

## EMHS 9<sup>TH</sup> SUMMER READING

Each year, students at EMHS do summer reading. Reading over the summer keeps one's mind "awake" and provides your class with an immediate platform to work on from the first day of school. The material for this packet was selected for its subject matter and relevance to you.

Please make a point of reading *all six* of the articles contained in this packet. Since there are several different pieces, you can break this reading up as your summer schedule allows. ***All articles should be read and annotated by the first day of school. Please bring this packet with you on the first day of school.***

This packet should be printed out and read carefully. You should always read with a pen or pencil and use ***annotation*** strategies to help yourself make sense of the text. To annotate a reading means to mark it up as you go, making notes of important ideas. *You will be graded on your annotations.*

### Annotation Directions:

1. Make a point of underlining the two most important ideas in each "column" of reading. You can underline a single phrase or a couple of sentences, but please choose your selections carefully.
2. Of the two ideas you underline in each column, select the most important one and rephrase it at the bottom of the page in your own words.
3. When you finish an article, review your annotations. On a separate sheet of paper, write down the "takeaway points" for each article—the most important ideas.

There are many online sources to further explain how to annotate a text. When you come to school on the first day, *this packet should be completely read and annotated. In addition, you should have your takeaway points on a separate sheet of paper completed.* These materials will be used for the first week or two of class to begin work.

## GROWING UP DIGITAL, WIRED FOR DISTRACTION by Matt Richtel

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. — On the eve of a pivotal academic year in Vishal Singh's life, he faces a stark choice on his bedroom desk: book or computer?

By all rights, Vishal, a bright 17-year-old, should already have finished the book, Kurt Vonnegut's "Cat's Cradle," his summer reading assignment. But he has managed 43 pages in two months.

He typically favors Facebook, YouTube and making digital videos. That is the case this August afternoon. Bypassing Vonnegut, he clicks over to YouTube, meaning that tomorrow he will enter his senior year of high school hoping to see an improvement in his grades, but without having completed his only summer homework.

On YouTube, "you can get a whole story in six minutes," he explains. "A book takes so long. I prefer the immediate gratification."

Students have always faced distractions and time-wasters. But computers and cellphones, and the constant stream of stimuli they offer, pose a profound new challenge to focusing and learning.

Researchers say the lure of these technologies, while it affects adults too, is particularly powerful for young people. The risk, they say, is that developing brains can become more easily habituated than adult brains to constantly switching tasks — and less able to sustain attention.

"Their brains are rewarded not for staying on task but for jumping to the next thing," said Michael Rich, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and executive director of the Center on Media and Child Health in Boston. And the effects could linger: "The worry is we're raising a generation of kids in front of screens whose brains are going to be wired differently."

But even as some parents and educators express unease about students' digital diets, they are intensifying efforts to use technology in the classroom, seeing it as a way to connect with students and give them essential skills. Across the country, schools are equipping themselves with computers, Internet access and mobile devices so they can teach on the students' technological territory.

It is a tension on vivid display at Vishal's school, Woodside High School, on a sprawling campus set against the forested hills of Silicon Valley. Here, as elsewhere, it is not uncommon for students to send hundreds of text messages a day or spend hours playing video games, and virtually everyone is on Facebook.

The principal, David Reilly, 37, a former musician who says he sympathizes when young people feel disenfranchised, is determined to engage these 21st-century students. He has asked teachers to build Web sites to communicate with students, introduced popular classes on using digital tools to record music, secured funding for iPads to teach Mandarin and obtained \$3 million in grants for a multimedia center.

He pushed first period back an hour, to 9 a.m., because students were showing up bleary-eyed, at least in part because

they were up late on their computers. Unchecked use of digital devices, he says, can create a culture in which students are addicted to the virtual world and lost in it.

“I am trying to take back their attention from their BlackBerrys and video games,” he says. “To a degree, I’m using technology to do it.”

The same tension surfaces in Vishal, whose ability to be distracted by computers is rivaled by his proficiency with them. At the beginning of his junior year, he discovered a passion for filmmaking and made a name for himself among friends and teachers with his storytelling in videos made with digital cameras and editing software.

He acts as his family’s tech-support expert, helping his father, Satendra, a lab manager, retrieve lost documents on the computer, and his mother, Indra, a security manager at the San Francisco airport, build her own Web site.

But he also plays video games 10 hours a week. He regularly sends Facebook status updates at 2 a.m., even on school nights, and has such a reputation for distributing links to videos that his best friend calls him a “YouTube bully.”

Several teachers call Vishal one of their brightest students, and they wonder why things are not adding up. Last semester, his grade point average was 2.3 after a D-plus in English and an F in Algebra II. He got an A in film critique.

“He’s a kid caught between two worlds,” said Mr. Reilly — one that is virtual and one with real-life demands.

Vishal, like his mother, says he lacks the self-control to favor schoolwork over the computer. She sat him down a few weeks before school started and told him that, while she respected his passion for film and his technical skills, he had to use them productively.

“This is the year,” she says she told him. “This is your senior year and you can’t afford not to focus.”

It was not always this way. As a child, Vishal had a tendency to procrastinate, but nothing like this. Something changed him.

### **Growing Up With Gadgets**

When he was 3, Vishal moved with his parents and older brother to their current home, a three-bedroom house in the working-class section of Redwood City, a suburb in Silicon Valley that is more diverse than some of its elite neighbors.

Thin and quiet with a shy smile, Vishal passed the admissions test for a prestigious public elementary and middle school. Until sixth grade, he focused on homework, regularly going to the house of a good friend to study with him.

But Vishal and his family say two things changed around the seventh grade: his mother went back to work, and he got a computer. He became increasingly engrossed in games and surfing the Internet, finding an easy outlet for what he describes as an inclination to procrastinate.

“I realized there were choices,” Vishal recalls. “Homework wasn’t the only option.”

Several recent studies show that young people tend to use home computers for entertainment, not learning, and that this can hurt school performance, particularly in low-income families. Jacob L. Vigdor, an economics professor at Duke University who led some of the research, said that when adults were not supervising computer use, children “are left to their own devices, and the impetus isn’t to do homework but play around.”

Research also shows that students often juggle homework and entertainment. The Kaiser Family Foundation found earlier this year that half of students from 8 to 18 are using the Internet, watching TV or using some other form of media either “most” (31 percent) or “some” (25 percent) of the time that they are doing homework.

At Woodside, as elsewhere, students’ use of technology is not uniform. Mr. Reilly, the principal, says their choices tend to reflect their personalities. Social butterflies tend to be heavy texters and Facebook users. Students who are less social might escape into games, while drifters or those prone to procrastination, like Vishal, might surf the Web or watch videos.

The technology has created on campuses a new set of social types — not the thespian and the jock but the texter and gamer, Facebook addict and YouTube potato.

“The technology amplifies whoever you are,” Mr. Reilly says.

