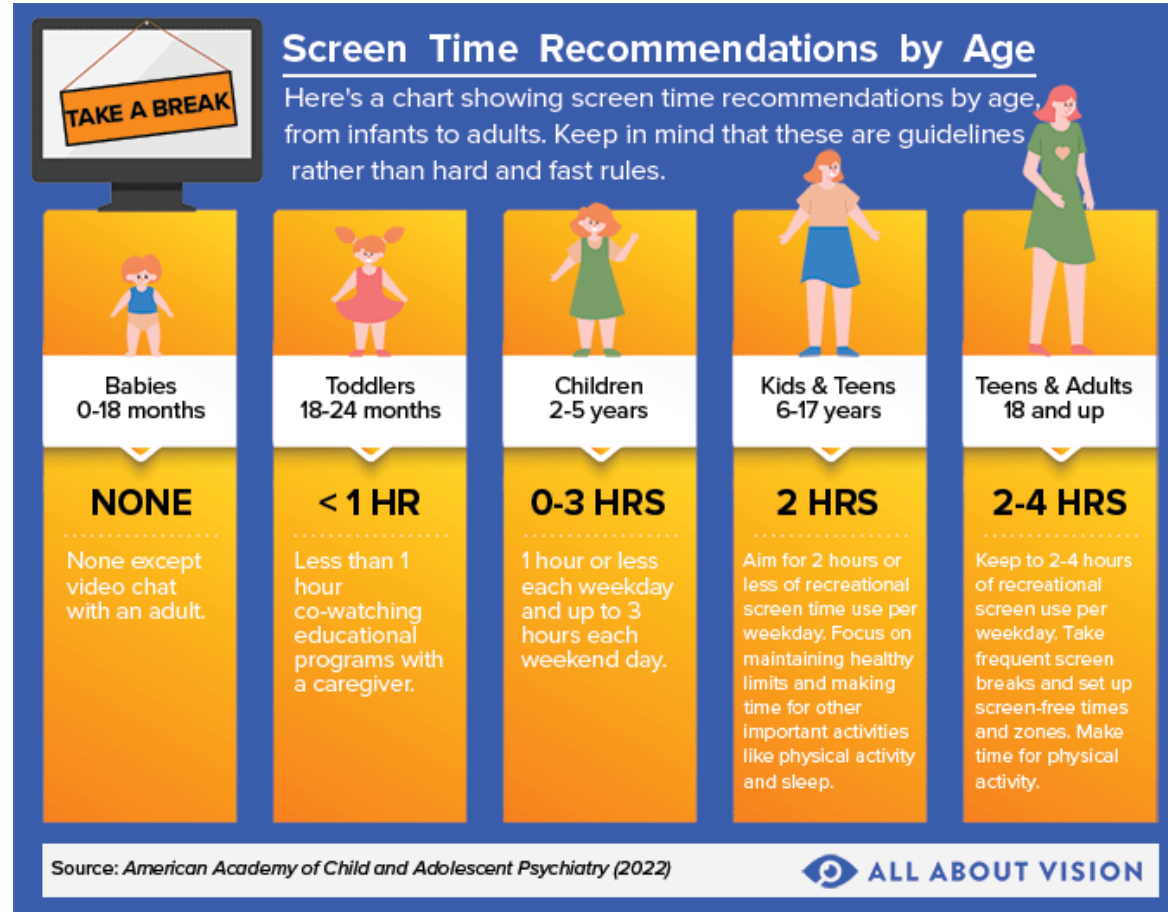
Screens are ubiquitous



...and not just for kids



Pediatricians suggest...



But what is really happening?



