

Catholic Mutual...CARES for Kids

Creating Healthy Digital Habits

In today's digital age, technology is an integral part of life, especially for teens and young adults. From social media to online education, the internet offers countless opportunities for connection, learning, and entertainment. However, excessive or unbalanced use of technology can have a negative impact on mental health, productivity, and relationships. Developing healthy digital habits is essential to maintaining a balanced lifestyle, where these habits begin by talking with your child about the potential dangers of the Internet and setting clear guidelines for its use.

Is the Internet Dangerous?

While the internet provides a wealth of information and connectivity, it also comes with certain risks. Cyberbullying, online predators, misinformation, and exposure to harmful content are real concerns, especially for younger users. It is important to be aware of these dangers and take proactive steps to stay safe. By practicing critical thinking, using privacy settings, and reporting suspicious behavior, users can protect themselves and enjoy the positive aspects of the online world.

Ways to Be Safe Online

Here are some practical tips that can be discussed with teens and young adults to help navigate the digital world responsibly and effectively.

- *Set Boundaries for Screen Time:* One of the most critical steps in establishing healthy digital habits is managing screen time. Prolonged exposure to screens can lead to eye strain, disrupted sleep, and reduced focus. Utilizing time-tracking applications or scheduling device-free time can help teens create boundaries and encourage more mindful interactions.
- *Cultivate Mindful Social Media Use:* Social media can be a double-edged sword. While it connects us with friends and global communities, it can also contribute to anxiety, comparison, and misinformation. There is also the chance that the child is exposed to content that is not appropriate for their age. This can be avoided by limiting or approving all downloaded applications.
- *Prioritize Digital Privacy and Security:* Navigating the internet safely is a crucial skill. Teens and young adults are often targets for scams, phishing, and cyberbullying. It is important to educate young adults on using strong passwords and thinking through information that is posted online. It is

important not to overshare, as all personal information should be closely guarded. This includes full name, address, phone number, email, and photographs. 'Tagging' locations can also be dangerous, as this could let potential predators know the area you live in or even where they go to school. Keeping your social media accounts set as 'private' will also help, as this will only share posts with those you have added as a friend. Informing your children to only add people they know will prevent strangers from viewing your posts/pictures.

Developing healthy digital habits is not about avoiding technology altogether but rather using it in a way that enhances, rather than detracts from, your life. By setting boundaries, using technology mindfully, and prioritizing offline experiences, teens and young adults can cultivate a balanced and fulfilling relationship with the digital world. The Internet is a beautiful tool, and it is our responsibility to help our children use it appropriately. Remember, the key is intentionality—make technology work for you, not the other way around.

Resources

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