For some, the amplification is intense. Allison Miller, 14, sends and receives 27,000 texts in a month, her fingers clicking at a blistering pace as she carries on as many as seven text conversations at a time. She texts between classes, at the

moment soccer practice ends, while being driven to and from school and, often, while studying.

Most of the exchanges are little more than quick greetings, but they can get more in-depth, like “if someone tells you about a drama going on with someone,” Allison said. “I can text one person while talking on the phone to someone else.”

But this proficiency comes at a cost: she blames multitasking for the three B’s on her recent progress report.

“I’ll be reading a book for homework and I’ll get a text message and pause my reading and put down the book, pick up the phone to reply to the text message, and then 20 minutes later realize, ‘Oh, I forgot to do my homework.’”

Some shyer students do not socialize through technology — they recede into it. Ramon Ochoa-Lopez, 14, an introvert, plays six hours of video games on weekdays and more on weekends, leaving homework to be done in the bathroom before school.

Escaping into games can also salve teenagers’ age-old desire for some control in their chaotic lives. “It’s a way for me to separate myself,” Ramon says. “If there’s an argument between my mom and one of my brothers, I’ll just go to my room and start playing video games and escape.”

With powerful new cellphones, the interactive experience can go everywhere. Between classes at Woodside or at lunch, when use of personal devices is permitted, students gather in clusters, sometimes chatting face to face, sometimes half-involved in a conversation while texting someone across the teeming quad. Others sit alone, watching a video, listening to music or updating Facebook.

Students say that their parents, worried about the distractions, try to police computer time, but that monitoring the use of cellphones is difficult. Parents may also want to be able to call their children at any time, so taking the phone away is not always an option.

Other parents wholly embrace computer use, even when it has no obvious educational benefit.

“If you’re not on top of technology, you’re not going to be on top of the world,” said John McMullen, 56, a retired criminal investigator whose son, Sean, is one of five friends in the group Vishal joins for lunch each day.

Sean’s favorite medium is video games; he plays for four hours after school and twice that on weekends. He was playing more but found his habit pulling his grade point average below 3.2, the point at which he felt comfortable. He says he sometimes wishes that his parents would force him to quit playing and study, because he finds it hard to quit when given the choice. Still, he says, video games are not responsible for his lack of focus, asserting that in another era he would have been distracted by TV or something else.

“Video games don’t make the hole; they fill it,” says Sean, sitting at a picnic table in the quad, where he is surrounded by a multimillion-dollar view: on the nearby hills are the evergreens that tower above the affluent neighborhoods populated by Internet tycoons. Sean, a senior, concedes that video games take a physical toll: “I haven’t done exercise since my sophomore year. But that doesn’t seem like a big deal. I still look the same.”

Sam Crocker, Vishal’s closest friend, who has straight A’s but lower SAT scores than he would like, blames the Internet’s distractions for his inability to finish either of his two summer reading books.

“I know I can read a book, but then I’m up and checking Facebook,” he says, adding: “Facebook is amazing because it feels like you’re doing something and you’re not doing anything. It’s the absence of doing something, but you feel gratified anyway.”

He concludes: “My attention span is getting worse.”

### **The Lure of Distraction**

Some neuroscientists have been studying people like Sam and Vishal. They have begun to understand what happens to the brains of young people who are constantly online and in touch.

In an experiment at the German Sport University in Cologne in 2007, boys from 12 to 14 spent an hour each night playing video games after they finished homework.

On alternate nights, the boys spent an hour watching an exciting movie, like “Harry Potter” or “Star Trek,” rather than playing video games. That allowed the researchers to compare the effect of video games and TV.

The researchers looked at how the use of these media affected the boys’ brainwave patterns while sleeping and their ability to remember their homework in the subsequent days. They found that playing video games led to markedly lower sleep quality than watching TV, and also led to a “significant decline” in the

boys' ability to remember vocabulary words. The findings were published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Markus Dworak, a researcher who led the study and is now a neuroscientist at Harvard, said it was not clear whether the boys' learning suffered because sleep was disrupted or, as he speculates, also because the intensity of the game experience overrode the brain's recording of the vocabulary.

"When you look at vocabulary and look at huge stimulus after that, your brain has to decide which information to store," he said. "Your brain might favor the emotionally stimulating information over the vocabulary."

At the University of California, San Francisco, scientists have found that when rats have a new experience, like exploring an unfamiliar area, their brains show new patterns of activity. But only when the rats take a break from their exploration do they process those patterns in a way that seems to create a persistent memory.

In that vein, recent imaging studies of people have found that major cross sections of the brain become surprisingly active during downtime. These brain studies suggest to researchers that periods of rest are critical in allowing the brain to synthesize information, make connections between ideas and even develop the sense of self.

Researchers say these studies have particular implications for young people, whose brains have more trouble focusing and setting priorities.

"Downtime is to the brain what sleep is to the body," said Dr. Rich of Harvard Medical School. "But kids are in a constant mode of stimulation."

"The headline is: bring back boredom," added Dr. Rich, who last month gave a speech to the American Academy of Pediatrics entitled, "Finding Huck Finn: Reclaiming Childhood from the River of Electronic Screens."

Dr. Rich said in an interview that he was not suggesting young people should toss out their devices, but rather that they embrace a more balanced approach to what he said were powerful tools necessary to compete and succeed in modern life.

The heavy use of devices also worries Daniel Anderson, a professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, who is known for research showing that children are not as harmed by TV viewing as some researchers have suggested.

Multitasking using ubiquitous, interactive and highly stimulating computers and phones, Professor Anderson says, appears to have a more powerful effect than TV.

Like Dr. Rich, he says he believes that young, developing brains are becoming habituated to distraction and to switching tasks, not to focus.

"If you've grown up processing multiple media, that's exactly the mode you're going to fall into when put in that environment — you develop a need for that stimulation," he said.

Vishal can attest to that.

“I’m doing Facebook, YouTube, having a conversation or two with a friend, listening to music at the same time. I’m doing a million things at once, like a lot of people my age,” he says. “Sometimes I’ll say: I need to stop this and do my schoolwork, but I can’t.”

“If it weren’t for the Internet, I’d focus more on school and be doing better academically,” he says. But thanks to the Internet, he says, he has discovered and pursued his passion: filmmaking. Without the Internet, “I also wouldn’t know what I want to do with my life.”

### **Clicking Toward a Future**

The woman sits in a cemetery at dusk, sobbing. Behind her, silhouetted and translucent, a man kneels, then fades away, a ghost.

This captivating image appears on Vishal’s computer screen. On this Thursday afternoon in late September, he is engrossed in scenes he shot the previous weekend for a music video he is making with his cousin.

The video is based on a song performed by the band Guns N’ Roses about a woman whose boyfriend dies. He wants it to be part of the package of work he submits to colleges that emphasize film study, along with a documentary he is making about home-schooled students.