Babies



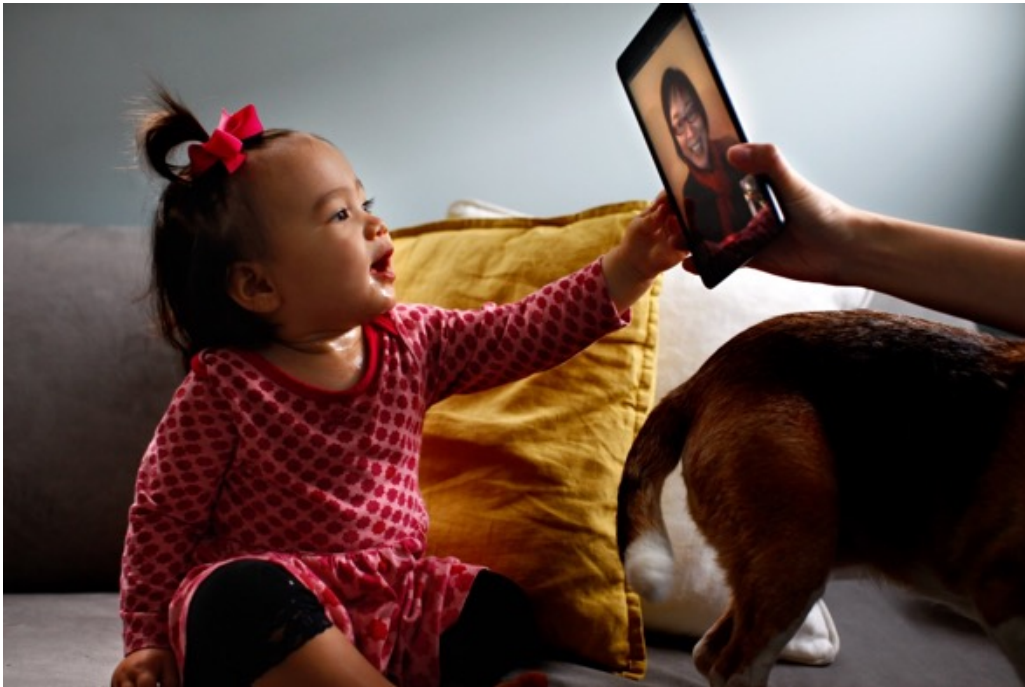
As of 2014, kids age **2 and under** in the United States averaged **3 hours, 3 minutes a day** of screen time, up from 1 hour, 19 minutes a day in 1997.

JAMA Pediatrics , Vol. 173, No. 4, 2019

Exposure to screens begins at about 4 months.

Pediatrics (2015); 136 (6):1044–1050

Preschool-aged Children



As of 2014, kids ages **3 to 5** spent **2 hours, 28 minutes a day** of screen time, on average

JAMA Pediatrics , Vol. 173, No. 4, 2019

Children



As of 2018, **8- to 12-year-olds** in the United States now use screens for entertainment for an average of **4 hours, 44 minutes a day** (not including schoolwork)

Common Sense Media, (Study published October 2019)

Teens

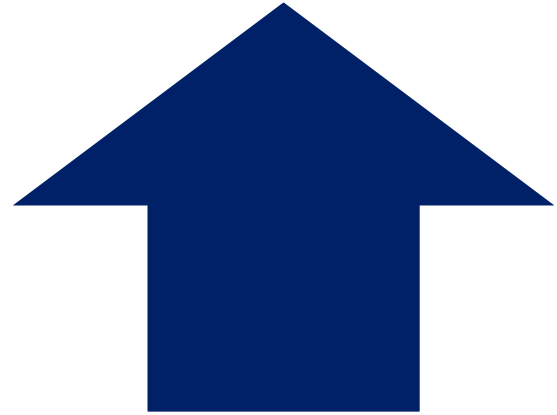


As of 2018, **13- to 18-year-olds** are on screens for an average of **7 hours, 22 minutes** each day (not including schoolwork)

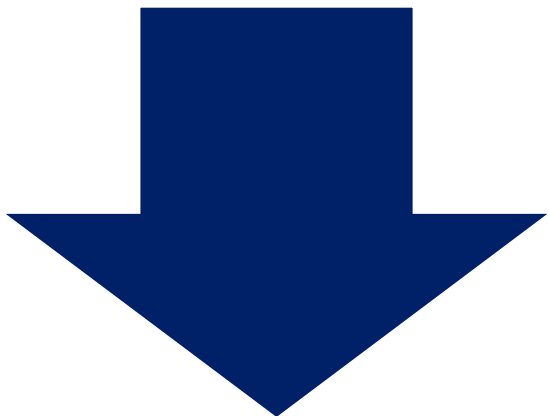
Common Sense Media, (Study published October 2019)

THE RESEARCH

Large Correlational Study



More screen
time/day



Less psychological
well-being

Mental Health Associations

Teens 14-
17

7+
Hrs/Day

2x likely
MH Probs

Problematic Associations

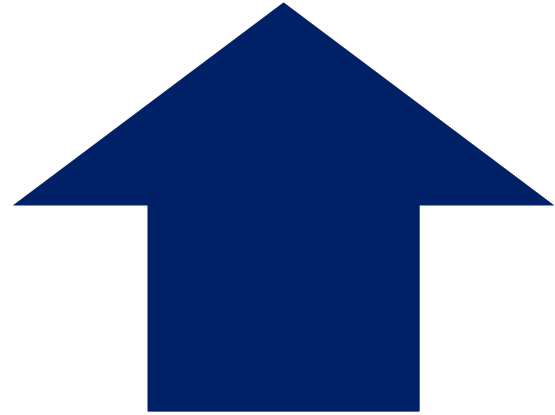
- More screen time was associated with:
 - Less sleep
 - Poorer Grades
 - More disruptive behaviors
 - Other studies have found associations with:
 - Higher rates of obesity
 - Lower scores on cognitive tests
 - Higher rates of depression
 - Less physical activity
 - Less in person social time
- (Lissak, 2018)