Now comes the editing. Vishal taught himself to use sophisticated editing software in part by watching tutorials on YouTube. He does not leave his chair for more than two hours,

sipping Pepsi, his face often inches from the screen, as he perfects the clip from the cemetery. The image of the crying woman was shot separately from the image of the kneeling man, and he is trying to fuse them.

“I’m spending two hours to get a few seconds just right,” he says.

He occasionally sends a text message or checks Facebook, but he is focused in a way he rarely is when doing homework. He says the chief difference is that filmmaking feels applicable to his chosen future, and he hopes colleges, like the University of Southern California or the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles, will be so impressed by his portfolio that they will overlook his school performance.

“This is going to compensate for the grades,” he says. On this day, his homework includes a worksheet for Latin, some reading for English class and an economics essay, but they can wait.

For Vishal, there’s another clear difference between filmmaking and homework: interactivity. As he edits, the windows on the screen come alive; every few seconds, he clicks the mouse to make tiny changes to the lighting and flow of the images, and the software gives him constant feedback.

“I click and something happens,” he says, explaining that, by comparison, reading a book or doing homework is less exciting. “I guess it goes back to the immediate gratification thing.”

The \$2,000 computer Vishal is using is state of the art and only a week old. It represents a concession by his parents. They

allowed him to buy it, despite their continuing concerns about his technology habits, because they wanted to support his filmmaking dream. “If we put roadblocks in his way, he’s just going to get depressed,” his mother says. Besides, she adds, “he’s been making an effort to do his homework.”

At this point in the semester, it seems she is right. The first schoolwide progress reports come out in late September, and Vishal has mostly A’s and B’s. He says he has been able to make headway by applying himself, but also by cutting back his workload. Unlike last year, he is not taking advanced placement classes, and he has chosen to retake Algebra II not in the classroom but in an online class that lets him work at his own pace.

His shift to easier classes might not please college admissions officers, according to Woodside’s college adviser, Zorina Matavulj. She says they want seniors to intensify their efforts. As it is, she says, even if Vishal improves his performance significantly, someone with his grades faces long odds in applying to the kinds of colleges he aspires to.

Still, Vishal’s passion for film reinforces for Mr. Reilly, the principal, that the way to reach these students is on their own terms.

### **Hands-On Technology**

Big Macintosh monitors sit on every desk, and a man with hip glasses and an easygoing style stands at the front of the class. He is Geoff Diesel, 40, a favorite teacher here at Woodside who has taught English and film. Now he teaches one of Mr. Reilly’s new classes, audio production. He has a rapt audience of more

than 20 students as he shows a video of the band Nirvana mixing their music, then holds up a music keyboard.

“Who knows how to use Pro Tools? We’ve got it. It’s the program used by the best music studios in the world,” he says.

In the back of the room, Mr. Reilly watches, thrilled. He introduced the audio course last year and enough students signed up to fill four classes. (He could barely pull together one class when he introduced Mandarin, even though he had secured iPads to help teach the language.)

“Some of these students are our most at-risk kids,” he says. He means that they are more likely to tune out school, skip class or not do their homework, and that they may not get healthful meals at home. They may also do their most enthusiastic writing not for class but in text messages and on Facebook. “They’re here, they’re in class, they’re listening.”

Despite Woodside High’s affluent setting, about 40 percent of its 1,800 students come from low-income families and receive a reduced-cost or free lunch. The school is 56 percent Latino, 38 percent white and 5 percent African-American, and it sends 93 percent of its students to four-year or community colleges.

Mr. Reilly says that the audio class provides solid vocational training and can get students interested in other subjects.

“Today mixing music, tomorrow sound waves and physics,” he says. And he thinks the key is that they love not just the music but getting their hands on the technology. “We’re meeting them on their turf.”



It does not mean he sees technology as a panacea. “I’ll always take one great teacher in a cave over a dozen Smart Boards,” he says, referring to the high-tech teaching displays used in many schools.

Teachers at Woodside commonly blame technology for students’ struggles to concentrate, but they are divided over whether embracing computers is the right solution.

“It’s a catastrophe,” said Alan Eaton, a charismatic Latin teacher. He says that technology has led to a “balkanization of their focus and duration of stamina,” and that schools make the problem worse when they adopt the technology.

“When rock ’n’ roll came about, we didn’t start using it in classrooms like we’re doing with technology,” he says. He personally feels the sting, since his advanced classes have one-third as many students as they had a decade ago.

Vishal remains a Latin student, one whom Mr. Eaton describes as particularly bright. But the teacher wonders if technology might be the reason Vishal seems to lose interest in academics the minute he leaves class.

Mr. Diesel, by contrast, does not think technology is behind the problems of Vishal and his schoolmates — in fact, he thinks it is the key to connecting with them, and an essential tool. “It’s in their DNA to look at screens,” he asserts. And he offers another analogy to explain his approach: “Frankenstein is in the room and I don’t want him to tear me apart. If I’m not using technology, I lose them completely.”

Mr. Diesel had Vishal as a student in cinema class and describes him as a “breath of fresh air” with a gift for

filmmaking. Mr. Diesel says he wonders if Vishal is a bit like Woody Allen, talented but not interested in being part of the system.

But Mr. Diesel adds: “If Vishal’s going to be an independent filmmaker, he’s got to read Vonnegut. If you’re going to write scripts, you’ve got to read.”

### **Back to Reading Aloud**

Vishal sits near the back of English IV. Marcia Blondel, a veteran teacher, asks the students to open the book they are studying, “The Things They Carried,” which is about the Vietnam War.

“Who wants to read starting in the middle of Page 137?” she asks. One student begins to read aloud, and the rest follow along.

To Ms. Blondel, the exercise in group reading represents a regression in American education and an indictment of technology. The reason she has to do it, she says, is that students now lack the attention span to read the assignments on their own.

“How can you have a discussion in class?” she complains, arguing that she has seen a considerable change in recent years. In some classes she can count on little more than one-third of the students to read a 30-page homework assignment.

She adds: “You can’t become a good writer by watching YouTube, texting and e-mailing a bunch of abbreviations.”

As the group-reading effort winds down, she says gently: “I hope this will motivate you to read on your own.”

It is a reminder of the choices that have followed the students through the semester: computer or homework? Immediate gratification or investing in the future?

Mr. Reilly hopes that the two can meet — that computers can be combined with education to better engage students and can give them technical skills without compromising deep analytical thought.

But in Vishal’s case, computers and schoolwork seem more and more to be mutually exclusive. Ms. Blondel says that Vishal, after a decent start to the school year, has fallen into bad habits. In October, he turned in weeks late, for example, a short essay based on the first few chapters of “The Things They Carried.” His grade at that point, she says, tracks around a D.

For his part, Vishal says he is investing himself more in his filmmaking, accelerating work with his cousin on their music video project. But he is also using Facebook late at night and surfing for videos on YouTube. The evidence of the shift comes in a string of Facebook updates.

*Saturday, 11:55 p.m.:* “Editing, editing, editing”

*Sunday, 3:55 p.m.:* “8+ hours of shooting, 8+ hours of editing. All for just a three-minute scene. Mind = Dead.”

*Sunday, 11:00 p.m.:* “Fun day, finally got to spend a day relaxing... now about that homework...”

Richtel, Matt. "Growing Up Digital, Wired for Distraction."  
*The New York Times*. The New York Times, 20 Nov.  
2010. Web. 12 May 2015.

## Teens Are Being Bullied ‘Constantly’ on Instagram by Taylor Lorenz

No app is more integral to teens’ social lives than Instagram. While Millennials relied on Facebook to navigate high school and college, connect with friends, and express themselves online, Gen Z’s networks exist almost entirely on Instagram. According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, 72 percent of teens use the platform, which now has more than 1 billion monthly users. Instagram allows teens to chat with people they know, meet new people, stay in touch with friends from camp or sports, and bond by sharing photos or having discussions.

But when those friendships go south, the app can become a portal of pain. According to a recent Pew survey, 59 percent of teens have been bullied online, and according to a 2017 survey conducted by Ditch the Label, a nonprofit anti-bullying group, more than one in five 12-to-20-year-olds experience bullying specifically on Instagram. “Instagram is a good place sometimes,” said Riley, a 14-year-old who, like most kids in this story, asked to be referred to by her first name only, “but there’s a lot of drama, bullying, and gossip to go along with it.”

Teenagers have always been cruel to one another. But Instagram provides a uniquely powerful set of tools to do so. The velocity and size of the distribution mechanism allow rude comments or harassing images to go viral within hours. Like Twitter, Instagram makes it easy to set up new, anonymous profiles, which can be used specifically for trolling. Most importantly, many interactions on the app are hidden from the watchful eyes of parents and teachers, many of whom don’t understand the platform’s intricacies.

“There is no place for bullying on Instagram, and we are committed to fostering a kind and supportive community. Any form of online abuse on Instagram runs completely counter to the culture we’re

invested in—a platform where everyone should feel safe and comfortable sharing their lives through photos and videos,” an Instagram spokesperson told *The Atlantic* in September. This week, the company also announced a set of new features aimed at combatting bullying, including comment filters on live videos, machine-learning technology to detect bullying in photos, and a “kindness camera effect to spread positivity” endorsed by the former *Dance Moms* star Maddie Ziegler.

Still, Instagram is many teens’ entire social infrastructure; at its most destructive, bullying someone on there is the digital equivalent of taping mean flyers all over someone’s school, and her home, and her friends’ homes.

After a falling-out with someone formerly in her friend group last year, Yael, a 15-year-old who asked to be referred to by a pseudonym, said the girl turned to Instagram to bully her day and night. “She unfollowed me, blocked me, unblocked me, then messaged me days on end, paragraphs,” Yael said. “She posted about me constantly on her account, mentioned me in her Story, and messaged me over and over again for weeks.”

Yael felt anxious even just having her phone in her pocket, because it reminded her of the harassment. “Every time I logged on to my account, I didn’t want to be there,” she said. “I knew when I opened the app, she would be there. I was having a lot of anxiety over it, a lot of stress.”

But still, she hesitated to quit the app entirely. Her friends on Instagram serve as a source of support. Also, quitting wouldn’t stop her tormentor from talking about her, and she’d rather know what the girl was saying. “You know someone’s talking about you, they’re posting about you, they’re messaging about you, they’re harassing you constantly,” she said. “You know every time you open the app they’re going to be there.”

Because bullying on your main feed is seen by many as aggressive

and uncool, many teens create hate pages: separate Instagram accounts, purpose-built and solely dedicated to trashing one person, created by teens alone or in a group. They'll post bad photos of their target, expose her secrets, post screenshots of texts from people saying mean things about her, and any other terrible stuff they can find.

"I've had at least 10 hate pages made about me," said Annie, a 15-year-old who asked to be referred to by a pseudonym. "I know some were made in a row by the same person, but some were from different people. They say really nasty things about you, the most outrageous as possible."

Sometimes teens, many of whom run several Instagram accounts, will take an old page with a high amount of followers and transform it into a hate page to turn it against someone they don't like. "One girl took a former meme page that was over 15,000 followers, took screencaps from my Story, and Photoshopped my nose bigger and posted it, tagging me being like, 'Hey guys, this is my new account,'" Annie said. "I had to send a formal cease and desist. I went to one of those lawyer websites and just filled it out. Then she did the same thing to my friend."

The scariest thing about being attacked by a hate page, teens say, is that you don't know who is doing the attacking. "In real-life bullying, you know what's doing it," said Skye, a 14-year-old. "Hate pages could be anyone. It could be someone you know, someone you don't know—you don't know what you know, and it's scary because it's really out of control at that point. Teachers tell you with bullying [to] just say 'Stop,' but in this case you can't, and you don't even know who to tell stop to."

Aside from hate pages, teens say most bullying takes place over direct message, Instagram Stories, or in the comments section of friends' photos. "Instagram won't delete a person's account unless it's clear bullying on their main feed," said Hadley, a 14-year-old, "and, like, no one is going to do that. It's over DM and in comment sections."

Mary, a 13-year-old who asked to be referred to by a pseudonym, said that relentless bullying on Instagram by a former friend gave her her first-ever panic attack. It started, Mary said, after she made the cheer team and her former friend did not. "She would DM me, or when I was with my friends, if they posted me on their Story, she would [respond] and say mean stuff about me since she knew I would see it since I'm with them," Mary said. "She would never do it on her own Story; she'd make it seem like she wasn't doing anything."

"There was literally a group chat on Instagram named Everyone in the Class but Mary," she added. "All they did on there was talk bad about me."

On Instagram, it's easy to see what people are up to and whom they're hanging out with. For teenagers who are acutely aware of social status, even a seemingly innocent group photo can set a bully off. Teens say that tagging the wrong friend in a photo can unleash a bully's wrath. Every location tag, comment, Story post, and even whom you follow or unfollow on your finsta (a secondary Instagram account where teens post more personal stuff) is scrutinized.

"Lots of bullying stems from jealousy, and Instagram is the ultimate jealousy platform," Hadley said. "People are constantly posting pics of their cars, their bodies. Anything good in your life or at school goes on Insta, and that makes people jealous."

Many high schools have anonymously run "confessions"-style Instagram accounts where users submit gossip about other students at school. For instance, an account like Greenville High School Confessions will pop up with a bio asking followers to "send the tea," i.e., gossip. Students will follow the locked account and submit texts of people saying bad things about one another or gossip they've heard about people at school. The account admin or admins will select the juiciest rumors and blast them out on Stories or on the main feed, sometimes even tagging the student's handle.

When someone who runs a school's confessions account doesn't like you, it can feel like the whole school has turned against you. "There was a page made called DTS.gossip, the initials of our school," Riley said. "The account was made to post rumors and crap about people in my school, but a lot of them were about me."