Displacing healthy activities

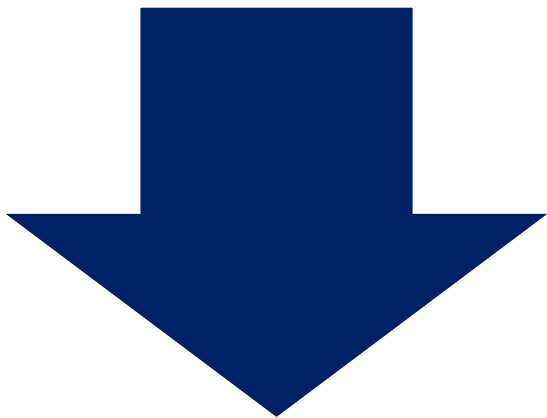
- Screens become a **problem** when they get in the way of other healthy habits and behaviors.
- The best mental health and cognitive outcomes for kids:
 - Regular physical activity
 - Sleep 9 to 10 hours a day
 - Developmentally appropriate learning activities



Brain Development

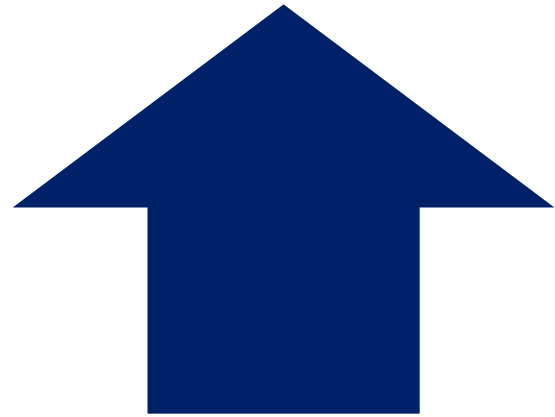


3-5 year-old kids who used screens more than one hour a day **without parental involvement...**



...had lower levels of development in the brain's white matter.

Cognitive Development



Kids who spent more time per week on screens at ages 24 months and 36 months...



...had poorer performance on screening tests for behavioral, cognitive and social development at 36 months

Gender Differences

- On average, boys spent about 45 minutes more daily with screens than girls, topping out at nearly five hours daily on weekends and four hours on weekdays.
- Boys and girls used screens differently, with boys spending twice as much time with video games, while girls spent more time engaging with social media. (The data, collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, did not include screen time associated with homework or online learning).

Should we throw out screens??



- NO!
- Many studies are correlational.
- There are benefits too.
- A lot depends on
 - how kids are using media
 - how much their parents are monitoring their use
 - how much time they're spending
 - and what they're watching and using

Screens Pyramid

Screens before bed,
T.V. in background,
“emergency needs”

Age-appropriate shows,
video games, and movies

Music, video chat with loved ones, non-
screen play activities

Limit time & content for little ones

- Kids under 3 learn much more from interactions with others than from screens.
- For screen time, limit it to educational, developmentally appropriate shows



Co-watch and co-play

- For babies and young toddlers, act like it's a story book and you are reading it with them
- Co-watching allows you to talk to your pre-schooler about the show that interests them
- Play video games with kids



Set no-screen spaces/times

- Consider the following for no-screen time:
 - Meals
 - 1 hour before bedtime
 - In the car
 - Vacations (or parts of them)



Model healthy screen use

- If you set no screen time rules, make sure you follow them
- When interacting with child, put the screen down so you are not distracted
- Model playing a game and stopping or watching a show and turning off



Avoid judgment/criticism

- Set limits and stick to them instead of criticizing child for too much screen time.
- Criticism can lead to the child hiding behavior.



Monitor use

- Research has found that parental monitoring of media in middle school is associated with better sleep, more prosocial behavior, improved grades and more time spent reading.



Keep kids busy with other things

- Structured involvement in some sport or physical activity
- Structured involvement in music or artistic activity
- Structured social activities in religious organizations, scouts, 4H, etc.
- Outdoor playtime
- Indoor play with toys
- Board games and puzzles
- Family activities and outings
- Creative projects

Questions?