Rory, a 15-year-old, said that confessions accounts had gotten so out of control at her high school that administrators had banned taking photos of other students on campus. "People at my school would ... expose drama or make up stuff, Photoshop people's faces, bully them basically. It's all anonymous."

But Rory said that the no-picture rule hasn't really curbed bullying. Not long ago, someone posted an entire diss track saying awful things about a 15-year-old girl to SoundCloud, which students promptly set as the link in their Instagram bio.

"I think a lot of kids get really invested in drama," Riley said, "with beauty gurus, YouTube, stuff like that. When it happens at school, they're very interested in it. It's fun. Which is horrible."

In Rory's case, Instagram has been both the catalyst and the medium for bullying. When she was 13, she was featured on the official Instagram account of Brandy Melville, a popular teen clothing brand.

"Tons of people from my school saw it immediately and started to make memes of me, calling me anorexic," she said. "Then there were others suggesting I wasn't thin enough. On their finstas, people were posting these mean things, people I thought I was friends with. I would block their finstas and they would tag my main account."

But even in the midst of the worst bullying, teens say they're wary of logging off. Rory is still active on the platform, though she only uses one account.

"Everyone has friends from Instagram," said Liv, a 13-year-old. "Everyone makes friends that way. It's inevitable. Everyone does it." Some teens did say they'd deactivate or take a break if their parents forced them to, but quitting forever "wasn't an option."

Liv said, "People need to think more about what they say before they say it, even if it's a DM you forget about and log off. The person you sent that message to, it can impact them. You can really screw someone's life up."

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Lorenz, Taylor. "Teens Are Being Bullied 'Constantly' on Instagram." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 10 Oct. 2018.

## Social Media Effects on Teens | Impact of Social Media on Self- Esteem

Rachel Ehmke is managing editor at the Child Mind Institute.

Many parents worry about how exposure to technology might affect toddlers developmentally. We know our preschoolers are picking up new social and cognitive skills at a stunning pace, and we don't want hours spent glued to an iPad to impede that. But adolescence is an equally important period of rapid development, and too few of us are paying attention to how our teenagers' use of technology—much more intense and intimate than a 3-year-old playing with dad's iPhone—is affecting them. In fact, experts worry that the social media and text messages that have become so integral to teenage life are promoting anxiety and lowering self-esteem.

Young people report that there might be good reason to worry. A survey conducted by the Royal Society for Public Health asked 14-24 year olds in the UK how social media platforms impacted their health and wellbeing. The survey results found that Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram all led to increased feelings of depression, anxiety, poor body image and loneliness.

### **Indirect communication**

Teens are masters at keeping themselves occupied in the hours after school until way past bedtime. When they're not doing their homework (and when they are) they're online and on their phones, texting, sharing, trolling, scrolling, you name it. Of course before everyone had an Instagram account teens

kept themselves busy, too, but they were more likely to do their chatting on the phone, or in person when hanging out at the mall. It may have looked like a lot of aimless hanging around, but what they were doing was experimenting, trying out skills, and succeeding and failing in tons of tiny real-time interactions that kids today are missing out on.

For one thing, modern teens are learning to do most of their communication while looking at a screen, not another person.

“As a species we are very highly attuned to reading social cues,” says Dr. Catherine Steiner-Adair, a clinical psychologist and author of *The Big Disconnect*. “There’s no question kids are missing out on very critical social skills. In a way, texting and online communicating—it’s not like it creates a nonverbal learning disability, but it puts everybody in a nonverbal disabled context, where body language, facial expression, and even the smallest kinds of vocal reactions are rendered invisible.”

### **Lowering the risks**

Certainly speaking indirectly creates a barrier to clear communication, but that's not all. Learning how to make friends is a major part of growing up, and friendship requires a certain amount of risk-taking. This is true for making a new friend, but it's also true for maintaining friendships. When there are problems that need to be faced—big ones or small ones—it takes courage to be honest about your feelings and then hear what the other person has to say.

Learning to effectively cross these bridges is part of what makes friendship fun and exciting, and also scary. “Part of healthy self-esteem is knowing how to say what you think and

feel even when you're in disagreement with other people or it feels emotionally risky," notes Dr. Steiner-Adair.

But when friendship is conducted online and through texts, kids are doing this in a context stripped of many of the most personal—and sometimes intimidating—aspects of communication. It's easier to keep your guard up when you're texting, so less is at stake. You aren't hearing or seeing the effect that your words are having on the other person. Because the conversation isn't happening in real time, each party can take more time to consider a response. No wonder kids say calling someone on the phone is "too intense"—it requires more direct communication, and if you aren't used to that it may well feel scary.

If kids aren't getting enough practice relating to people and getting their needs met in person and in real time, many of them will grow up to be adults who are anxious about our species' primary means of communication—talking. And of course social negotiations only get riskier as people get older and begin navigating romantic relationships and employment.

### **Cyberbullying and the imposter syndrome**

The other big danger that comes from kids communicating more indirectly is that it has gotten easier to be cruel. "Kids text all sorts of things that you would never in a million years contemplate saying to anyone's face," says Dr. Donna Wick, a clinical and developmental psychologist. She notes that this seems to be especially true of girls, who typically don't like to disagree with each other in "real life."

"You hope to teach them that they can disagree without jeopardizing the relationship, but what social media is

teaching them to do is disagree in ways that are more extreme and *do* jeopardize the relationship. It's exactly what you don't want to have happen," she says.

Dr. Steiner-Adair agrees that girls are particularly at risk. "Girls are socialized more to compare themselves to other people, girls in particular, to develop their identities, so it makes them more vulnerable to the downside of all this." She warns that a lack of solid self-esteem is often to blame. "We forget that relational aggression comes from insecurity and feeling awful about yourself, and wanting to put other people down so you feel better."

Peer acceptance is a big thing for adolescents, and many of them care about their image as much as a politician running for office, and to them it can feel as serious. Add to that the fact that kids today are getting actual polling data on how much people like them or their appearance via things like "likes." It's enough to turn anyone's head. Who wouldn't want to make herself look cooler if she can? So kids can spend hours pruning their online identities, trying to project an idealized image. Teenage girls sort through hundreds of photos, agonizing over which ones to post online. Boys compete for attention by trying to out-gross one other, pushing the envelope as much as they can in the already disinhibited atmosphere online. Kids gang up on each other.

Adolescents have always been doing this, but with the advent of social media they are faced with more opportunities—and more traps—than ever before. When kids scroll through their feeds and see how great everyone seems, it only adds to the pressure. We're used to worrying about the impractical ideals that photoshopped magazine models give to our kids, but what happens with the kid next door is photoshopped, too? Even

more confusing, what about when your own profile doesn't really represent the person that you feel like you are on the inside?

"Adolescence and the early twenties in particular are the years in which you are acutely aware of the contrasts between who you appear to be and who you think you are," says Dr. Wick. "It's similar to the 'imposter syndrome' in psychology. As you get older and acquire more mastery, you begin to realize that you actually are good at some things, and then you feel that gap hopefully narrow. But imagine having your deepest darkest fear be that you aren't as good as you look, and then imagine needing to look that good all the time! It's exhausting."

As Dr. Steiner-Adair explains, "Self-esteem comes from consolidating who you are." The more identities you have, and the more time you spend pretending to be someone you aren't, the harder it's going to be to feel good about yourself.

### **Stalking (and being ignored)**

Another big change that has come with new technology and especially smart phones is that we are never really alone. Kids update their status, share what they're watching, listening to, and reading, and have apps that let their friends know their specific location on a map at all times. Even if a person isn't trying to keep his friends updated, he's still never out of reach of a text message. The result is that kids feel hyperconnected with each other. The conversation never needs to stop, and it feels like there's always something new happening.

"Whatever we think of the 'relationships' maintained and in some cases initiated on social media, kids never get a break from them," notes Dr. Wick. "And that, in and of itself, can produce anxiety. Everyone needs a respite from the demands of intimacy and connection; time alone to regroup, replenish and just chill out. When you don't have that, it's easy to become emotionally depleted, fertile ground for anxiety to breed."

It's also surprisingly easy to feel lonely in the middle of all that hyperconnection. For one thing, kids now know with depressing certainty when they're being ignored. We all have phones and we all respond to things pretty quickly, so when you're waiting for a response that doesn't come, the silence can be deafening. The silent treatment might be a strategic insult or just the unfortunate side effect of an online adolescent relationship that starts out intensely but then fades away.

"In the old days when a boy was going to break up with you, he had to have a conversation with you. Or at least he had to call," says Dr. Wick. "These days he might just disappear from your screen, and you never get to have the 'What did I do?' conversation." Kids are often left imagining the worst about themselves.

But even when the conversation doesn't end, being in a constant state of waiting can still provoke anxiety. We can feel ourselves being put on the back burner, we put others back there, and our very human need to communicate is effectively delegated there, too.



## What should parents do?

Both experts interviewed for this article agreed that the best thing parents can do to minimize the risks associated with technology is to curtail their own consumption first. It's up to parents to set a good example of what healthy computer usage looks like. Most of us check our phones or our email too much, out of either real interest or nervous habit. Kids should be used to seeing our faces, not our heads bent over a screen. Establish technology-free zones in the house and technology-free hours when no one uses the phone, including mom and dad. "Don't walk in the door after work in the middle of a conversation," Dr. Steiner-Adair advises. "Don't walk in the door after work, say 'hi' quickly, and then 'just check your email.' In the morning, get up a half hour earlier than your kids and check your email then. Give them your full attention until they're out the door. And neither of you should be using phones in the car to or from school because that's an important time to talk."

Not only does limiting the amount of time you spend plugged in to computers provide a healthy counterpoint to the tech-obsessed world, it also strengthens the parent-child bond and makes kids feel more secure. Kids need to know that you are available to help them with their problems, talk about their day, or give them a reality check.

"It is the mini-moments of disconnection, when parents are too focused on their own devices and screens, that dilute the parent-child relationship," Dr. Steiner-Adair warns. And when kids start turning to the Internet for help or to process whatever happened during the day, you might not like what happens. "Tech can give your children more information that you can, and it doesn't have your values," notes Dr. Steiner-

won't answer his question in a developmentally appropriate way."

In addition Dr. Wick advises delaying the age of first use as much as possible. "I use the same advice here that I use when talking about kids and alcohol—try to get as far as you can without anything at all." If your child is on Facebook, Dr. Wick says that you should be your child's friend and monitor her page. But she advises against going through text messages unless there is cause for concern. "If you have a reason to be worried then okay, but it better be a good reason. I see parents who are just plain old spying on their kids. Parents should begin by trusting their children. To not even give your kid the benefit of the doubt is incredibly damaging to the relationship. You have to feel like your parents think you're a good kid."

Offline, the gold standard advice for helping kids build healthy self-esteem is to get them involved in something that they're interested in. It could be sports or music or taking apart computers or volunteering—anything that sparks an interest and gives them confidence. When kids learn to feel good about what they can *do* instead of how they look and what they own, they're happier and better prepared for success in real life. That most of these activities also involve spending time interacting with peers face-to-face is just the icing on the cake.

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Ehmke, Rachel. "Social Media Effects on Teens: Impact of Social Media on Self-Esteem." The Child Mind Institute, 03 Aug. 2017. Web, 2 May 201

## WHY CAN'T WE READ ANYMORE?

by Hugh McGuire

Last year, I read four books.

The reasons for that low number are, I guess, the same as your reasons for reading fewer books than you think you should have read last year: I've been finding it harder and harder to concentrate on words, sentences, paragraphs. Let alone chapters. Chapters often have page after page of paragraphs. It just seems such an awful lot of words to concentrate on, on their own, without something else happening. And once you've finished one chapter, you have to get through the another one. And usually a whole bunch more, before you can say *finished*, and get to the next. The next book. The next thing. The next possibility. Next next next.

### **I am an optimist**

Still, I am an optimist. Most nights last year, I got into bed with a book—paper or e—and started. Reading. Read. Ing. One word after the next. A sentence. Two sentences.

Maybe three.

And then ... I needed just a *little* something else. Something to tide me over. Something to scratch that little itch at the back of my mind— just a quick look at email on my iPhone; to write, and erase, a response to a funny Tweet from William Gibson; to find, and follow, a link to a good, really good, article in the *New Yorker*, or, better, the *New York Review of Books* (which I might even read most of, if it is that good). Email again, just to be sure.

I'd read another sentence. That's four sentences.

*Smokers who are the most optimistic about their ability to resist temptation are the most likely to relapse four months later, and overoptimistic dieters are the least likely to lose weight.*

It takes a long time to read a book at four sentences per day.

And it's exhausting. I was usually asleep halfway through sentence number five.

I've noticed this pattern of behaviour for a while now, but I think last year's completed book tally was as low as it has ever been. It was dispiriting, most deeply so because my professional life revolves around books: I started LibriVox (free public domain audiobooks), and Pressbooks (an online platform for making print and ebooks), and I co-edited a book about the future of books.

I've dedicated my life one way or another to books, I *believe* in them, yet, I wasn't able to read them.

I'm not alone.

### **When the people at the New Yorker can't concentrate long enough to listen to a song all the way through, how are books to survive?**

I heard an interview on the New Yorker podcast recently, the host was interviewing writer and photographer, Teju Cole.

**Host:**

*One of the challenges in culture now is to, say, listen to a song all the way through, we're all so distracted, are you still able to kind of give deep attention to things, are you able to sort of engage in culture that way?"*

**Teju Cole:**

*"Yes, very much so."*

When I heard this, I felt like hugging the host. He couldn't even listen to a song all the way through, before getting distracted. Imagine what his bedside pile of books does to him.

I also felt like hugging Teju Cole. It's people like Mr. Cole who give us hope that someone will be left to teach our children how to read books.

**Dancing to distraction**

What was true of my problems reading books—the unavoidable siren call of the digital hit of new information—was true in the rest of my life as well.

My two-year old daughter, dance recital. Pink tutu. Cat ears on her head. Along with five other two-year-olds, in front of a crowd of 75 parents and grandparents, these little toddlers put on a show. You can imagine the rest. You've seen these videos on Youtube, maybe I have shown you my videos. The cuteness level was extreme, a moment that defines a certain kind of parental pride. My daughter didn't even dance, she just wandered around the stage, looking at the audience with eyes as wide as a two-year old's eyes staring at a bunch of

strangers. It didn't matter that she didn't dance, I was so proud. I took photos, and video, with my phone.

And, just in case, I checked my email. Twitter. You never know.

I find myself in these kinds of situations often, checking email or Twitter, or Facebook, with nothing to gain except the stress of a work-related message that I can't answer right now in any case.

It makes me feel vaguely dirty, reading my phone with my daughter doing something wonderful right next to me, like I'm sneaking a cigarette.

Or a crack pipe.

One time I was reading on my phone while my older daughter, the four-year-old, was trying to talk to me. I didn't quite hear what she had said, and in any case, I was reading an article about North Korea. She grabbed my face in her two hands, pulled me towards her. "Look at me," she said, "when I'm talking to you."

She is right. I should.

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Spending time with friends, or family, I often feel a soul-deep throb coming from that perfectly engineered wafer of stainless steel and glass and rare earth metals in my pocket. *Touch me. Look at me. You might find something marvellous.*

This sickness is not limited to when I am trying to read, or once-in-a-lifetime events with my daughter.

At work, my concentration is constantly broken: finishing writing an article (this one, actually), answering that client's request, reviewing and commenting on the new designs, cleaning up the copy on the About page. Contacting so and so. Taxes.

All these tasks critical to my livelihood, get bumped more often than I should admit by a quick look at Twitter (for work), or Facebook (also for work), or an article about Mandelbrot sets (which, just this minute, I read).

Email, of course, is the worst, because email is where work happens, and even if it's not the *work you should be doing right now* it may well be work that's easier to do than what you are doing now, and that means somehow you end up doing that work instead of whatever you are supposed to be working on now. And only then do you get back to what you should have been focusing on all along.

### **Dopamine and digital**

It turns out that digital devices and software are finely tuned to train us to pay attention to them, no matter what else we should be doing. The mechanism, borne out by recent neuroscience studies, is something like this:

- *New information creates a rush of dopamine to the brain, a neurotransmitter that makes you feel good.*
- *The promise of new information compels your brain to seek out that dopamine rush.*

With fMRIs, you can see the brain's pleasure centres light up with activity when new emails arrive.

So, every new email you get gives you a little flood of dopamine. Every little flood of dopamine reinforces your brain's memory that checking email gives a flood of dopamine. And our brains are programmed to seek out things that will give us little floods of dopamine. Further, these patterns of behaviour start creating neural pathways, so that they become unconscious habits: Work on something important, brain itch, check email, *dopamine*, refresh, *dopamine*, check Twitter, *dopamine*, back to work. Over and over, and each time the habit becomes more ingrained in the actual structures of our brains.

How can books compete?

### **Pleasing ourselves to death**

There is a famous study of rats, wired up with electrodes on their brains. When the rats press a lever, a little charge gets released in part of their brain that stimulates dopamine release. A pleasure lever.

Given a choice between food and dopamine, they'll take the dopamine, often up to the point of exhaustion and starvation. They'll take the dopamine over sex. Some studies see the rats pressing the dopamine lever 700 times in an hour.

We do the same things with our email. Refresh. Refresh.

There is no beautiful universe on the other side of the email refresh button, and yet it's the call of that button that keeps

pulling me out of the work I am doing, out of reading books I want to read.

### **Why are books important?**

When I think back on my life, I can define a set of books that shaped me—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually. Books have always been an escape, a learning experience, a saviour, but beyond this, greater than this, certain books became, over time, a kind of glue that holds together my understanding of the world. I think of them as nodes of knowledge and emotion, nodes that knot together the fabric my self. Books, for me anyway, hold together who I am.

Books, in ways that are different to visual art, to music, to radio, to love even, force us to walk through another's thoughts, one word at a time, over hours and days. We share our minds for that time with the writer's. There is a slowness, a forced reflection required by the medium that is unique. Books recreate someone else's thoughts inside our own minds, and maybe it is this one-to-one mapping of someone else's words, on their own, without external stimuli, that give books their power. Books force us to let someone else's thoughts inhabit our minds completely.

Books are not just transferrers of knowledge and emotion, but a special kind of tool that flattens one self into another, that enable the trying-on of foreign ideas and emotions.

This suppressing of the self is a kind of meditation too—and while books have always been important to me on their own (pre-digital) merits, it started to occur to me that “learning how to read books again,” might also be a way to start weaning my mind away from this dopamine-soaked digital detritus, this

meaningless wash of digital information, which would have a double benefit: I would be reading books again, and I would get my mind back.

And, there are, often, beautiful universes to be found on the other side of the cover of a book.

### **The problems with digital stuff**

Recent neuroscience confirms many of the things we sufferers of digital overload know innately. That successful multi-tasking is a myth. Multi-tasking makes us stupider. According to psychologist Glenn Wilson, the cognitive losses from multitasking are equivalent to smoking pot.

This is bad for so many reasons: it makes us less effective at work, which means either we get less done, or have less time to spend doing other things, or both.

*Being in a situation where you are trying to concentrate on a task, and an e-mail is sitting unread in your inbox, can reduce your effective IQ by 10 points.*

It's worse than that though, because this constant hopping from one thing to another is also exhausting.

My least productive days, the days when I have spent the most time jumping between projects and emails and Twitter and whatever else, are also my most exhausting days. I used to think that my exhaustion was the cause of this lack of focus, but it turns out the opposite might be true.

*It takes more energy to shift your attention from task to task. It takes less energy to focus. That means that people who*

*organize their time in a way that allows them to focus are not only going to get more done, but they'll be less tired and less neurochemically depleted after doing it.*

### **The problem defined**

And so, the problem, more or less, is identified:

1. I cannot read books because my brain has been trained to want a constant hit of dopamine, which a digital interruption will provide
2. This digital dopamine addiction means I have trouble focusing: on books, work, family and friends

Problem identified, or most of it. There is more.

### **Oh, and don't forget about television**

We live in a golden age of television, there is no doubt. The stuff being produced these days is very good. And there is a lot of it.

For the past couple of years, my evening routine has been a variation on: get home from work, exhausted. Make sure the girls have eaten. Make sure I eat. Get the girls to bed. Feel exhausted. Turn on the computer to watch some (neo-golden-age-era) television. Fiddle with work emails, and generally piddle around while that golden-age-era TV consumes 57% of my attention. Be bad at watching TV and bad at getting emails done. Go to bed. Try to read. Check email. Try to read again. Fall asleep.

*Those who read own the world, and those who watch television lose it. (Werner Herzog)*

I don't know if Werner Herzog is right, but I do know that I would never say about television — even the great stuff, of which there is plenty — what I say about books. There are no television shows that exist as nodes holding together my understanding of the world. My relationship to television is just not the same as it is to books.

### **And, so, a change**

And so, starting in January, I started making some changes. The key ones are:

1. No more Twitter, Facebook, or article reading during the work day (hard)
2. No reading of random news articles (hard)
3. No smartphones or computers in the bedroom (easy)
4. No TV after dinner (it turns out, easy)
5. Instead, go straight to bed and start reading a book — usually on an eink ereader (it turns out, easy)

The shocking thing was how quickly my mind adapted to accommodate reading books again. I had expected to fight for that concentration — but I didn't have to fight. With less digital input (no pre-bed TV, especially), extra time (no TV, again), and without a tempting digital device near at hand ... there was time and space for my mind to settle into a book.

What a wonderful feeling it was.

I am reading books now more than I have in years. I have more energy, and more focus than I've had for ages. I have not fully conquered my digital dopamine addiction, though, but it's getting there. I think reading books is helping me retrain my mind for focus.

And books, it turns out, are still the same wonderful things they used to be. I can read them again.

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McGuire, Hugh. "Why Can't We Read Anymore?" *Medium*. Medium, 22 Apr. 2015. Web. 12 May 2015.

## Five Ways Social Media Can Be Good for Teens by Caroline Knorr

From cyberbullying to FOMO, social media has its share of negatives. But, if it's all bad, how did 2,000 students protest their school system's budget cuts? How are teens leading the charge against cyberbullying? How did they organize a national school walkout day to protest gun laws? Easy: savvy use of social media. For a few years, many teens have been saying that social media — despite its flaws — is mostly positive. And new research is shedding light on the good things that can happen when kids connect, share and learn online. As kids begin to use tools such as

Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and even YouTube in earnest, they're learning the responsibility that comes with the power to broadcast to the world. You can help nurture the positive aspects by accepting how important social media is for kids and helping them find ways for it to add real value to their lives. For inspiration, here are some of the benefits of your child being social-media-savvy:

It lets them do good. Twitter, Facebook and other large social networks expose kids to important issues and people from all over the world. Kids realize they have a voice they didn't have before and are doing everything from crowdfunding social justice projects to anonymously tweeting positive thoughts. Check out these sites that help kids do good.

[The non-problem problem of a teen who doesn't care about social media]

“For all the advances in modern cancer care, centering a patient in a community is one of the most important.”

It strengthens friendships. Studies, including Common Sense Media's “Social Media, Social Life: How Teens View Their Digital Lives” and the Pew Research Center's “Teens, Technology and Friendships” show that social media helps teenagers make friends and keep them.

It can offer a sense of belonging. While heavy social media use can isolate kids, a study conducted by Griffith University and the University of Queensland in Australia found that although American teens have fewer friends than their historical counterparts, they are less lonely than teens in past decades. They report feeling less isolated and have become more socially adept, partly because of an increase in technology use.

It provides genuine support. Online acceptance — whether a kid is interested in an unusual subject that isn't considered cool or is grappling with sexual identity — can validate a marginalized child. Suicidal teens can even get immediate access to quality support online. One example

occurred on a Minecraft forum on Reddit when an entire online community used voice-conferencing software to talk a teenager out of committing suicide.

It helps them express themselves. The popularity of fan fiction (original stories based on existing material that people write and upload online) proves how strong the desire is for self-expression. Producers and performers can satisfy this need through social media. Digital technology allows kids to share their work with a wider audience and even collaborate with far-flung partners (an essential 21st-century skill). If they're really serious, social media can provide essential feedback for kids to hone their craft.

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Knorr, Caroline. “Five Ways Social Media Can Be Good for Teens.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 19 Mar. 2018.



## Are There Social Media Benefits for Teens?

### A New Survey Says Yes

By Catherine Brown

I'm afraid to admit this for fear of backlash, but I let my 14-year-old have an Instagram account. I understand other parents' concerns, I really do. We've all heard that social media leads to too much drama. It pressures kids to present a perfect image of themselves. Who wouldn't want to protect their kids from that? I certainly do, but the reason I let my daughter have an account is the same reason why I spend time on social media. Social media enables me to connect with a lot of different people. I can stay up to date on what's going on in many of my friends' lives in a way I just couldn't do otherwise. A survey conducted this past spring by the Pew Research Center confirmed that teens ages 13-17 are using social media in a similar way. The survey reports teens are much more likely to talk about social media in positive terms, such as the benefits it provides, than in negative terms of the stress it creates. While slightly less than half of the teens surveyed said they've felt overwhelmed by social media drama, only 13 percent said they felt that way "a lot." Pew Social Media Usage Survey Some other highlights of the Pew Research Center survey: 81 percent of teens surveyed said that social media makes them feel more connected to their peers. Nearly 70 percent said social media helps them feel like

they have support when they need it, 71 percent reported they felt more included by using social media. Only 25 percent said using social media made them feel excluded, 69 percent said they feel more confident because of social media, while 26 percent said social media made them feel less confident. The social media study also helps alleviate the parental fear that kids who have access to social media will post inappropriate pictures or highly personal details. The survey found that half of teens never or rarely post selfies. In general, teens are much more likely to post about their accomplishments or family lives. Only about one in ten teens say they post about their personal problems or religious or political beliefs. Social interaction is that only what they admit to posting when they are really hiding inappropriate posts from their parents? Maybe, but it isn't happening as often as parents might think. Only one in ten teens regularly restricts posts so their parents won't see them. The concern many parents have that online interaction is taking the place of in-person interaction is not completely unfounded: About 60 percent of teens said they spend time interacting with their friends online every day. Only 24 percent say they interact face-to-face every day. but don't be too quick to blame social media. Around 75 percent of teens reported that either they or their friends were just too busy for more frequent in-person interactions. Perhaps kids aren't interacting as much in person because their schedules are too full with homework

and activities. In that case, social media helps them stay connected when they might not otherwise have time to interact. For teens, living in the digital age does have its challenges. However, for the most part, they are extensions of the social issues that are a part of adolescent life. Social media may intensify the drama and pressures teens face, but it can also provide benefits, from helping them stay connected to enabling them to find communities where they feel accepted.

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Brown, Catherine. "Can Social Media Ever Be Good for Teens? Survey Says..." *Your Teen Magazine*, 11 Sept. 2020.